

## **LIFE IN THE VINE**

### ***Transform***

July 11, 2021

**Overarching Theme:** In 2021, FUMC will be SENT with the peace of Christ!

#### **Instructions:**

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

#### **Core Point:**

On Easter evening, the Risen Christ appears to his gathered disciple for the first time since Good Friday and speaks these words: "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you." Just as Jesus sent his disciples into a divided, conflicted 1<sup>st</sup> Century with his peace, so he sends us into a divided, conflicted 2021 with his peace.

#### **Matthew:**

The Gospel according to Matthew is written by Matthew (Levi), a Jewish tax collector who became one of Jesus' disciples. This Gospel forms the connecting link between the Old and New Testament because of its emphasis on the fulfilment of prophecy. The purpose of the writing of this Gospel was to prove that Jesus is the Messiah, the eternal King and it was written especially to the Jews probably between AD 60-65. A key verse of this Gospel is: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (5:17). Some of the special features of this Gospel are: Matthew is filled with Messianic language ('Son of David' is used throughout) and Old Testament references (53 quotes and 76 other references); this Gospel was not written as a chronological account but that its purpose was to present the clear evidence that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior.

– Adapted from The Life Application Bible, p. 1636.

#### **Reflect on this Scripture:**

Matthew 5:1-12 NRSV

<sup>1</sup> When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. <sup>2</sup> Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

- <sup>3</sup> "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
<sup>4</sup> "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.  
<sup>5</sup> "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.  
<sup>6</sup> "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.  
<sup>7</sup> "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.  
<sup>8</sup> "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.  
<sup>9</sup> "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.  
<sup>10</sup> "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
<sup>11</sup> "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

### **This Week:**

We have been following the Sermon Series called 'Life in the Vine.' This series is based on the theme for the 2021 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity based on the words of Jesus found in John 15:1-17 where Jesus refers to himself as the Vine and his disciples as the branches meant to bear fruit to bring glory to the Father. Jesus gave the picture of the Vine to describe his life with his disciples and their lives in relation to each other. In this series we looked at the aspects of God through Christ calling us into relationship and to welcome others into relationship with us; to mature and grow in this relationship in Christ by seeking to be united with those who belong to Christ; to allow the very essence of this relationship, which is God's sacrificial and unconditional love, to be received from Jesus and to be responded to by loving him and obeying his new commandment of loving others the way he has loved us; and to use that which is foundational to this relationship, prayer, to truly commune with God and to pray for others, especially those who belong to Christ, and for Christian unity. On the fifth Sunday in this Series we look at Jesus' word to those who are his true disciples on who they are in God's eyes and how being transformed within they are agents of transformation for God's Kingdom in the world. Jesus said, "You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you" (Jn. 15:3).

Perhaps the greatest words to have ever fallen from any human lips are the words of Jesus spoken in the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew's Gospel, chapters 5 through 7, and the first part of this Sermon is known as the Beatitudes or as Billy Graham, the renowned evangelist put it, the 'Beautiful Attitudes.' But more than these being beautiful attitudes that Jesus' disciples ought to have in their lives, these that were mentioned by Jesus are his prophetic word to his authentic

disciples as pointers to who they are and on how God sees them as 'blessed' because they belong to God's Kingdom living with Kingdom values rather than belonging to this world and living with world values. Even as Jesus was ministering in Galilee, crowds of people came to him, believing him to be the Messiah of God bringing God's reign into the world and they followed him to hear him proclaim the message and demonstrate the power of the Kingdom of God through teaching, preaching, and healing. Seeing the crowds following him, Jesus, in the tradition and authority of the prophets of the past pronounced his prophetic and paradoxical word of blessing on those in the crowd who would be his true disciples and he said that they were the ones who belonged to God's Kingdom, had God's reign on their lives and would find deep contentment and satisfaction. They would not be merely happy because happiness depended on happy happenings and circumstances in one's lives and they would not be those considered to be successful by the standards of the world but in God's eternal perspective they are the ones truly blessed. Luke's Gospel has a shorter version of the Beatitudes (Lk. 6:20-23) and clearly mentions Jesus pointing out to those in the crowd to be 'blessed' as he recorded, "Blessed are you..."

But who are the 'blessed' ones that Jesus referred to? Jesus gave eight pointers to who his authentic disciples are and mentioned that these are what God values and will finally reward in eternity. These are completely opposite to what the world values and in the present time it may seem that what the world values will last forever but it would be totally reversed at the end of time and in eternity. So Jesus pointed out that his true disciples are those in the present time who realize their spiritual helplessness and need for the Savior which is already fulfilled through him as he brings God's Kingdom to them with his coming. The realization of spiritual helplessness leads to sorrowing for their sins and the sins of the world, as a result they humble themselves before God and others, leading to deeply desiring to be made right with God and for the world to be made right with God and each other in justice and peace. These disciples in the age to come will be comforted, shall have the blessings of the earth, and will be satisfied. Further, these attitudes within bring about the character lived out of being merciful toward others, having pure motives and intentions in heart, and sharing God's peace with others and in so doing in the age to come would themselves find mercy from God, they would meet with God, and would be those who belong to God. Jesus then mentioned that the his true disciples living by Kingdom values would find the world with its own values hostile to them and therefore they would face persecution in different ways. But this too in God's eyes is to be blessed as they are already belonging to God's Kingdom come through him. Jesus' true disciples facing spiritual and social conflict due to putting faith in him and seeking to follow him in the world can be

exceedingly glad in their hearts because they live in the tradition of the true prophets who faced the same and their reward in the end will be great.

Jesus gave his prophetic and paradoxical word of blessing to his authentic disciples and by that declared that they are transformed people of God's Kingdom and they are called to be agents of transformation for God's Kingdom in the world.

**Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:**

1. How would you define one to be 'blessed'? As Jesus gave eight pointers that described his true disciples, how would you describe the opposite of each of them?
2. Is Jesus describing who his followers are or prescribing what they must do? What do you think and why? How does this explain the nature of the Kingdom of Heaven/God?
3. How does Jesus' prophetic declaration that we are already transformed make a difference for us to be agents of transformation?

**Activity for the Life of a Disciple:**

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: Matthew 5:3 NRSV  
3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
3. Prayerfully approach God in asking to realize more your spiritual helplessness and need for Jesus as your Savior and Lord and to grow from there with the remaining attitudes/qualities that Jesus gave in the Beatitudes.