

I come to you in the name of one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

When I sat down to write my sermon this week, I had an agenda. I had been struck by a new phrase that emerged out of last weekend's interesting interactions between the media and the new president's administration. Alternative facts spoke to me. I thought it a perfect encapsulation of a lot of aspects of our society today. The proliferation of so-called fake news on social media. The insistence of 24 hour news networks to have a political angle and bent, rather than simply reporting what is happening in the world. Even in personal relationships this concept of alternative facts speaks to our insistence of maintaining unhealthy relationships with friends or family. With this phrase, I had wanted to write a sermon about alternative beatitudes.

I thought to myself, how could I write a sermon that would point to the first actions of the new president, actions that I see as antithetical to the beatitudes, but he may classify as simply alternative beatitudes. Blessed are the rich, for they were ordained by God to be so. Blessed are the wall builders, for they isolate themselves from the world and horde everything for themselves. Blessed are the Americans, for dirty immigrants, particularly Mexicans and Muslims, are only here to steal our jobs and become terrorists.

I was, am, pretty proud of this. Quite clever of me, if I do say so myself. And, I am just as antithetical to the beatitudes in doing so.

There's a temptation when we read or hear the beatitudes to play the victim. We want to be the descriptors that are laid out. We want to be the blessed. We want to say that these beatitudes speak of me, they justify me, they support me. I am the pure in heart. I am the merciful. I am those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. But are we really?

There are many among us who protest. There are many among us who resist. There are many among us who make our voices heard. There are many among us, myself perhaps chief among them, who flood facebook with petitions and smart articles for all of our like-minded friends to agree with. But, where is the actionable response to the injustices we see in our world? Have we really been persecuted? Have we really been pure in heart? Have we really been merciful?

I would argue that for most if not all of us, no, we haven't. I was struck with a photo that went viral from the women's marches last Saturday. Someone held a sign stating: "I'll see all you nice white ladies at the next #BlackLivesMatter march, right?" This sign served as a stark reminder to me that we are righteousness fighters, when that righteousness is for us. But if we truly are to hunger and thirst for righteousness, we will not be filled until we fight for the righteousness of all. This is not to question the motives of those who marched, nor is it to say that the march was not an immensely powerful and positive force in this world on that day, instead I'm asking us to ask ourselves if we truly can live into the fullness of the beatitudes that Christ lays before us today. We have to know deeply that our actions cannot stop at one march, our passions cannot be limited to one topic, one group, if we are fighting for righteousness, because righteousness cannot be realized until all can be said to have it.

I know my heart isn't pure. I experience a double-edged sword of rage and apathy when I hear news of actions that I cannot believe will (or will not) be made by our country. I rage because I cannot believe the idiocy, the unchristian-ness, the flat out evil I see being perpetrated. I want to fight. I want to win. And then the apathy sets in when I ask, who will

listen to me, how will I make any difference, how can I possibly stand against the evil I perceive to be in this world? I want to hunger and thirst for righteousness, I want to fight for righteousness even as I am persecuted for righteousness' sake, but it's hard. It's hard to devote your entire life to advocating. It's hard to devote your entire life when it means that people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on Jesus' account.

And that's the point. The beatitudes are not a checklist to be accomplished. The beatitudes are not a set of descriptors that we should try to shoehorn our own identity into. Because, when we do so, we will find that those who believe the exact opposite of us are also claiming that identity of peacemaker, righteousness seeker. So we, as followers of Christ, must consider the radical depth to which Christ calls out to us from the mount. We, as followers of Christ, must ask ourselves: how can we take Christ's message from the mount and actually try to live into it?

And, I'm not sure I know the answer. I'm not convinced that I can know the answer until I see God, until I am filled, until I inherit the earth. A lot of what we do as Christians is a somewhat blind attempt at fulfilling a very exact way of life. A way of life that often runs counter to the lives that we have chosen to live for ourselves, even when those lives are filled with mercy, compassion, righteousness. And yet, we have to try. We have to try and live into this very exact way of life that we assured is the only path to salvation, to eternal life. And, that's hard.

It's hard to be perfect. It's hard to always live into an ideal that really only a handful of people in the history of existence can be said to have made inroads into, living the type of

exact life that Christ lays out before us today. We are broken. We are imperfect. We are not the merciful. We are not the pure in heart. We are not the peacemakers. At least, not all the time, not when others challenge us and our only way we see to fight back, to stand up, to subvert, is to go dark, to give into those baser instincts.

But, Christ still stands before us. Christ still reaches out to us, sheds his light into those dark places and leads us back out into the light. Christ assures us. Christ empowers us. Christ acknowledges the work we do, the passion we have, the heart we put into it all, and knows that even in our brokenness, even in our failure to truly become one with the identity that these beatitudes lay out, we try. And, it is in our trying that we meet Christ. It is in our trying that we can begin to see the power of Christ at work in this world. It is in our trying that we begin to be filled, we begin to see, we begin to inherit the earth.

Following Christ, truly following Christ, is not easy, and if anyone ever told you that it was, they were lying. It's not easy to follow Christ because we are destined to fail at it. It is not easy to follow Christ because we are conditioned to react in ways that ultimately run counter to what Christ has left for us. And yet, through the amazing, life-altering, reality-shifting gift that is God's grace, we can't help but try to follow Christ. We can't help but work to see righteousness realized for all. We can't help but try and be the peacemakers, even in the face of insurmountable odds. We can't help but try because God's grace is present here, and we want to share that Good News with the world, and we especially want to share that Good News with the world, when we ourselves are coming up short.

It makes sense, to me at least, that in our near future the beatitudes will become a way marker of sorts for many people. That is a mistake. They are not a checklist for Christians to insure they are doing everything right. Rather, they represent what would be the best of us, if we could somehow achieve such heights. But, we can't. And, that's ok. As long as we're willing to try, and in trying recognize that we will likely fail in our endeavors, from not enacting the change we see needed to using tactics and speech that forgets the humanity of our so-called enemy. And, it is in this failing that we will experience God's grace. It is in this failing that we will see the Good News lived out in our lives. It is in recognizing these failings as our own shortcomings laid out in the light that we will meet Christ in this world, and it is where we will truly begin to understand what is offered to us today in these beatitudes.

Amen.