

Homily for December 20, 2007
Service of Prayer and Healing
Pat Hall, Parish Nurse
St. Margaret's Church

I suspect that most of us here this evening because we feel we are not able to fully engage in the Christmas activities going on around us. We are mourning the death of a family member, the loss of a job or a relationship, the loss of health, the loss of connectedness to other humans. We are here because we are seeking solace, hope, comfort, and meaning.

Let's look at the Gospel of John for help:

In this Gospel, Jesus said "I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete." He also said "I came that they (we) may have life and have it abundantly." These are the highest gifts God can give us here on earth. The joy Jesus refers to goes below the surface of our lives to the deep place that forms the bedrock of our being--- that place that steadies us in the midst of life's turbulence. You may wonder how do we get there from where we are now.

I am participating in two small groups here at St. Margaret's, one that is studying the beatitudes and one that is studying healing in the New Testament. I'd like to share with you some insights into finding that joy and abundant life Jesus wants for us.

The Beatitudes offer us a way of life, a pattern of commitments that helps us grow spiritually. The word beatitude means "a state of happiness or blessedness." However, some of the beatitudes don't seem to make sense at first glance.

Let's look at the first one:
Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

One might think poor in spirit refers to a feeling of depression, lack of joy or energy, sadness. Jesus, in fact, was talking about a lack of spirit, an emptiness that allows us to make room for God. It is a mature, freely accepted dependence on God's love. It is a realization that our whole identity is rooted in God's power not our own.

The next beatitude is:

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

The second beatitude tells us that mourners are blessed and will be comforted. Those of you who had someone die this year would not have used the word “blessed” to describe how you felt. To the contrary, you probably felt only a deep overwhelming, long lasting grief. The same holds true if you had a major illness. But in the midst of that grief, comes the opportunity for spiritual growth—the blessing that comes from allowing our empty hearts to become a vessel for God’s power. Comfort also comes from community: the presence of friends, the arrival of food, faith and the power of Scripture.

In the midst of our spiritual poverty and deep grief, we long for healing of our pain: physical, mental, and spiritual. For that, we look to the model Jesus gave us. His healing was offered within a society that valued community over the individual.

In modern Western culture, healing is a restoration of function for the individual. In ancient Mediterranean society, healing was restoration to a functional state of being or a valued person within society.

Jesus did not cure disease in the same way western society does now. There was no knowledge of germs or virus, lab tests or x-rays. Illness was thought to be self- induced because of some sinful act. If you became ill, you had brought it on yourself. You were separated from society---shunned until the illness had run its course, or you died. Jesus healed people from the symptoms that separated them from community. He was not concerned with “who” or what caused it.

He also empowered his disciples to go out and do the same. I think that is a desire of our church today: to be a community in which health and wellness are promoted, laying on of hands and prayers are offered for healing of body, mind and spirit and all members are valued and nurtured.

So, as you participate in the prayers to follow, acknowledge your poor spirit, grief, loneliness, or pain, and ask God to come into that empty place in your heart. Allow him to gradually refill that place with joy and life in abundance. Amen.