

Let's go back to last week. Joel preached a rousing sermon about the call of the disciples as a call to **adventure**. To boldly go where no one has ever gone before...to get on that horse and save your family, your community, your world from every evil (and no, I do not have any kind of hat hiding up here!) "Come," Jesus said to the first disciples, "follow me! I will make you fishers of humanity!" Sitting in their father's boats, mending his nets for the umpteenth time with all that youthful energy just bursting inside, they immediately went and followed.

And now, the next chapter. The crowds had begun to gather. It seems the **fishing** was **going well**. With excitement and expectation, the new disciples gather around Jesus on the mountain where he would speak to the people. He opens his mouth and says –

**"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven!"**

Let's imagine their thoughts. "Okay, interesting start....but we've never known the poor in spirit to lead a charge to adventure."

**"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."**

"Well, that sounds good. Everyone needs comfort in these awful days."

**"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth."**

"Um, **what?**"

**"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."**

"Yeah, Jesus, now you're cooking. Let's feed that hunger and thirst!"

**"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy."**

**Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."**

"Oh, you're losing us. **What** does mercy and purity have to do with adventure?"

**"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."**

At this point they look at each other. "When he called us, did he say anything about making peace? Peace! While we are so oppressed? No, I **did not** hear that."

**"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."**

"Uh oh, **what** have we gotten ourselves into?"

**"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you, and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who went before you!"**

You know it **may** actually be that Jesus called 100 enthusiasts into his inner circle, but it was the staunch twelve who remained after that. We don't know...but the possibility is **likely**. With these teachings, Jesus began to lay out what kind of adventure they would be on together. It was much the same kind that the prophet Micah was offering the people seven centuries before – to become a people by doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God. It involved the risk of living out of sync with the culture's attitudes, priorities, and values and in sync with the attitudes, priorities, and values of the kingdom or the communion of God. I can tell you it is a great adventure, but one that takes us off our high horse (sorry, Joel) and plants us firmly on the ground, hand in hand with one another.

In our time, we are **losing** that **ground** and **one another**. The forces of division and hostility are strong. It is a **global** phenomenon; the violence people suffer is too much to comprehend. It is a **national** phenomenon. Witness the glee with which our public figures tear one another up. It is a **local** phenomenon. Have you been tuned into the often acrimonious discussion occurring in our local towns because of school districting and closing issues that hurt our students, wound our teachers, and threaten our common spirit? It is a **church** phenomenon. When things get difficult, many of us move away and not toward the breach occurring with an open hand and healing heart. It is a **personal** phenomenon. Broken within ourselves, the violence on the outside lives within; anger erupts in depression, aggression, self-hatred, all kinds of addictions and abuse. The ground under our feet no longer feels holy.

You need to know that Jesus gave these teachings in a violent culture, to a people just as broken, with vehement conflicts over how to live. Commentator Edwin Van Driel writes: “Many of the ethical passages of the sermon can be read as Jesus’ intervention in a heated contemporary theological and political debate raging between the parties of his day – Zealots, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes: What course should God’s people choose under these circumstances? How should they relate to their enemies? How should the people of God preserve their identity?”

**How are** we to live in a broken world? I think Jesus was clear. We are to live **at peace with ourselves**, in **loving relationship with one another**, and in **communion with God**. It is simple really...and it is terribly hard. This is not a lifestyle celebrated by our culture. But indeed, it is not a “lifestyle” at all. It is a minute by minute commitment to the mending of brokenness wherever and whenever it occurs. It is peacemaking of the deepest and widest kind, beginning with poverty of spirit, a gentle openness to life just as it is, a miracle. Every breath is a miracle, and our task is to simply live it. Yes, this life includes loss and suffering, but it is often pain that reveals our common ground with one another, where we find each other and are comforted. That is part of the miracle.

How are we to live in a broken world? In **humility**. To be meek is to be humble, accepting ourselves as we are, needing neither to be more nor less, which allows us to accept with others as they are. I have recently learned something important about humility. It is **only** when we can accept ourselves just as we are, warts, limitations, and all, that we begin to really feel the love of the God who made us. I always thought I needed to be something more, something better. Constantly striving to be something different makes it impossible for us to know or give love.

And when we know love, mercy follows – tenderness and forgiveness toward ourselves and all others. Here is where communion begins, when we discover the burning desire to share that love which is our **birthright** as children of God. The making of peace is **not** about waging war, it is about extending and sharing our birthright to be whole and loved to the whole human family.

Sharing our love takes many shapes and forms. It takes unpopular stands. It rubs up against injustice. It exposes hatred, discrimination, inequity. It abhors violence. But most of all, it exposes the lie that tells us that we are essentially autonomous and separate beings on this planet, and reveals the truth – we were made to be in communion with each other. When our bonds are broken, it all falls apart. And persecution may follow.

The disciples listening to Jesus as he gave his message on the mount were young. They had not yet learned that the call to communion is a call to the greatest adventure. They did not yet know that it had to start with themselves. Or that the bond that would grow among them would be strong enough to face any hardship and expand literally to every corner of the earth. But they learned. They learned around a table like this. Where they and where we come as we are, find peace within ourselves, deepen our bonds with one another, and delight in communion with God. The blessed life begins here. Amen.