

FOLLOWERS OF THE WAY: "What We Get." – October 9, 2016
By Wayne J. Schneider – Soli Deo Gloria.

FOLLOWERS OF THE WAY: "What We Get."
St. Matthew 5:10-12

Last Sunday we learned Jesus' clarified his concept of the Kingdom of God, like that of the world at peace. His parable is a blessing on everyone who makes peace a possibility.

There is something else here, something that Jesus was just as sure of, but may have been a bit reticent to explain. His reluctance might have been because his goal for the Kingdom was vastly different than the objective of the leaders of Israel. They saw freedom from Roman rule, and the end of taxation, as its purpose.

But, Jesus understood that the Kingdom of God would never be achieved by military might. The Kingdom would come only when 'Followers of the Way' practiced the values he was preaching. Jesus also appreciated that the religious and political leaders would never permit such unorthodox thinking to survive. They would have to find some way to end this threat.

Jesus also knew that if his disciples and those who followed him answered his call and joined him in his belief, they would be in danger too. There was a real possibility that if Jesus told these people about this threat, they might change their minds and stop following him. Should he take the risk? Conversely, If he gave no warning, they would feel the burn of his betrayal.

Jesus makes his choice and says, "***Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophet who were before you.***"

So, Jesus shares the truth with them as always, and lo and behold, he earned their respect. Today, 2000 years later, he tells us that if we make the same choice, if we decide to walk in Jesus' Way, we will likely experience some resistance from time to time. We might even be scorned or shunned by some who view our lifestyle as too 'soft' or simply wrong.

As Jesus sits there on the hillside, he shares not only the threat but also the blessing. Now, what could THAT be?

Two blessings, it appears. I mentioned last Sunday that noble art teaches us many things, especially religious art. I believe that all pure art is sacred. Awkward 'religious' art sometimes tries too hard and slips down into cheap sentiment.

On one occasion I discovered a painting of Jesus laughing. I found this piece wonderfully soothing. Perhaps, because I rarely think of Jesus laughing. Since my viewing of this piece, I now envision Jesus laughing many times, for example, as Peter and John told stories around the fire pit. I see the humanity of Jesus more clearly.

The second blessing 'Followers of the Way' receive is the gift of joy, peace of mind, and a trust in God that cannot be taken away.

But I believe there is a third gift, a third blessing. This gift is designed to reach into the depth of our soul, the place where, when we are alone and honest with ourselves, we know it is our deepest pain: our loneliness and our need of a genuine friend. I have such a friend.

MY friend knows everything about me, has been with me through the tragedies and the pain as well as the ecstasy. His unique methods show me how to see myself as I am. He accepts me exactly as I am, and it is that acceptance which motivates me to become what I was meant to be, to develop into the better me. My friend meets all the requirements of an authentic friend. He loves me without limit; when others turn away, he remains. When I cross the River Jordan, I want people to remember that I was his friend. My friend is Jesus Christ.

Does that sound arrogant? Do you think Pastor Wayne has given up rational objectivity for sloppy subjectivity? Before you answer that, check the Holy Scriptures. Could it be that 'friendship' is a magnificent expression of our relationship with God through Jesus, at his invitation? In St. John 15:15-16 Jesus says, "***No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave no longer knows what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things I have heard from my Father, I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask in my name he may give to you.***"

We must comprehend this friendship if we are to grasp the implications of this Beatitude. We often find ourselves in trouble because of personality eccentricities, insensitivity, or ego needs.

Being persecuted for righteousness' sake is something different. It is working with Jesus in the battle against evil in the world.

Sometimes, reading this Beatitude, we feel guilt for not being 'persecuted.' That would be misplaced guilt. Rather, tell God that you are ready and willing to follow, and live, as 'Followers of the Way' in every part of your personal and social life.

Here are seven, dynamic forces that, if you choose them, will change your life forever:

A total commitment to Jesus as your Savior and Lord.

Daily Bible reading and prayer.

Giving regularly.

Worshiping consistently and attending a Bible study.

Willing to share your faith.

Participation in a small group ministry.

Putting the Kingdom of God at work in the needs of society.

Trying to live the Beatitudes without my Friend is impossible. The greater our needs, the greater our friendship will grow. Let us grow together! Alleluia Amen.