

**Christ Church – Gabriola Island**  
**January 29, 2023**  
**The Rev. Deborah van der Goes**

**“Blessed Be”**

*A woman in Miami explained that in order to offset the depression she felt at reaching her 40th birthday, she decided to treat herself to a new haircut and a new outfit. Walking down the street, she was flattered when two young men waved at her saying something in Spanish. Pretending not to hear them, she tossed her head haughtily as she marched resolutely onward. A third man tried to speak to her as she strode past his car. He finally leaned his head out the window and yelled, “Ma’am they’re trying to tell you – you are walking in their wet cement”*

Aha! Ouch! Epiphany!

So what do we do when down in the dumps? A visitor at a zoo noticed an attendant crying quietly in the corner. The visitor asked another attendant what the man was crying about, and he was told that one of the elephants had died. Touched by this, the visitor then asked, “I assume he must have been particularly fond of the elephant?” And the reply came back, “No, it’s not that. What he’s crying about is that he is the one who has to dig the grave”.

*Oof! Oh my! Epiphany again. (And.... thank you to my Marvin...ever willing supplier of such good sermon stories.)*

Epiphany: that quick dawning of comprehension that changes you momentarily from the inside out. And if you pay attention and allow the inner work, it transforms your life.

Today, we sang the Beatitudes to you. It is good to sing of such things lest we think we can completely understand them. For what we call the Beatitudes are a series of Epiphanies. Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst. Blessed are the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers. Blessed are you even when under intense persecution – all of which we might manage to

comprehend fleetingly, a bit, from time to time. All of which we aim to grow in our lives.

How do we grow in the kind of blessedness that Jesus is talking about? When we know ourselves to be poor in spirit, mourning, feeling meek, or hungry or under intense opposition? What do we do? Where do we turn? What do we do together as Church?

We gather, and we learn to sit together, and we pay attention to....to what? Or more precisely, our tradition of faith tells us, that we are to we pay attention to Whom? For our faith tells us that what is on the other side of the silence, the other side of all those words and impressions that we send “out there” is a WHOM, not a WHAT, and that WHOM is so all encompassing and Universal, so all pervasive that we do not, simply cannot, find adequate words. Best we can do is ...hmmm....God, Lord, Creator, Love, or in Hebrew Adonai, El, Yahweh, or “Life” itself with a Capital “L”.

And so we come to know, we learn from each other, and from the many ancient and time tested words of our liturgy, that it is a communication, a conversation, a dialogue. And in that dialogue or that communication, we have a chance, over time, and with great persistence, to come to know such blessedness.

We follow the sound of the bell into silence and there we may encounter God. The world of Jesus would tell us behind that silence is the essential blessedness of Life itself. And that which sustains life is the huge tender mercy with which we are enveloped each of us from long before conception to way beyond what we call death. It is the ancient wisdom of knowing God as “Hesed” or in English “tender mercy”. In Hebrew it can only be said gently...with breath. Hesed. (In English that phrase is, unfortunately, used more often with sarcasm...“*we’ll just leave you to the tender mercies of...*” and we know exactly how bad that just might be!). Thus it’s worth learning a few Hebrew words - the words Jesus himself would have used. Hesed.

And our way of communication with God is what we call prayer, but could be called dance, or could be called breath. We say these words of our prayers, we listen to the words of these ancient texts, we sing together the words of our songs and hymns and are bathed in words that

tell us of Life, of God, of communication, of communion. It is always unfolding (if and as we invite that to happen). Always changing.

We could think of our lives as what? As certain words become important – as **poems** (Imagine this! We are God’s poem) Or, as images catch our attention – like the image of light on the front cover of your bulletin – we might see ourselves as a bit like caught up “**in the image....**” Or we might pay attention simply to our breath – between phrases in a hymn, and know that we are breathing in or drinking in the gift of Life from our Divine Creator. As sounds are so central for my life, I know God the Creator so much more through **music**.

It is together, in this place we call “Church”, where we are shaped towards....towards what? Blessedness, towards Life? Towards Mercy? Towards being a blessing to each other. Towards being life giving to others who come among us? Towards finding ourselves dwelling in these Beatitudes, and living out these Beatitudes.

But it’s not exactly easy, nor quick. It takes a willingness to know ones own poverty, ones own shortcomings, ones own faults, ones own humility. And it’s not exactly comfortable! Thus most Sundays of the year there are prayers of confession (along with the promises of Absolution! ) It may take years of this willingness to being shaped by God in order to be a blessing to others.

Here is another story from Marvin. *“The Jameson family was large and close. One of the Jameson daughters had just married, and several of her siblings were concerned about Lisa and Tom, her new husband. To Tom, holidays were for watching football. Wives were for cooking and cleaning. Children were, well, to be tolerated. In short, Tom saw himself clearly at the centre of his world and didn’t see any reason to connect with his new family.*

*Lisa’s mother was also especially troubled. Instead of bad-mouthing her new son-in-law, she publically announced to the family, “We’ll love him into life”. And so they did. They accepted him as he was, and encouraged him to be involved in all of the family gatherings, and important decisions to be made. Although it was often difficult, the family members reminded one another often that they were “loving Tom into life”.*

*After 25 years of marriage, immediately after the wedding of Tom and Lisa's daughter, the family once again gathered. They discussed their new young family member, and again they expressed concerns. Tom's concerns were as deep as any; but he quietly expressed his own gratitude and publicly offered a profound possibility. "We'll love him into life. You gave that gift to me. We can give that gift to him, too". A blessing; a Beatitude.*

*I know a of a church, far away, and not so long ago where this happened. A woman fresh out of rehab (for drug additions) comes among them. She is self-centered, demanding and difficult. They know their mandate is to love others into life. And that is what happens. Slowly, deeply and wonderfully, over the years she becomes one of the gentle, self-giving, creative, welcoming, merciful, peaceful and compassionate members of her church.*

Perhaps the question that the Beatitudes brings to us is, "How blessed are others because of you?"

*May God bless you with a restless discomfort about easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that you may seek truth boldly and love deep within your heart.*

*May God bless you with holy anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that you may tirelessly work for justice, freedom, and peace among all people.*

*May God bless you with the gift of tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, or the loss of all that they cherish, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and transform their pain into joy.*

*May God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you really can make a difference in this world, so that you are able, with God's grace, to do what others claim cannot be done.*

