

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you O God, my strength and my joy...Amen.

In Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie's devotional book, *Good Enough 40ish devotionals for a life of imperfection*, they have a devotional entitled hashtag blessed...

They state, "We don't live in a culture of blessing. We live in a culture of #Blessed... Christmas card professional photoshoot where everyone is looking directly at the camera wearing matching tops? #Blessed.

As Christians, we cross-stich our blessings on pillows, hand-letter them in whimsical fonts, and tattoo them on our bodies, forgetting, perhaps, that Jesus turned the idea of what makes us blessed upside down.

His blessings should leave some people wide-eyed, and others with tears of relief streaming down their cheeks.

Jesus says, blessed are you when you are at the end of your rope. When you are exhausted and despairing. When tears are your food, morning and night. When your stomach grumbles and your mouth is dry...

You who are ridiculed and humiliated, left out and left behind. The timid and the soft-spoken. The one who works toward peace instead of the easy road of vengeance.

So much of how we interpret these blessings depends on where we are sitting when we hear them.

Maybe we are like the respected and applauded religious leaders in Jesus's time... We say and do the right things.

Our righteousness is on full display on Instagram. Our chest puffs with pride at how well life has worked out—our beautiful family, our comfortable bank account, our healthy body.

These beatitudes should make us uncomfortable. Because God is celebrating who we try so hard not to be. Dependent. Needy. Desperate.

Jesus was looking into the eyes of those who felt like the misfits. And then used the everyday experiences of weeping, hungering, thirsting, suffering as a badge of belonging.¹

Now, I have to wonder, what it must have felt like for those in the crowd to hear these words from Jesus, to be given the gift of blessing, when they were not accustomed to such gifts.

But I also have to wonder what the elite or those who lived comfortable lives thought when they heard this?

And while I was pondering the devotional on #blessed and preparing for the service today, I was continually nudged by the Holy Spirit to look again at the passage from Micah...

I was struck how the gospel was both complementary and also in opposition with the passage from Micah.

As the passage from Micah is all about what we are to do while we live our lives... Namely, that we do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.

Which almost seems to juxtapose the gospel reading... Because Jesus blesses all the people who are in situations who have not experienced justice or kindness...

And ironically, the people that Jesus is talking to, are the people who walk humbly with God...

Showing that when we walk humbly with God, we can cultivate a culture of blessing...

Because when you walk humbly with God, you will naturally do justice and love kindness...

¹ Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie *Good Enough 40ish devotionals for a life of imperfection*. Convergent Books, Penguin Random House LLC, New York, 2022. Page 123.

Which in turn brings about the kingdom of God on earth...

Which then brings us back to the gospel reading today...

As Jesus' blessings were rooted in the kingdom of God...

It was not that Jesus was trying to say that you need to be poor, hungry, outcast, or sad to get into the kingdom of God...

Instead, Jesus' words were meant to be a comfort for those who were enduring a difficult situation... To instill in them a sense of hope and grace.

Grace that will be poured out continually in the kingdom of God... In the form of blessings, love, and life everlasting...

Grace that we also need here on earth, while we walk humbly with God...

Because nobody can be humble all of the time... And nobody can act with pure justice and kindness all of the time either...

And so, we need God's grace to fill those spaces...

Grace that comes from Jesus' words today in the form of a blessing...

Blessing the difficult situations in life...

And maybe Jesus blesses those who experience these circumstances—not to have people seek them out—but to remind everyone that even in the darkest and hardest moments of life...

That God is there... That there is grace... And that no matter what, you are blessed... blessed in God's love.

Because God works in the midst of difficult situations... God is present even when you cannot feel God's presence...

And even though it may seem counterintuitive, bringing blessings to those hard moments, it is in those moments that we often need to be reminded... that you are blessed and the kingdom of God is yours...

A kingdom that Micah challenges us to usher in every day... By putting our trust in God, so that we can do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God...

Now I know that the word justice, can come across as politically charged and can bring up a range of emotions for different people...

But the version of justice that I often think about, comes from Cornel West... Who said, "justice is what love looks like in public" ...

And when we hold that definition of justice in our hearts and in our actions, then we have a real chance of ushering in the kingdom of God...

A place where life will be turned upside down from what we are used to...

As Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie state...

"The world looks a bit strange here, upside down. But maybe it's how it's supposed to be: our feet rooted in heaven.²" Amen...

² Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie *Good Enough 40ish devotionals for a life of imperfection*. Convergent Books, Penguin Random House LLC, New York, 2022. Page 124.