

So last week I looked at the reading...it was the beatitudes from Mathew....  
and thought to myself, mmmm...I've always wanted to explore them,  
rarely do I hear anything about them...ok, let's do it!

So, after the programs were printed, I started doing my research and  
I found out why I rarely hear anything about them...  
no one really understands them!

Oh, sure, the scholars told me some interesting things...  
That they are wisdom sayings that are found  
all throughout ancient Jewish wisdom literature...  
Three of them are present tense, and the rest are future tense...  
but that's really curious because Jesus was all about the here and now,  
so why would he push the kingdom of God  
off into the far distant future?

Eight of these are way too many to deal with today...  
Today, let's simply like to reflect upon the first one...  
'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs IS the kingdom of God'.  
It's important to notice that this is one of the present tense beatitudes...

What does poor in spirit mean?  
Could it be humility?  
Well, sure, at face value  
but then it seems pretty easy to understand  
but the beatitudes aren't that straightforward,  
so, maybe that's not it....

Some scholars said 'Poor in spirit' actually refers to the loss of one's zest for life...  
like when life is so hard...

when life just beats you up so badly, that it is almost impossible for you to see any joy, any beauty, any reason for living.

That certainly would have been true for the disciples who were listening to Jesus that day.

They were truly at the bottom rung of society's ladder.

They were crushed under the weight of extreme poverty,

by the oppression of Roman Rule, and by the burden of Temple law...

So, on one hand, it is no surprise that they flocked to Jesus

but on the other hand,

I wonder what they thought when he told them

that in their life of barely existing there was the kingdom of heaven....

I don't know, if I was in their place...that would be really hard to believe!

I would have lots of questions!

if I was barely making it from one day to the next

could I say 'wow'! the kingdom of heaven is here???

and if I was in this position now, which I am not....

if I was living in the slums of Calcutta, Englewood or Mexico city...

could I see the Kingdom of heaven NOW????

I don't think so...

Not if I imagined the Kingdom of heaven on earth as a place or a space that was

free from pain,

free from hunger,

free from any hurt of any kind...

I think that is what most of us think of as the Kingdom of heaven on earth,

but then most of also know that life is never perfect, never without pain.... so how do we can

we understand what Jesus is teaching????....

**This week, I came across another understanding of this first beatitude,  
one gleaned from the ancient Aramaic of Jesus,  
not from the Greek text of Mathew...**

**Remember: Jesus spoke Aramaic, it was translated then into Greek to be written down,  
and then it was translated into Latin and then into English...  
and we all know the problems when we start moving from one language to another...**

**Here is the first beatitude spoken in Jesus' ancient Aramaic.  
as translated by Prof. Neil Douglas Klotz:**

**“Now is the blessedly ripe time to find our home in the breath, to realize that the breath  
and breathing is our first and last possession and when we do that,  
we will find power in our “I can” to all situations within us.”....**

**mmm....a little different, eh?**

**Instead of: Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**“Now is the blessedly ripe time to find our home in the breath, to realize that the breath  
and breathing is our first and last possession and when we do that,  
we will find power in our “I can” to all situations within us.”....**

**Ok...so the question is: what does this mean???**

**For the ancient Jews, Yahweh was Lord of Universe...King and Ruler of Israel.**

**AND...it was blasphemous to speak the name Yahweh.**

**That is why often, still to this day, no vowels are used when Yahweh is written...**

**Jewish scholars believe that the name Yahweh is really a breath prayer...**

**because your lips don't close when you say the name...**

**Breath and wind are often used in Scripture to denote the presence of God  
and the action of God...**

**Remember how creation began: In the beginning, “God said” and it was so...  
In the New Testament...Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit upon the apostles...  
There’s a lot more....**

**and we can think about our own lives...  
when we are born, our first action is to breathe in...  
when we die...our last action is to breathe out...**

**The ancient Jewish perspective, the one Jesus was immersed in,  
the one that is beatitude is giving voice to...  
Is that our lives, from the moment we are born to the moment when we die  
are rooted and sustained in the Life of the Lord of the Cosmos...  
Our breath IS the breath of Yahweh...**

**No matter what the exterior circumstances of our lives.**

**The people listening to Jesus that day had always been told they were rejected by God  
because they were poor, sick and under Roman Rule...Jesus says not so:  
You ARE, right now...a living, breathing presence of the Holy One of the Universe...**

**We who are listening to Jesus’s words this day, may have our questions about the presence  
of the Reign of God in this world of terrorism, climate crisis, addiction, job loss, divorce,  
illness, grief and/or poverty...  
Jesus tells US the same thing....Your breath is the breath of Holy One....  
your very life is grounded, rooted in the Presence of God ...**

**When we can believe this, it changes everything.  
It doesn’t necessarily change the exterior circumstances of our lives,  
but it changes how we ARE in those circumstances...  
because it gives us a true sense of self worth...**

**it gives us a ground of strength and courage  
so we can get through struggles of our lives  
with a sense of integrity, kindness and honor because we are rooted in the Holy....**

**I'd like to pause for a moment, and let each of us pay attention to our own breath.  
For 3 breaths...to be aware of our breathing in and breathing out.  
be aware that your breath is the life breath,  
the life force of the Holy One of the Universe....**

*PAUSE*

**To be willing to see the Holy in the rhythm of our breath  
is to be willing to see life as holy....  
To be willing to see life as Holy...  
is to know that we ARE living IN the reign of heaven on Earth...**

**AMEN.**