

“Life Attitudes-Face the Pain”- Matthew 5:4, Philippians 3:1-10

It doesn't matter what you have accomplished in life, or how long it has been, but going back to a high school reunion can start up feelings of pain that we felt as sixteen and seventeen year old teenagers all over again. The problem with many high school reunions is that all those people remember the small, early part of our lives very few of them do not know anything about us after high school, nor do they really care. For that reason have only gone to one high school reunion since I graduated from high school in 1970.

I went to my 10 year high school reunion in 1980. I can remember showing up to a picnic in the park in Staunton and immediately felt like it was 1970 all over again. There was the “in” crowd and I wonder if any of them would speak to me or ask me about my life now in 1980. I remember the pain at that reunion of being ignored or feeling left out. I can still picture the separate crowds at the reunion: The “haves” and the “have-nots”: The in crowd and the out crowd. I can also remember that neither group spoke to the other. I never went back to another reunion. We all feel pain and hurt at times in our lives. Some of course much deeper than this.

We are in the second sermon of a series of sermons on the Beatitudes. The first was, “Blessed or joyful are those poor in spirit for they will inherit the kingdom of God.” We have to identify with our humble ness and our need to rely on God totally. Our second beatitude this morning reads, “Blessed or joyful are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”

I have a confession to make this morning. I am a huge Hugh Grant movie fan. I probably own 10 of his movies. You know, “Notting Hill”, “Nine Months”, and Bridgett Jones’ Diary just to name a few. He is a bumbling sort of fellow who everything seems to work out right in the end. He and I are somewhat alike. Although I am not as suave as he is. In the popular film, “Four Weddings and a Funeral”, the character that Hugh Grant plays and the character friends together go to four weddings and the funeral of one of the friends. At the funeral one of the friends speaks using W.H. Auden’s moving words to suggest at times of grief; we “stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone and gather at the casket. This says a

lot of the way we often mourn. We feel those who mourn. We avert our gaze, dash off a note, send a spray of flowers. We may offer a prayer and say a few words we hope will bring comfort. We hope the mourners “feel better” soon. We as quick as possible get back to life filled with the business of life with its ups and downs with weddings and hilarity.

In Jesus time mourning was not rushed or hushed. Mourners would tear the clothes off their backs. They would scream out in agony, scoop up dirt place it on the top of their heads. Friends would gather and they would linger over their grief at least a week in intense fashion. In this setting then what did Jesus mean when said, “Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted”? We want to quickly put away the veil of mourning returning to the happy life as they did in Four Weddings and a Funeral. To mourn means to care deeply for our pain but also the pain of others. To mourn with someone means we listen, we stick with someone, we hear their story, and we bear their tears. We allow people to not have to hurry up and feel better after a death or a disaster. To mourn means we allow people to not banish the hurt. If a person is worth loving they are worth grieving over.

To mourn means to feel godly sorrow for sin. If we read and study the lives of spiritual giants, we find men and women who contemplate their sins and shed tears of grief. Jesus is saying be open to the wounds of the world. Mourn humanity’s mourning, weep over humanity’s weeping. Be wounded by humanity’s wounds. How often do we watch the news and feel the hurts and trauma felt by people across the word that are hurt by terrorists, natural disasters, domestic violence, murders? Do we mourn for the sin of humanity that causes much of the pain in the world?

Blessed are those who face and embrace their pain. All of us through the process of growing up fall into the illusion that life need to be perfect. Even as grown adults, we often say, “Life is supposed to be fair.” How often have we said to children and even grandchildren, “Life is not fair”. As small children we have a soft spot and open hearts and are protected by our parents from the cold cruel world. Then we are confronted by the reality of a broken world. The first time I

felt this was at the age of 10. For the first time I saw a violently drunk soldier in the lobby of a small hotel in Bangkok Thailand. I can still hear the extremely explicit language and see his buddies holding him back from tearing off the head of another soldier. It was very violent. Life for me at that point became very real and very scary. That picture stayed with me even today.

How many of us can go back and identify an early experience of being excluded from a group? Or the first time we were bullied and made fun of as a kid? I can remember vividly in the seventh grade. I hated the seventh grade. I can remember in the spring of that year in P.E. we had to participate in track and field. I was 4'9" tall. The P.E. teacher announced that we were going to have a track meet. I thought, "I hope all I have to do is run the 50 yard dash." The P.E. teacher said to me however, "Phillips, you are going to do the low hurdles." I said to myself, "Are you kidding me." I didn't say anything to him for two reasons. He would make fun of me. 2. He had a paddle and was not afraid to use it. The hurdles were as tall as I was. I was a nervous wreck the day of the meet. I knew I could never jump over that hurdle. So when the time came for me to do my event, I ran up to the hurdle but instead of trying to jump over it which I knew I could not do, I ran up and then ran around it and kept on going. When the meet was over the P.E. coach made fun of me in front of the class and the kids were merciless in their teasing me and calling me shorty. It was painful. It stayed with me for years. Even to this day I cannot watch any movies or TV where there is bullying of any kind going on. Many of us experienced other painful times as children: divorce, alcoholism, desertion, and other physical problems we were made fun of. The list goes on.

Jesus talks about, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are those who think their lives have to be perfect to have a relationship with God, but instead they experience grace. I did not experience grace that day on the track field in the seventh grade. Since then I have experienced God's grace in numerous ways and through his grace have recovered from the pain of childhood. Blessed are those who want a quick fix for their pain, but instead need the transforming process that Jesus offers them.

“Blessed are those who mourn. “ The mourners are those who have caught a glimpse of God’s new day, who cry out for the relief of pain and hurt. They will be comforted. When we mourn God mourns also. We long to be comforted. We long for the pain to go away. Jesus offers himself through the Holy Spirit. In our pain God can transform us. In the Philippian chapter Paul prayed to know Christ fully. Not just intellectually, but relationally. This means a personal relationship with Jesus in our pain; and a relationship with each other to get through our pain. Jesus says, when we mourn we feel our own pain, but we feel the pain of others who hurt. Be open to the wounds of the world. Mourn humanity’s mourning, weep over humanity’s mourning. This second beatitude means we face our pain with God’s help and we can share in the pain of others. We can’t control the pain that comes in our lives but we can walk with each other and with God in it.