

# “God’s Kind of People”

Micah 6:1-8 & Matthew 5:1-12  
Rev. James Ramsey, February 2, 2014

Jesus stands on the mount and begins his sermon.

He will reveal his Father’s conception of the world – defined much differently than we imagine. God is remaking the world, where people are defined by their character and conduct more than their heritage or their resources, their social position or their political power.



Jesus explains what it means to be a citizen of God’s new world -- a world Jesus called “the kingdom of heaven.” Who are the citizens of God’s world? Who are God’s Kind of People? Those who love God and exhibit certain traits – defining, distinctive traits that will be common to all of those who are becoming part of God’s new world. People who embrace these traits, make them part of their way of doing business, Jesus says are blessed. They find favor in God’s eyes. They are God’s Kind of People.

The poor in spirit. The mourning. The meek. Those who hunger for righteousness. The pure in heart. The merciful. The peacemakers, persecuted, slandered, insulted peacemakers. These are God’s kind of people.



Scholars have long debated the meaning of the first Beatitude – what does Jesus mean by “poor in spirit?” The other Beatitudes follow this first one. We know Jesus chose his words carefully. He fulfills God’s Word by embodying it.

We understand mourning and meekness, the hunger for justice and purity of heart. We know mercy, although it’s hard to exercise it. Peacemaking, as difficult as it is,



surely is within our grasp. But who strives to be "Poor in Spirit?" Yet it may be that this first informs all the rest.

My colleague, Timothy Merrill was traveling with his wife in Ireland last summer.

They happened upon a Saturday evening vesper service at a Dominican monastery in Waterford.

The abbot leading the service read the text in Matthew titled "The Beatitudes." His brief homily focused on just the first verse: "Blessed are the poor in spirit."

He suggested reversing the word order and read it like this: "Blessed are those who have the spirit of the poor."



In other words, **God's Kind of People** are those who identify themselves with those who have less, with those who struggle to survive, with those whose options are limited by systems and structures beyond their control. We are blessed when we can enter into their suffering and can see as they see. The poor, then, become more than an abstract concept, or a demographic entity removed from our own experience. We have become them for we have their spirit.

The one who is poor in spirit recognizes that he or she has nothing to offer God on his or her own, that his or her life has no purpose apart from God. They obey God not out of obligation, but out of a desire to gain something better -- the life of God's new world...the kingdom of heaven. The poor in spirit are those who voluntarily empty themselves so that they can be filled by God.

Retired music teacher Mildred Hondorf had been a woman of faith for a long time. But she learned a powerful lesson in an unexpected way from an unlikely teacher. She has



summarized what it means to live as God would have us live, as Christ taught in the beginning of his Sermon on the Mount.

If God didn't have a purpose for us, Mildred believes, we wouldn't be here! So.....

Live simply.

Love generously.

Care deeply.

Speak kindly.

Leave the rest to God.

Mildred had taught piano lessons for over 30 years. She taught children with varying levels of musical ability, some very talented students, but also some that were downright 'musically challenged' - one such pupil being Robby.

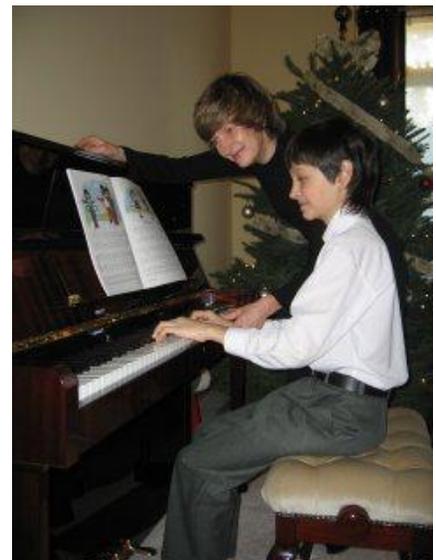


Robby was 11 years old when his mother (a single mom) dropped him off for his first piano lesson. Mildred prefers students (especially boys) begin at an earlier age, which she explained to Robby. But Robby said that it had always been his mother's dream to hear him play the piano, so – reluctantly- she accepted him as a student.

Almost immediately she regretted her decision. The lessons seemed a hopeless endeavor. Robby tried, but he lacked the sense of tone and basic rhythm needed to excel. Still, he practiced, he dutifully reviewed his scales and struggled to learn the few elementary pieces Mildred required of all her students. Over the months Robby tried and tried while Mildred listened and cringed and encouraged.

Each weekly session would end with Robby remarking, “My mom's going to hear me play someday”. Still, Robby had no inborn ability.

Mildred only knew Robby's mother from a distance because Robby would always get dropped off for lessons. Sometimes his mother



would part her aged car in Mildred's driveway, waiting for the lesson to finish. She always waved and smiled, but never spoke.

Then one day Robby stopped coming for his lessons. Mildred thought about calling him, but assumed that he and his mother had finally realized the obvious...Robby was no piano player. Mildred was actually relieved these lessons were over. He was a bad advertisement for her teaching! Hopefully he had decided to pursue something else.

Several weeks later Mildred mailed her annual flyer recital to all her students' homes. She was surprised when Robby responded that he would like to take part. She told him that the recital was for current pupils and that because he had dropped out, he really did not qualify.

Robby countered. He told her that his mother had been sick and unable to drive, but that he had been practicing. "Please Miss Hondorf, I've just got to play," he insisted. Mildred is not sure what led her to accept, but she did.

The night of the recital arrived and the high school gymnasium was packed with parents, relatives and friends. She positioned Robby last in the program, just before she was to come up, thank all the students and play a finishing piece. She strategized that any damage Robby might do would come at the end of the program and she could always gloss over his poor performance with her own rousing 'curtain closer'.



The program went off without a hitch. Mildred's students had been practicing and it showed. Then Robby came up on the stage. His clothes were wrinkled and his hair looked as though he had run an egg beater through it. "Why wasn't he dressed up like the other students?" Mildred wondered. "Why didn't his mother at least make him comb his hair for this special night?"





Robby pulled out the piano bench, and surprised Mildred when he announced that he had chosen to play Mozart's Concerto No. 21 in C Major.

No one, most of all Mildred, was prepared for what came next. Robby's fingers danced nimbly over the keys. He went from pianissimo to fortissimo, from allegro to virtuoso; he effortlessly held the suspended chords Mozart demands!

The performance was nothing short of magnificent. Never had Mildred heard Mozart played so well by anyone near Robby's age.

After six and a half minutes Robby ended in a grand crescendo, and the crowd erupted in a wild standing ovation. Overcome with tears, Mildred ran up onstage and wrapped her arms around Robby. "I have never heard you play like that Robby, how did you do it?"

Through the microphone Robby explained: "Well, Miss Hondorf .... remember I told you how my mom was sick? Well, she was actually really sick, she had cancer and she passed away this morning. And well ..... she was born deaf, so tonight was the first time she had ever heard me play and I wanted to make it special."

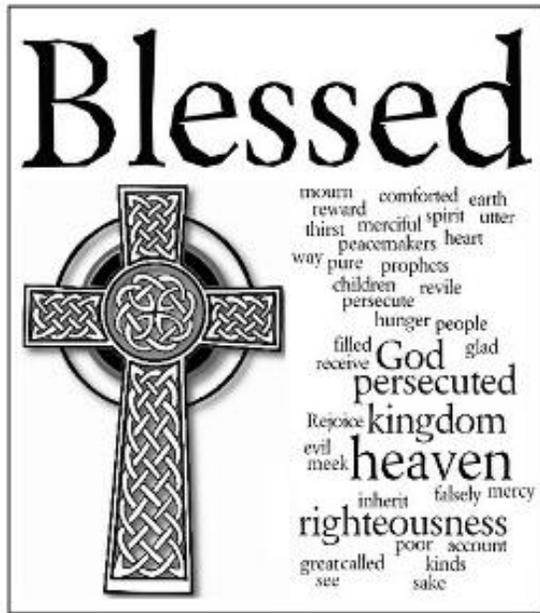


Mildred thinks about that night every day...and about Robby...and about the amazing lesson she learned about God's kind of people.

She reflects, "How much richer has my life become simply by taking Robby as my pupil. He was the teacher and I was the pupil, for he taught me the meaning of perseverance and love and believing in yourself, and maybe even taking a chance on someone and you didn't know why.

I cannot help but think of Jesus' words...

Blessed are the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart ...



We can all make a difference!  
Because we are God's kind of people and  
we live among God's kind of people. So  
many seemingly trivial interactions present  
us with a choice...

Do we recognize these opportunities  
when God presents them to us? Do we act  
with compassion when given the chance?

We can choose to act as Jesus  
taught. Embrace the traits of those who  
love God.

If God didn't have a purpose for us,  
we wouldn't be here!

Live simply.

Love generously.

Care deeply.

Speak kindly.

Leave the rest to God.

That's what God's Kind of People do.

AMEN.