

**Title: Blessed be the earth**

**Text: Matthew 5: 1-12**

Rev. Sharon Smith

For humanity to save the earth – to live sustainably (interdependent)  
it is not sufficient to consume differently,  
but to consume less,  
way less.

And to consume less – humans need to change how we think about ourselves.

According to theologian and ecologist, Sallie McFague,

- the world needs religions that promote restraint.
- And more specifically a Christianity that holds high the notion of self-emptying.

*Sallie McFague, Blessed are the Consumers.*

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These 12 verses recorded in Matthew's gospel – were once used by the Early Church in a core text in the preparation for baptism.

The decision of joining the church, of becoming a follower of Christ, in those early years meant to give up a way of thinking (dominated by the self-aggrandizement of the Roman Empire) and re-orienting to the way of Jesus - becoming part of the Christian minority.

It seems we need to get back to the basics.

Re-orienting ourselves to these words of Jesus that are rich, complex and invite a complete turnaround from what our society expects from us.

Frederick Buechner re-writes the Beatitudes this way:

Jesus' people are

- Not the spiritual giants, but the ones who, spiritually speaking, have absolutely nothing to give and absolutely everything to receive...
- Not the champions of faith, but the ones who mourn over their own suffering because they know that for the most part they've brought it down on themselves, and over the suffering of others because that's just the way it makes them feel to be in the same room with them.
- Not the strong ones, but the meek ones in the sense of the gentle ones, that is, the ones who somehow make the world more human...

- Not the ones who are righteous, but the ones who hope they will be someday and in the meantime are well aware that the distance they still have to go is even greater than the distance they've already come.
- Not the ones who triumph over evil, but the ones who, see it also in themselves every time they comb their hair in front of the bathroom mirror, and are merciful when they find it in others.
- Not the totally pure, but the "pure in heart," the ones who may be as shopworn and clay-footed as the next, but have somehow kept some inner freshness and innocence intact.
- Not the ones who have necessarily found peace in its fullness, but the ones who, just for that reason, try to bring it about wherever and however they can - peace with their neighbours and God, peace with themselves.

*Frederick Buechner ~originally published in Whistling in the Dark and later in Beyond Words*

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These values of – (1) knowing our need and (2) of desiring the needs of others.  
When put into practice are exactly what our world needs.

Humility, Kindness, and Justice.

- A self-emptying we see in the person of Jesus.

A self – emptying that has the potential to save the earth:

Self emptying is

- **Voluntary poverty.** Choosing to have less, to buy less, to consume less.
  - **Focussed attention to the needs of others.** Especially their most physical basic needs, such as food and shelter. To become interdependent with each other.
  - **Development of a universal self** – moving from a narrow focus on a concern for our ego (and our nearest and dearest) to reach out further and further until even a sparrow, a moth or caterpillar is included.
  - When the **universal self operates in both our private and public lives** –  
So that we take only our share, clean up after ourselves, and we keep the house in good repair for those who will use it after us.
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The wonder of the Beatitudes, these 8 blessings, is that they invite us to be live out of LOVE.  
Motivated by Blessing - God's desire to pour out love and affirmation.

- Not doing out of fear or for reward,
- not behaving out of shame or guilt.

These are values, motivated by love, that guide us to the light. Shaunti, come and share with us.