

Reg Reynolds, Hope
Reading: Matthew 5:1-16

March 27, 2016

Praise God that we've been given such a beautiful day to assemble and to hear parts of his word presented to us, this message that Jesus delivered on a mountaintop so many hundreds and hundreds of years ago. What a wonderful collection of things that was that he delivered to those people, and we will get around to that in just a little bit. Dan, thank you for that reading; Nancy, thank you for putting the verse on the bulletin.

Our journey today begins in a garden. One of my customers on 67th St., in Mission Hills I guess it is, just east of Metcalf, has a neighbor right across the street. There's a big sign in the front yard that says: The garden is open. All are welcome to come and enjoy. I've never taken the time and shame on me. I love gardens. To stop and just walk around the back of her house and see what she has put together back there--that is so neat that she invites folks to stop and just take a breath and enjoy for a moment. I'll do that one of these days, but our journey begins in a garden. The Bible tells us that it was placed in Eden. Depending on how you reckon time, and it doesn't probably matter much at all-- 6000,7000, 8000 years ago-- I don't know, a long time--God created a couple, Adam and Eve. We're familiar with the story and most of the stories that I'm going to go through on the way to a point that I'm going to try and make this morning. One verse in Genesis 3, 3:8 and this verse catches my attention every time I think about this particular passage. This talks about the sound of God walking in this garden in the breeze. What a neat place that Adam and Eve were placed-- to be surrounded by this beauty! They had a certain amount of tilling and some pruning, and I don't know what exactly they did, but I can't imagine it was anything too bad, because that came later as a punishment. To be able to be surrounded by the beauty of this place and to hear God, the sounds of God walking through this garden and then to think of what they did one day, to get up and to transgress one of the simple laws of God had given them--don't eat anything off this tree. Well as man will do more times than not, it looked good, probably tasted good. Let's find out, and they did and they separated themselves and everyone after them from God. What a horrible thing to have happen and it was of their own doing. Romans 5:12 tells us: "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned." So the story in a garden that started out with so much promise, so much hope, and so much beauty, turns badly wrong because of eating a piece of fruit, and it separates millions and billions of people that come after that from God.

As we go through the Old Testament, we see peaks and valleys. Mankind/ society goes downhill until the time of Noah. We know this story to the point that God feels he has to just destroy what he has created to get rid of this blight, this blemish that just covers the earth with the exception of Noah and his immediate family, 8 people, and he starts over with these eight. He cleanses, he purges the sin from the earth and starts again and mankind has another hope. Can we do it right this time? Well, no, we don't and we see man spreading out across the globe again, and we go on down through time and some of Noah's descendents and we come to Abraham. Abraham we know was a very good man. He was very close to God. He was a man of faith. He followed God and God from

the very beginning before he had even created any of these things, had put together a plan. Now I'm not much of a planner-- anyone that knows me will probably attest to that. I like to kind of take it as it comes, and wing it and tweak if we need to or whatever else and that's not always the best way of doing it-- but God has put together a plan and when Abraham comes onto the scene, God talks to Abraham and makes a promise to him that his descendents are going to be as many as the stars in the sky, as many as the sands on the seashore. This is a bunch of descendents and out of them he's going to make a mighty nation, and they are going to have this wonderful hope. They're going to be a special people, a set apart people, and as long as they make God their king, things are going to go well for them. God will fight their battles for them. He will take care of them. He will cause them to prosper and things will be well. God loves his people, and he wants his people to love him in this relationship.

So Abraham goes through his life. He has children. We go down to Jacob and through Jacob of course we have the 12 sons. We have Joseph being sold into slavery because of largely jealousy on the part of his brothers. He ends up down in Egypt, and this seems to be a bad thing, and I try to place myself in the mind of Joseph and I don't do so well. But what must some days have gone through Joseph's mind to think what in the world has happened to me? why have I ended up where I ended up? I haven't done anything to deserve this in human thinking. Maybe he didn't think any of those things. I don't know. Maybe he could see the end of this and realize that this was God's plan. I do not know, but it was, and while down in Egypt, a severe famine took over the entire area and Abraham's descendents have to go down to Egypt to buy food or they're not going to survive this terrible seven-year famine. In the meantime God has placed Joseph in a position, and Joseph has done well, obeyed God, and prayed to God and served him as he could, and is in a position to alleviate the famine and the things it brings on his family when they come down into Egypt. We know this story; he prospers. He is lifted up to the second position in government in the land of Egypt. His family is all down there, 70 souls, and the book of Genesis ends in a really good place. Jacob is pronouncing blessings on his family, and one of the blessings is through the son Judah and his descendents, there's going to be someone that's going to give a law and it's never going to depart from the tribe or the family of Judah. It's going to bring great things to people who accept God, who will pay attention to what God wants to happen.

Sometime after Joseph dies, they stay down in Egypt and the family starts growing at a remarkable rate, thanks to the blessings and the providence of God. But Pharaoh comes on the scene. It says he doesn't know Joseph--that he didn't know anything about Joseph is maybe a little hard to believe, but he didn't respect where the Israelites were, and he could see a growing problem here that needed to be dealt with. So he made slaves out of this teeming multitude. Out of some of these people is born a man by the name of Moses and we know this story as well. He's brought up in the courts of Pharaoh, the royal household. Josephus says that Moses was in fact a military commander in southern Egypt in his youth. This is kind of neat to contemplate. Anyway, he's learned in two different languages. Undoubtedly, he knows the story of his people. He's brought up in the Egyptian hierarchy. He is aware of what's going on there. Moses becomes a very powerful man. When he's 40 years old, he goes out and sees an

Egyptian taskmaster beating on one of his fellow Hebrews, and he strikes the Egyptian and inadvertently kills him. He becomes a wanted man. We know the story of how he flees and ends up in another land for 40 years. He's married, has a couple of boys and things go well with them out there and he's enjoying this lifestyle I would presume there. God calls Moses to go back to the land of Egypt to get the people out of there who at this time now number probably between two and 3 million people, and they been praying to God to relieve them of this oppression. Moses goes back and we'll skip all of the details there. He confronts Pharaoh after the 10 plagues, the final being of course, the death of the firstborn. Pharaoh releases the slave people and they leave the land. He follows them three days later when he realizes what he is just lost, but they are all drowned in the Red Sea. The Hebrew people, the family of Abraham, crosses safely and begin their long trek for 40 years to the promised land which God made the promise of course, to Abraham a long time prior.

On the way they stop at a mountain called Sinai; we're not sure exactly which peak this is now --there are two or three different locations it might be, but up on top of the mountain, God speaks to Moses and gives him a law for his people to separate them from everyone else. There are a lot of sacrificial type things. It's going to be a very bloody law. I would not want to have lived under it if that's what it took to serve God to be saved. Of course you do, but it is not something that from my vantage point in 2016 appeals to me with all of the killing of animals and the smearing of blood and all of the things that are detailed in this law. But as part of this law, he gives what is referred to by us as the 10 Commandments. They are kind of a negative law in a way. Much as a parent would work with and teach a young child--Don't stick your head in the microwave and push on; don't place your hand on top of the stove when it is glowing red hot; don't run out in the street in front of a moving semi-- and we tell our children these things-- and they are negative because they are don't do this, I guess because we want them safe. We don't want them hurt. God gives these laws to his people because he wants them to grow up to be safe, to be in a good position. Thou shall have no other gods before me. Thou shall have no carved images. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God's name in vain. Remember the Sabbath day. Honor your father and mother. Then he goes back to the don't do this. Don't murder. Don't commit adultery. Don't steal. Don't bear false witness. Don't covet anything that belongs to your neighbor. And then among all of the other laws that God gives to his people, it's kind of a harsh type law if you will. It's very regimented and these people needed that. We're told I believe in the book of Galatians that these laws were given to God's people as a schoolmaster for us that we can sit here and we can watch this law play itself out over hundreds of years. We could understand why God gave this law to his people. We can see the blessings when it's followed; we can see the consequences when it is not followed, and he gets us up to another point in history that we will get to in a few moments before we start becoming involved. We're better people for God having given this to the Jewish nation.

So we get past this and the people were getting all this law down and they're serving God. They're making all these animal sacrifices and making messes all over the place with these deceased animals, and it comes time to go to the promised land, and Moses is not going to be allowed to enter. So he turns the reins of the nation that he had

governed and led for so many years over to his general, his assistant, however you choose to look at him, Joshua. Joshua was a wonderful man, and he leads this group of former Egyptian slaves into the promised land, into Canaan, the land God had promised to Abraham and to his descendents. We've seen peaks and valleys in the story so far. This is one of the peaks; they've got a brand-new start. They are a nation. Now they're not just a family in Egypt. They've grown into something large and wonderful to fulfill one of God's promises and they're in the promised land, and they start taking this land, city by city by city and driving out and annihilating some of the inhabitants. They don't get it all done, which causes great problems later on for themselves as they become enmeshed and surrounded too many times by evil influences. We go from this place down a slope-- in this nation, once so full of promise and hope with their entire existence ahead of them starts entering into not such a good point in their history.

After Joshua passed away, the land had no king, that everyone did what was right in their own eyes, and we can well imagine how that went over, people being people and kind of leaving God out of the equation what kind of terrible predicaments they got themselves in. This promised land that should've been such a wonderful existence had they just made God their king and obeyed him, they find themselves in a vicious cycle. Things are good for a short time as long as they obey God, but they start slipping away from God because they want something more. They want a physical, tangible king or leader of some kind to keep them straightened out, and they become involved with the gods of the nation surrounding and they start doing evil things. And God becomes displeased and God has to send other nations in to punish his nation to try and get their attention. Well, he gets their attention. They realize they're doing wrong. They pray to God. God delivers them in the form of 15 or 16 judges, depending on how you count them, and things will be well for a few more years then the judge will die. They've had 20, 30, or 40 years of peace, and they go through the cycle again over and over and over for a few hundred years. They still have a big chunk of their existence ahead of them, but sometimes a hopelessness seeps into the nation.

When the period of the judges is over, they decide they want a king like all the nations roundabout. We want to be like everybody else. God knows it isn't such a good idea. Samuel tries to convince them not to do it, but they get their first king, King Saul who is a failure by and large. The second king David of course is from the tribe of Judah going back to fulfill one of the promises and a blessing that was made in the book of Genesis, and for a period of 40, 50 years, the nation is blessed. David is a very good king. He makes some horrendous mistakes, but he is a man after God's own heart because he loves God only, and follows God as best he can, and his son Solomon starts out well. Solomon starts marrying women from surrounding nations for political reasons and ends up amassing an amazing number of wives and concubines and finds himself so enmeshed in idolatry and things that he creates a situation pretty much that they're never going to get rid of. They will have highs and lows in the nation of Judah when they split as Shane was showing us on his chart in class this morning. We see the highs and the lows at least on the side of Judah. Israel just goes further and further downhill with the succession of 19 bad kings. Judah itself finally gets to a point that they're beyond

repair, and the Babylonian Empire comes in and destroys them and forces the people back to Babylon. The people at this time seem to kind of come to their senses. They no longer find idolatry; to this day, idolatry is never been a problem among the Jewish nation. They have many other problems along the way, but they start waiting for a Messiah that has been promised to them.

As we go through history, we have Nebuchadnezzar's dream that Daniel interprets. There is going to be the four world empires: Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome and we see bits and pieces of these stories in our Old Testament. We see how God's people interact with them. How sometimes there are good things that happened to them, how many more times there are things that are not so good because the people still aren't where they need to be. We go through a period of time between the Old and the New Testament--a couple of hundred years--we have a period of the Maccabees where they actually gain independence for several decades, but they still don't have their own king. World events kind of get quiet here for a while. The people are still worshiping God and serving God; they are still doing the sacrifices and all of the things that they've been doing since the time of Moses, but they know there's something coming for them. We understand that it's the Messiah. They're looking for may be more like a physical earthly king that can take over the nation and lead them back to where they had been under their highest point with David and Solomon.

We get about four BC-- and I'm real bad and trying to break myself of this and I'll interject this right now. Early on in the Old Testament, it's really easy to see the individuals in all of this. You have Abraham, you have Isaac, you have Jacob, you have Joseph-- you have the patriarchs and they're people. They get up in the morning. They live their lives. They do their sacrifices. They do whatever that particular day calls for. They're people just like us. We get into the kingdoms and it starts to, at least in my mind, become a kingdom and I have lost sight over the years and reading history that these were people. It was a large kingdom full of guys and ladies and kids, pets probably. I don't know but they were people and they would get up some mornings and they would have good days, but they would have really, really bad days. They were under Babylonian rule, or they were under the Greeks. At the time of Jesus, they were under the Romans and they hated this existence. They wanted something better. They wanted to be where God wanted them to be, but they couldn't get there on their own.

Now I can pose a question this morning as to how many here have gotten up in the morning and been just depressed and had rotten days because you weren't where you really wanted and needed to be. I would guess that there would be several hands go up-- that sometimes life just isn't what we really wanted out of life. Whether it's our own fault or whether things have just worked out a certain way or whatever, but we're people just like the Jews were people and I've got to remind myself of that to keep it on that level. In 4 BC a little baby is born. According to the writings of Isaiah, he wasn't maybe the cutest baby that ever came down the pipe, maybe not nearly as cute as some of the babies and young people that we have in our group this morning. There are some dolls out there, but this little baby is born and he's a special little guy. I don't know what his parents knew. Mary had an inkling from hearing the message from God that there was

something about him that he was going to grow up to be a really special man. And we know how this story came along and turned out. Thirty years later or so, Jesus has grown up. He's worked undoubtedly with his father as a carpenter and he's done some of these manual things, and it says that he grew up in grace and favor with anyone that knew him. He was a good young man, a fine person.

One day a crowd gathers on top of a mountain. They've been hearing stories of this teacher, this preacher that has gone about teaching really interesting things, performing miracles. He has healed the sick, he's helped the blind to see. Those that haven't been able to walk, he has healed them. And people have gotten up and walked in one or more cases carrying their bed with them down the street. These things were irrefutable. It had been seen by hundreds and hundreds and heard by hundreds and hundreds. This man is amazing and we want to hear him. We know the law of Moses. (I'm interjecting myself into their heads, which maybe I shouldn't do.) We know the law of Moses. We've been doing all of the sacrifices. We know that someone of promise is supposed to be here. Could this be that man? They gather on this mountain top, and I don't know what circumstances lead this multitude up there to this one place. Maybe they knew Jesus was coming to the area and that he likes to go up on mountain tops. I don't know, but they gathered there. Sure enough, here comes this teacher and he goes up to the top of this mountain and begins to teach. I don't know if it was quiet or not. A large multitude tends to make some noise, but in the back of my mind, I'm going to speculate that maybe it grew quiet. They wanted to hear what this teacher had to say. They've heard all of the stories and all the wonderful things that he has done. What is he going to tell us? I'm not having a good life. I'm living under Roman dominion. I don't like where I am; things are not really good. I'm separated in a sense from God. I need hope. I need something good to come to my life, to come to me.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." You can hear pins being dropped on the side of this hill. What? I'm not hearing" thou shalt not." I'm not hearing don't do this or the wrath of God is going to fall on you. They'd seen that over centuries. "Blessed are the poor in spirit" and can you imagine how that got the attention of that multitude, many or most of whom were poor in spirit? I'm relatively comfortable in saying that the people who gathered on this mountain were not necessarily the religious leaders or the movers and shakers of the Judean society at this particular time. These were people that needed hope, that needed an injection of something good into their lives to make them feel good about where they were.

"Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted." Is there anyone in this auditorium this morning that has never been poor in spirit? Is there anyone here who has never mourned? Been sad? Every eye in this building has shed tears at some time or another. I'm perfectly confident saying that. This message was to the Jews in Roman days, and it's to us today. "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth"-- not necessarily the loud ones, who like to attract attention to themselves and create waves and try and dominate through power--but the meek, the quiet. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, they'll be filled." If there is a void in your life, this teacher is telling you that he has what will fill that void. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." The converse of this has to be true as well-- that if you're not

merciful, you shall not obtain mercy. Later teachings of Jesus pointed that out. If you want to obtain mercy, you show mercy. If you want to obtain whatever it is--love, grace, compassion, you show those things and allow God to be able to give them back to you. "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers"-- for those that go around not trying to create strife and stir things up just for entertainment's sake, but those who go about trying to foster peace, to bring people together, to calm and quiet things down so we can all play together like nice kids, and we can accomplish things because we're all unified and working together in a peaceful fashion. "Blessed are those that are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Who here as a Christian has not felt persecuted on some level? That's bad-- you feel bad in a way, but there's a blessing behind that. Verse 11 of Matthew five talks about being reviled and persecuted, people saying all kinds of evil things against. We're told me to rejoice and be exceeding glad for great is the reward we're going to have in heaven.

We've come through--Abraham was 2000 BC-ish round number , and we're up to around 26 AD, give or take. We've come through a little over 2000 years. There have been some good ups-- there have been a lot of downs for God's people. They were in a place at this time in their history and in their personal lives as people that they needed a message of hope and they got it! Jesus delivered a message here the likes of which maybe had never been heard before. Romans 15:4: "Whatsoever things were written before were written for our learning that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. " I don't know of course where anyone here this morning is in their lives. Hopefully we pray things have been wonderful. I'm guessing that there have been days that have been less than wonderful. Maybe today you're not in a good place. But we've been given a message of hope by our Savior Jesus Christ. So many hundreds of years ago we saw the Israelites fight through so much or all of their history, yearning for something more than what they had.

We began our journey this morning in a garden in Eden where man did something wrong, transgressed the law of God, and found himself separated from God, and that brought about in this whole history of ups and downs and punishments in good things and more bad things than good to the point of Jesus's message on this mountainside. We're going to end our journey now this morning in another garden, a garden by the name of Gethsemane where Jesus goes to pray, spend the last few moments with his dear friends, his disciples who spent roughly 3 1/2 years with him, watching him, listening to him, absorbing all of these lessons and the hope that he was giving to everyone he came in contact with, and the hope that he's offering something now that will allow us to be reunited with God. So much separation over the centuries, and if we will but avail ourselves of the message that Christ brings to us, we can have hope in this life. Romans the eighth chapter , I'll read one last passage. And I hope I've been able to convey a message of hope this morning regardless of where you are. Romans 8:31 "What shall we say then to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?" The Israel nation saw this time and time and time again, that as long as they were with God and God was with them, no one could stand against God, and that nation. Verse 35 through the end of the chapter: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall

tribulation, or distress, or persecution or famine or nakedness, or peril or sword? Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Reunited with God! What a message that is that Jesus gave to those folks on the side of the mountain there, and that we are allowed to read and think about here this morning. I'll leave these thoughts with you. Wherever you are in life, there's hope. We can be united with God through this life and into the next or we can spend an eternity with our Father, with our Creator. The bad things gone away, and in that time it's all wonderful to be forever in the presence of our Father. Leave here full of hope. If I've spent however many minutes just remember that--leave here this morning, full of hope. We are so blessed. If there is anyone here this morning that we can help in any fashion, would you please come forward as we stand and sing?