

FOLLOWERS OF THE WAY: "Be Merciful." – August 21, 2016
By Wayne J. Schneider – Soli Deo Gloria

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St. Matthew 5:4

The comedian Seinfeld says, "*According to most studies, people's number one fear is public speaking. Number two is death. Death is number two. Does that sound right? This means you are better off in the casket than doing the eulogy!*"

My dad died twenty-five years ago and yet my eyes still fill when I think of him. Grief hurts, and it sometimes seems as if it is endless. Our God has no beginning or ending, and that is such a relief. Jesus completes his beatitude on mercy with the promise that "Those who mourn will be comforted."

The black church has always had a better understanding of death and mourning than the white church. The poet James Weldon Johnson captured how sister Caroline died, and God ordered Thanatos (death) to bring her to him. The poet explains how God smoothed *'the furrows from her face,'* while rocking her in his arms. Finally, the angels sing, *'Weep not, weep not, she is not dead; she is resting in the bosom of Jesus.'*

This is the type of death I think I would like, and I would hope that the people I leave behind would find comfort in the knowledge that I, too, am *'resting in the bosom of Jesus.'* But I don't believe that this is what Jesus was talking about when he spoke of this beatitude. This is what I think Jesus was talking about:

He was not talking about *'things'* or *'experiences'* that come naturally, like mourning a loss. He is expressing virtues we must choose and nurture, things that are difficult to accomplish, about the way we are to live our lives and build the Kingdom of God. These are the values by which we make our life choices, our decisions about how we are to live the life God has given us. All of this was a way to encourage us to have compassionate hearts for those who are suffering around us.

The definition of compassion is "*to suffer with those who suffer.*" When we do so this it is an affirmative action because it helps bring comfort to those who are mourning a loss, as well as bringing healing to the ill, and even goodness to society, because it treats all as equal.

This side of dementia, we never forget our loved ones who have died, because we know that other people have shared our grief and cried our tears.

It is in this weeping for others that we find blessing. It is this weeping that finds a sacred, valued place in the teaching of Jesus. It is not hard to visualize the events that break our hearts, make us angry, frustrated, or disgusted. These are reasonable responses. But they often affect us physiologically with elevated blood pressure, and sometimes with our noses elevated too.

It is only when we walk in another's shoes can we suffer or weep with another. Only then can we utter a word of healing, or can we act with compassion, love, and understanding. It is imperative that a Follower of the Way believe and accept the truth that everyone is created equally. And then to act upon it.

Perhaps it is by placing an offering during worship, or a pat on the back. Maybe it is a word of welcome to a visitor or a congratulatory hug, or lunch with someone facing a challenging decision.

Then, there was the homeless man who found employment in Washington, D.C., a job that paid eleven dollars an hour, but forced him to live under a bridge with a blanket, so that the few dollars enabled his grandchildren to attend school. One day a man started a conversation with the homeless man, discovered his situation, then took him home and gave him a bed and bed clothes, and a place to live in an out-building on his property. Finally, the homeless man had a home because someone saw him as his equal.

We never have to look far because those who weep for themselves are all around us. Their need is for someone to empathize with them, to cry with them, no matter what

the cause. It's not only personal; injustice and inequalities surround us caused by political and economic stupidities.

We all have a voice and a vote because we have all been created equal by God. And, all of us have been called by God to walk the way Jesus did. May it be so for us. Alleluia Amen.