

## Pastor Roy's sermon from January 29, 2017

Children: Do you have any questions about Dinosaurs and the Bible? Or Dragons and the Bible?

What does it mean to be blessed??? To have plenty? To have a healthy savings account or shares of stock in a retirement account? a big family? A good reputation? Lots of friends? Be satisfied? Physically and emotionally healthy? To have cool stuff? To be independent? To have our dreams fulfilled? To have a nice home as long as we live? To be able to live and be the way we want to live and be?

The Beatitudes show that Jesus had thought about what it means to be blessed. Perhaps Jesus was influenced by Micah 6:8. He has told you what is good and what does the Lord require of you? Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. The blessed life is a life of just dealings, kind actions, and humility. Those are always things we can control. We can treat people fairly and resist unfair privileges. We can be kind. We can be humble. It's a matter of making choices which reveal mercy.

Will we have plenty? Be satisfied? Be healthy, surrounded by good family and friends? Have things the way we want them? Perhaps. Sometimes yes, sometimes no. But the important details for the blessed life is how we act, and how we treat those around us. Also, how we treat the land around us. From Micah and the Beatitudes, if we stop and think, to be blessed is not simply being happy and safe and healthy. To be blessed is to live in balance with all around us to the best of our ability. To be humble. To listen. To love. Blessing flows from who we are and the choices we make, not from what we have or can accomplish. (Blessed are. . .)

Jesus lived a life of blessing. His was not an easy life. There was enough, yet he was not consumed by his own needs. He made choices and spoke up for those who had no voice—who had greater needs. He made their needs his needs. He healed as he was able. He taught as he was able. He pointed out inconsistencies and greed among the powerful voices and forces of his day. Come what may. What came was the cross. He did not solve the issues and problems of his day. He drew a line of mercy in the sand and then offered up his life when they demanded that he give in to their ways of greed, fear, and insecurity.

This is the stumbling block suggested by Paul, the stumbling block of the cross. The cross was Jesus' refusal to go along with the out of whack choices and priorities of the powerful. The cross is a stumbling block because if we understand the cross for what it is, it will rub us the wrong way. We like Superman. We like billionaires, movie and rock stars. We like people who get their way, who can move mountains.

But someone who stands for justice and mercy and dies a miserable, lonesome, futureless death? That is a stumbling block. Oh, of course, we proclaim eternal life and we exalt in the resurrection, but these are mysteries, we don't know precisely how they will play out. Our faith is not a guarantee.

If we proclaim guarantees with tidy endings and answers, we have eliminated the stumbling block of the cross. We have eliminated faith in the life and death of Jesus for love and justice, come what may. The cross is a scandal because it looks like failure. Our faith is a scandal because it offers no guarantees, simply a willingness to follow, and love, and serve, and trust in God's mercy that we will be drawn up with all of creation into the fullness of the life of God.

Here is why we can live by faith and boldly proclaim by deed and word the good news to the poor, the physically and mentally ill—yes even those who have plenty who are on the path to learning that their plenty is not a guarantee of blessing.

Perhaps today Jesus might say -- Blessed are the refugees. Blessed are the homeless. Blessed are those who have survived trauma and abuse. Blessed are those who have learned to listen. Blessed are those who are mindful of their own inward struggles. Blessed are those who are aware of their own weakness, so that they can relate to others with humility. Blessed are those who take honest stock of their own lives. Blessed are those with few expectations. Blessed are those who have learned the joy of sacrifice. Blessed are those who give their lives for love—day after day after day. Blessed are those who speak up for those who have no voice. Courage to us all. Indeed.