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Bush Hill Presbyterian Church  
Alexandria, VA 22310  
Sunday, January 30, 2011

Micah 6:1–8  
Matthew 5:1–12

## FAITH ENGAGING LIFE

There's an old story about a Special Forces unit that goes to a forward location. After arriving, the sergeant in charge and a colonel are there. They post a guard, and then they pitch their tent and lie down for some much needed rest. After a few hours, they both are awake and gazing at the sky—they are amazed at the number of stars. Sergeant asked the colonel, "What do you see when you look into the heaven?" Colonel said, "I see a milky galaxy and galaxies beyond that and millions and millions of planets. If I look close, I see that Saturn is in Leo. If I take note of the time, I notice from the stars that it's about a quarter past three. If I think theologically, I think about how powerful God is and how seemingly insignificant we are. If I think meteorologically, I know that tomorrow is going to be a beautiful day. We have a clear night." Then the colonel asked the sergeant, "When you look into the stars, what do you see?" The sergeant says, "I see that someone has stolen our tent." The obvious, right?

The obvious is here—what we sang in the beatitudes. If we walk back through our scripture readings for today, "... to do justice, to love mercy, to simply walk in humility ...." All these words of guidance—words that are commonplace—are obvious. Do not reproach your neighbor. Were you touched and reminded of the character of our faith when we read the words, "Keep your oath; stand by your oath even if it means your own hurt." Each of the words of the beatitudes say: *Be a source of healing in your world. For your world is hurting.* It's so obvious and yet when we think back about what we have learned about the beatitudes, most of us thought they were for a future time more than they were for the present. That somehow God would set right all the injustices in this life in the life that is to come. We thought that God would kind of clean up after us mentally. Or worse, God would clean up after us morally.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. The beatitudes begin and end with "here-and-now" kingdom principles, similar to "don't eat candy in your tent." It's important for us to remember there is proper conduct within the kingdom. God is promising to be present with us every time we are there: facing down poverty, abiding with those who are grieving, hungering for righteousness for those who have been wrong; surrendering our own appetites, our thirsts, for this world's wonderful rewards and longing instead for God's presence, desiring to participate in meekness and mercy and purity, in peace.

That's when our lives changed forever, when life takes on a radically new meaning. Now, to be sure, this change is risky. It's a dangerous change of direction. We even will find that we want to risk being wounded ourselves where we see in the wounds of the cross our healings, that a cycle surrounds us and we know that we too are called to risk everything on behalf of those whom God loves. We learned this early on when we were

so proud if we ever saw one of our children practicing the lessons, when we told our children just because one of the other classmates is different is no reason for them to reject these classmates. Could we have been any prouder if we had seen one of our children go up to the outcast on the school playground and show them kindness? And yet, we seem to have so much trouble learning that lesson ourselves.

We normally think of surrendering our will as the opposite of being strong. The lesson that we didn't read today says that when we are surrendered to God, we are our strongest. At the conclusion of this nation's horrible civil war, Lee was quoted as saying that he surrendered as much to Lincoln's goodness as he did to the might of Grant's army. When we surrender to God's goodness, a new control takes over in our lives. Fear no longer dictates our behavior. We step out in faith and we risk being where God already abides—where God is tangible. We can teach our children the simple lessons of the playground, but still we don't seem to get it. The greatest reward—the most amazing blessing—is there for us if we are willing to go where God receives us, into God's presence rather than asking God to come into ours. And all we have to do is spend time with those who are vulnerable. It's a kingdom principle. When we who are at risk are experiencing this, we will discover we are accompanied by God.

It's a kingdom principle—that faith always engages life at those points when our passion is greeted by those around us who are hurting, who are in need. It's a kingdom principle, and it's life-saving, even in its simplicity. May we not only sing these words, may we live them. May they guide us this week, as always. Amen.