

**Love God Love Others 5**

**“THE COMMUNITY’S VALUES”  
Matthew 5:3-10**

Please look with me at the Main Street United Methodist Church Vision Statement. Let’s read that out loud together:

***Fostering vital communities through love and life-changing experiences.***

And I tell you, this is one of the greatest needs of our time—people are hungry for vital community. A community is a network of relationships. A vital community is a network of relationships that is alive and life-giving.

And who doesn’t want that? Everybody wants vital community. People are starving for vital community. Raise your hand if you DON’T want vital community—if you’re saying, “I want to live by myself and I don’t want to deal with anybody!”

Now, here’s the thing: For us at Main Street to foster vital communities, we have to BE a vital community. And for us to be a vital community, we have to live by the Jesus Creed. And at the start of this sermon series, I told you what that is. A man came to Jesus one day and said, “What is the greatest commandment?” And what Jesus said in response is what we call “The Jesus Creed.”

So, do me a favor and let’s say the Jesus Creed out loud together:

***“Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one.  
Love the Lord your God with all your heart,  
with all your soul,  
with all your mind,  
and with all your strength.”  
The second is this, “Love your neighbor as yourself.”  
There is no other commandment greater than these.***

And my sisters and brothers at Main Street, that is THE KEY to vital community:

**Love God**

**Love Others**

Let me hear you say that ... *[repeat]*

That’s the key to vital community, and that’s what we’ve been talking about during the season of Lent. And we’ve looked at the community’s prayer, which is the Lord’s Prayer, and the community’s table, which is Holy Communion, and the community’s standards, which are the Ten Commandments—and today we’re going to look at the community’s values.

We're going to read from Matthew 5, verses 3-10. These are statements from Jesus that come at the beginning of one of his most famous sermons. We call them the Beatitudes, from the Latin for "blessed." I'd like us to read these out loud responsively:

*Blessed are the poor in spirit,*

***for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.***

*Blessed are those who mourn,*

***for they will be comforted.***

*Blessed are the meek,*

***for they will inherit the earth.***

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,*

***for they will be filled.***

*Blessed are the merciful,*

***for they will be shown mercy.***

*Blessed are the pure in heart,*

***for they will see God.***

*Blessed are the peacemakers,*

***for they will be called children of God.***

*Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,*

***for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.***

Matthew 5:3-10, *New International Version*

**LET'S PRAY:** Oh God, let these statements of Jesus shape us into the Christ-centered community that you want us to be. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

So, everybody loves the Beatitudes. They're beautiful. They're poetic. "*Blessed are the poor in spirit ... Blessed are the merciful ... Blessed are the peacemakers.*" People read the Beatitudes at weddings, at funerals, at graduations. Everybody loves the Beatitudes. The problem is, nobody seems to know what they actually mean.

For example, is Jesus giving us a list of things he wants us to DO? "I want you to go out and perform acts of mercy. I want you to go out and make peace."

OR— are the Beatitudes a list of things we're supposed to BE? Like some people call these the "BE-Attitudes." We're supposed to BE humble, and meek, and pure in heart, and if we're not those things, we're supposed to work on being those things.

OR—are the Beatitudes a road map to happiness? Some people call them the "Be Happy Attitudes." So maybe Jesus is saying, "Look, if you be humble, and be meek, and show mercy, and make peace—then you'll be happy."

OR (and stick with me now)—are the Beatitudes simply statements of fact that don't ask you to do or to be anything? Could it be that Jesus is looking out on a group of people

who already are poor in spirit ... who are already mourning ... who are, in fact, hungry and thirsting for righteousness ... could it be that Jesus is looking at these people who are right in front of him and saying, "Look, I know society shuns you, but God honors you" (which is another word for blessed)?

Maybe the real point of the Beatitudes is that Jesus wants you to look out at the world and realize that many who are least in the eyes of the world are the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

And maybe Jesus wants you to realize that many who are great in the eyes of the world, aren't even going to make it into the kingdom of heaven.

So are the Beatitudes ...

- a) A list of things to do?
- b) A list of things to be?
- c) A road map to happiness?
- d) A statement of who is already blessed in the eyes of God?

Well, obviously opinions vary, but in my study this week, I did see two things that most scholars agree on. Whether the Beatitudes are things to do, or things to be, or just simple statements, all the scholars I read seem to agree on two things:

- 1- The Beatitudes represent a set of VALUES.
- 2- These values are upside down from the rest of the world.

Everybody agrees on those two things—that whatever else the Beatitudes are, there's a set of values behind them. And the values behind the Beatitudes are upside down from the rest of the world.

Now, what do I mean by values? Values are what you care about. Values are what's important to you. Values are not the same thing as rules, because there are a lot of rules you follow that you don't care about. And values are not the same thing as goals, because values are not things you're trying to accomplish.

Values define who you are. Values say, "This is good, and this is bad. We want this, and we don't want that."

So, for example, in America, we value hard work. And we value democracy. Artists value creativity. Universities value academic freedom. In the South we value hospitality.

Values are guiding principles. So if you look at the Beatitudes you're going to see the principles that are supposed to guide this community called the church. These are...

### The Community's Values

- 1- Humility: "Blessed are the poor in spirit"

To be poor in spirit means to not be full of yourself. It's reliance on God. It's an inner disposition that says, "I am nothing without God."

So, in other words, we value humility, which means we don't value bragging, boasting, or arrogance.

2- Broken hearts: "Blessed are those who mourn"

"Blessed are those who mourn" doesn't have to do with losing a loved one. It has to do with being broken-hearted over the state of the world. It means that you look around at the pain and suffering and the sin and sadness, and your heart breaks, and you long for the day when God's kingdom comes and God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

This is what Bob Pierce, the founder of Samaritan's Purse was talking about when he said, *"Let my heart be broken by the things that break the heart of God."*

3- Gentleness: "Blessed are the meek"

And meek does not mean wimpy. It does not mean weak. The original Greek word refers to strength that is under control. It's used of a wild animal that's been tamed. The idea is that you're not pushy, you're not aggressive, you're not harsh—you're gentle.

4- Spiritual Hunger: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness"

In this community, we're not hungry for money. We're not hungry for success. We're not hungry for fame or fortune. We're hungry for God. We long to grow spiritually. And so we study the Bible and we pray and we worship and we seek out more and more of God so that we can become more and more like Jesus. And that passion drives us like a hungry person is driven to find food.

5- Mercy: "Blessed are the merciful"

Friends, get this straight: We value mercy. We don't hold grudges. We don't retaliate. We forgive. That's one of our core values.

6- Integrity: "Blessed are the pure in heart"

Pure in heart means single-minded and honest. It means that what you say with your mouth is what you mean in your heart. It means you tell the truth. It means people can trust you.

7- Peacemaking: "Blessed are the peacemakers"

We do not value violence—whether it’s physical violence, verbal violence, emotional violence, sexual violence—we abhor violence. We want to see people put down their weapons—whether those weapons are guns, or spoken words, or posts on the internet—we want to help people put down their weapons and live at peace. And a good place for that to start would be if we in the Christian community would put down our weapons and learn how to live in peace.

But get this straight. I don’t see how Jesus could say this any more clearly: We value peace.

#### 8- Concern for people on the margins:

This is the only Beatitude that Jesus expounds on. He says,

“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

--Matthew 5:10-12

Now, put this in context: Jesus is talking to people who are being beat up by the establishment. The religious leaders drove them out of the synagogues, and the political leaders outlawed their beliefs.

Jesus is talking to people who are shunned by the rest of society. They’ve been pushed out on the margins because of their faith. And Jesus is comforting these people. He’s saying, “Don’t be discouraged. You, of all people, should rejoice! Because you have a great reward waiting for you in heaven!”

Now here Jesus speaks to those who are marginalized because they’re being persecuted for their faith. But I’m going to suggest that this concern extends to people who are on the margins because of poverty, or discrimination, or educational status, or lack of opportunity or lack of voice. Homeless people, sick people, people with mental illness, people in nursing homes, people who can’t work and therefore can’t support themselves—anybody who finds themselves left out, left behind, or looked down on. The classic phrase is “the least, the last, and the lost.”

In the Christian community, we value these people. We don’t shut them out. We don’t look down on them. We don’t exclude them. We look up to them! We value them. We honor them. Because one day, they’re going to be royalty in the kingdom of heaven.

Now do me a favor and look at those values again:

#### The Community’s Values

- 1- Humility
- 2- Broken hearts
- 3- Gentleness
- 4- Spiritual Hunger
- 5- Mercy
- 6- Integrity
- 7- Peacemaking
- 8- Concern for people on the margins

For the most part, those are not the values of the world around us. The world's values are more like be strong, be bold, be a winner, get what's yours. Be attractive and flaunt it. Get money and buy stuff.

The world is not all that excited about humility and gentleness and spiritual hunger and all that stuff.

So, I want us to really think about this question: When people look at us, do they see the world's values, or the values of a Christ-centered community?

One thing to notice about the community's values is that they have to be lived in community—it's impossible to live out those values on your own.

So look again at the community's values:

- Are those the values we live by?
- Are those the values that most Christians live by?
- Are those the values that Christians in America are known for?
- Are those the values that we Christians look for in our leaders?

Values are what's important to you. Values are what you care about. Values define who you are and how you do things. And in the Christian community, our values are upside down from the rest of the world.

So what would it look like if we in the church stopped taking our cues from the world, and made a new commitment to live out the values of Jesus?

I'll tell you one thing that would happen. We would be a vital community that

*Foster[s] vital communities through love and life-changing experiences.*

**LET'S PRAY:** Oh, God, make us humble. Make us gentle. Make us merciful. Make us people of integrity. Make us makers of peace.

God, break our hearts for what breaks yours. Place within us a deep spiritual hunger. And give us, Lord, your passion for those on the margins. In the name of the one who taught and lived these values—your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.