

We are continuing in our sermon series this morning on the Beatitudes that I had originally titled, “How then shall we live?” But I’ve actually adjusted the title to something that I think fits a bit better with where God is taking this series.

“Make something of me.” It was a phrase that I used routinely in the sermon last week, and I think that that will be our golden thread going forward. “Make something of me.”

Make something of me. Make something of us. Enable us to *live into* these realities, these signs of the kingdom breaking in. Help us to step into who you are and what your ‘Kingdom come near’ looks like.

This is our prayer, our ache, as we read these verses—let your kingdom break through me so that *this* is what happens.

This week we’re adding in the second verse of the Beatitudes, and like last week I’ll read the first two verses in the passage and invite you to join for the reading of the Beatitude verses. And we’ll see if you can do the first by memory. **Read Matthew 5:1-4.**

Last week we were able to have my family here joining us in worship. And after the service, the group of us met out on the front yard to share in some food and social time together.

And while chatting with my sister-in-law, she asked me if that day was hard for Danny. And it took me a minute to realize what she was asking me, because of course we had just baptized Elijah, so everyone had been congratulating us. But she was referring to the fact that it was Father’s Day.

Now for those of you who aren’t aware, my husband Danny grew up without a dad. His dad was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumour when Danny’s mom was pregnant with him, and his dad ended up passing away when Danny was only nine months old. So he and his two older sisters basically grew up without a father.

For my sister-in-law to ask the question was of course very kind. But it was an interesting question for me to respond to, because she wasn’t asking if Danny was grieving the loss of his dad. That was already assumed, that growing up without a dad is something that one naturally grieves throughout the whole course of their life. It’s not something that you ever just “get over.”

Her question, rather, was referring to *how* Danny was grieving. Because certain things, events, memories, conversations, will naturally bring grief out of us; so she was wondering if a day that celebrates fatherhood was a day that brought out that journey of grief in a particularly difficult way.

Of course he grieves the loss of his dad, but *how* does he grieve? Does this day make it harder?

Similarly, in the passage that we just read, when Jesus speaks of mourning, He's getting at something deeper than just the reality of grief, or that grief is a part of our human existence. He's inviting us to consider *how* we grieve in light of His Kingdom come near.

Because there are lots of things these days that can cause us grief. The state of the world, for instance. Israel and Iran—and now the U.S. Russia and Ukraine. An airplane crashing in India and claiming 241 lives. Immigrants being unjustly kicked out. Others being refused entry.

And it's hard to live in light of the coming kingdom when all around us is the evidence of *worldly* kingdoms breaking things apart.

But the reality of *Jesus'* Kingdom is the context for this passage. And so all these verses in the Beatitudes are connected to the same theme.

Poverty of spirit, which we spoke of last week, hangs together with today's verse. When we come before God in poverty of spirit, recognizing our own neediness before God, our grieving then takes on a different form.

That of mourning. Because what Jesus is talking about here is an even deeper ache than just grief. Grief is the emotional response that brings out feelings of sadness, shock, and denial.

Mourning is when something very personal has happened. Usually when we've lost someone. And so to mourn is an active working out of our grief. It's an expression of our grief.

It's when we do something *with* our grief.

A couple years ago, my mother-in-law sent me a devotional, written by an African pastor—and for the life of me I couldn't find his name. But he wrote this:

“Whenever my children bruise themselves, they place their hands over the swelling and just sit there with little tears trickling down their cheeks, holding their hurt. What's interesting to me is their instinctive reaction to *draw closer to* the pain, to press into it, to hold it, to sit with it. And perhaps that's the key. The way we learn to respond to pain and suffering is to press into it.”

It feels very counterintuitive, because normally we want to run away from our pain, or at the very least try to move on from it.

But in the Matthew passage, Jesus seems to be indicating that the pain of our mourning is something we *can* press into because we know and trust that His Kingdom has come near. We press into it with the trust that Jesus is in fact nearby and will hold us *in* our pain.

Again, the question for us isn't whether or not we *should* mourn, but rather, *how* should we mourn in light of our hope in Christ and in the reality of His coming Kingdom.

Because when we mourn the loss of someone, something deep within us is aching that things are not as they should be. That *we* are not as we should be.

That there is a picture in our minds of what it *should* be like. Grief makes us aware of the ache within us that longs for something to fix it. To fix what's wrong. To fix what's broken.

Our mourning, then, is set in the hope of a better Kingdom. We mourn because we've set our grief within the context of a greater reality that what we can't yet fully see. We *can* press into the pain because we trust—in our poverty of spirit—that God holds our pain and will make a way for things to be made right again.

We who mourn are *blessed* because we know that our grief is not an end—as it is for so many in this world who don't have hope. We know that our grief *points to something*. To a future where everything that causes pain will no longer be the cause of *any* pain. That He *will* come to make all things new.

He just hasn't done it yet.

And so asking the question, then, of how we mourn is incredibly important. Because when we routinely take our grief before God and mourn in that poverty of spirit that says, "I need you. This is too hard. Make something of me. Make something of this mess, this tragedy, these horrific emotions that I'm feeling..."

...When we do that, we are engaging with our pain in a way that allows the Spirit of Jesus to hold us in our pain. It's not trying to 'fix it.' It's allowing Jesus to hold that pain for us.

And who else but Jesus would understand?

Henri Nouwen once said this: "Look at the man who is pierced and broken, and you [will] see the love of God radiating out to you.... Every time you look at... the burden you have to bear, see your struggles as being struggled with right there on the cross by the Son of God. Your struggle becomes a light burden because it is the burden of God and God has suffered *for* us."

Mourning implies that we see our grief in light of the grief that Jesus Himself bore. Because what He bore on the cross was not just the weight of sin and brokenness, but every pain or grief that you and I will ever endure. Jesus has struggled with them all.

And He has struggled in them all *for you*. He has suffered *for you*. So that you don't need to suffer in the same way. It doesn't make the grief easier. But it does change the focus of our grief. Because

you have this comfort.

You know, there's a reason why baptism is such an essential part of our life together. Because it constantly brings us back into the greater story, so that when we mourn, we do not mourn as those who have no hope, as Paul says to the Thessalonians.

*"Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death...."*

We don't want you to be *uninformed*, he says. The 18<sup>th</sup> century poet, Lord Byron, once said that "sorrow is knowledge." We who follow Jesus are the ones who are 'knowledgeable' in our grief.

*"Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope."*

So often when we are mourning, we speak of those who have died, those who have gone before us, those who have passed away, those who have crossed the threshold.

But I wonder if we need to be more intentional about referring to those who have gone before us in the same way that Scripture does. As those who are asleep.

Because I think it would change the way we mourn. And it's language that Jesus Himself uses.

In Matthew 9, when a synagogue leader comes to Jesus, he kneels before Jesus and says, "My daughter has just died."

His daughter has just died. There's no mistaking it. The girl is no longer breathing.

But her father isn't living in that reality. Because he asks Jesus to come and put his hand on her *so that she can live*. So that death can somehow be reversed.

Jesus goes with him, but notice that when they get to the house, Jesus changes the language. He tells the noisy crowd of pipe-players and grievers to quiet down because the girl is just asleep.

And of course the crowd laughs at Him, which could have very easily discouraged the synagogue leader into thinking that there was no point in bringing Jesus. That pressing into his pain was a lost effort.

But he had seen enough to know that the kingdom of heaven had in fact come near in Jesus. And he was setting his grief within that hope.

Similarly, when we mourn, our mourning is actually a sign of hope, a hope that Jesus is in fact *alive*,

that His resurrection is real, and that *that* realness will soon be ours.

Simply put, we do not grieve as the world grieves, because our hope is simply not of this world. And the parts of us that *are* weak, that *are* grieving, that feel broken or poor, that mourn what has been lost, those are the places within us where Jesus promises He will do something new.

That's what He's all about.

Case-in-point, later on in Matthew's gospel, when Jesus *Himself* is buried, we are told that there was a group of women who were at the tomb when Jesus was put in, likely there to mourn.

And interestingly, they are the ones who are the first to be comforted. They are the first to see and experience this verse in Matthew 5 become reality.

Because in Matthew's account, it's these women who *actually witness* the angel coming down, rolling back the stone, sitting on it, and sharing with them that Jesus has risen, and who are then sent to go and share the good news.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they *will be* comforted." It's a promise. In this life, mourning is something that draws us to the kingdom come near, to our Suffering Saviour who was very familiar with grief, and who never ceases or fails to sit with us when we too are overwhelmed with grief.

About a week ago, some friends of my parents shared a story with me. Their youngest daughter, Rosalie, is a painter and was asked by a woman to paint a very specific picture that was going to be used at a memorial service.

This woman's sister and husband had recently suffered a terrible tragedy. They had gotten pregnant, but it turned out that the child had a congenital heart condition. He was delivered but then passed away two days later. And so this woman was asking Rosalie to paint a picture of the wife and her husband sitting on a bench, grieving the loss of their child, and then Jesus standing next to them holding their baby.

Now, Rosalie doesn't often do portraits. It's not her thing; she's more of a landscape painter. But she agreed to do it. And when this story was shared with me, I just had to ask if I could see the painting. And when I saw it, and I just had to ask permission if I could share it with you all. And I can't think of any better way to explain it, to explain what Jesus is talking about, then to show you this image.

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