

Parish Retreat 2017: Flourishing From the Inside Out

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[0 : 00] Chuck DeGroat, who has a background as a pastor and as a therapist and as a seminary professor, and he spent a lot of time thinking about and walking with people through the ideas that we've been considering this weekend around wholeheartedness. And so it's our delight to welcome him here to preach today. Thanks. Thank you. Can we pray together? Let's pray. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you see us. You see us in the midst of our hiddenness, and you know us. You see us in our shame, and you long for freedom within us. You see us this morning as we come, some of us full of joy and anticipating a word from you, and others of us full of doubt, having had conversations that perhaps bring things up that are uncomfortable, and wondering, is there a word for me?

Wherever you find us this morning, Lord, remind us of your profound love. Remind us that you pursue us, that you love us, that you died, and you were raised for us. In the name of Jesus. Amen. Well, once again, it's so good to be with you. This has been a good weekend, hasn't it? Have the conversations been good for you here and there after yesterday morning? I mean, I've talked to a number of you throughout the day yesterday and yesterday evening, and it just feels like there's something churning, and that's a really good thing, and I hope you leave with that, and the conversations continue. And I really like this crowd. Today's the feast day. Do you know what feast day is? Do we talk about feast days? Of course, you're Anglicans. You love your feast days. Today's the feast day of St. Teresa of Avila, the great 16th century reformer. And she once said, from silly devotions and sour-faced saints, Lord, deliver us. And I feel like I've been delivered. I'm with people who are joyful in the Lord, and they know that joy both in Christ and with one another. And so this has been a real blessing to me to be with you all. So thank you for that.

[2 : 19] I want to introduce very briefly the brother of the legendary Jane Olson, my friend Andy Bast here. Andy Bast and I are colleagues at Western Theological Seminary. Andy is kind of like, he's got so many talents that we don't know what to do with him. He's like a strategic initiatives leader, sort of envisioning the future, and he raises money for the seminary. He was recently involved in a worship project called Porter's Gate, a faith and vocation project. He wrote one of the songs on it. So he's a legend, and you have him here today. And so I'm really grateful to have my good friend and colleague here this morning. That's it. Anything else? Did I miss? No. This morning, I want to reflect on Matthew chapter 5 as a way of coming full circle to this conversation on wholeheartedness. Matthew 5, the Beatitudes, present a vision for flourishing in the world, a vision of the kingdom of God, as N.T. Wright says. And I believe that they sort of bring us to the conversation that we've been hovering in and around over the last 24, 36 hours. And that's, how do we move from a life of hiddenness to a life of wholeness? How do we move from a life of fragmentation to a life of wholeness, wholeheartedness? And I believe that there's a vision of this right here in these Beatitudes. I've spent a lot of time with the Beatitudes over the years. I used to teach on some of this stuff. I did a sermon series about 15 years ago on this, and I had an inkling that it was sort of moving in this direction, and I've been preaching in and around this. And then a few weeks ago at the seminary where I teach, a scholar named Jonathan Pennington came in. Jonathan just wrote a book called *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*. And so I was a little bit nervous with this guy coming in because I thought he could just sort of debunk everything that I've thought about the Sermon on the Mount. And so he came in, shared some time with us over lunch. There was a Q&A, and at one point he said, I believe that the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes in particular, are a vision of wholeheartedness. Like I almost jumped out of my seat, you know? And like, you got to imagine now, like eight-year-old Chuck is active at this point inside, like, notice me, notice me, you know? And he hasn't read the book or anything like that. And so then a

colleague of mine says, well, tell me what you mean by wholeheartedness. I'm not familiar with that language. And I'm like, dang it, you're my colleague, Han Luen. And so then I got up the courage to say, well, here's how I would understand it. It's the experience of our oneness and worthiness in Christ.

And Jonathan and I got talking, and there was such a symbiosis. Is that the right word? And it was really gratifying to know that I think some of the work that I've done is so rooted in a vision of flourishing that we see playing out in a way that you might not automatically see if you read the Beatitudes from 1 to 10, right? These are situated in a kind of series of chapters that recapitulate the Exodus story. And I don't want to go through all of that right now, but you probably remember King Herod, much like Pharaoh back in the day, anxious about this Messiah who's come along. King Herod, who orders all children, I believe, under two years old to be murdered, right? And Jesus' family takes him, and they flee to Egypt. Sound familiar? And out of Egypt, Jesus comes. He's baptized, in a sense, through the Red Sea, right? There's the imagery there. And then goes out into a wilderness where he spends 40 days and 40 nights. Does that sound familiar to you? Isn't it interesting how the Bible does stuff like this, and you're reading along, you don't even see it? It retells, it re-narrates the Exodus story. And then we get to this point of Jesus calling the disciples, and in a moment, what we're going to find is that Matthew 5 is this movement to a kind of new Sinai, a new law, a new vision of life together. But first, in Matthew chapter 4, Jesus calls these young disciples. Now, what you need to know about the disciples that you probably already know is that these are just teenage boys. These are teenagers. When we accept students into seminary, they're generally in their 20s. We end up doing psychological testing. We put them through the Enneagram. They're in groups. Like, I'm thinking, what are you doing, Jesus? No vetting process at all? [6 : 57] You know, and he calls these young men to himself, and he says, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. Can you imagine how they must have felt? Can you imagine what must have been stirring within them?

These young men who probably would not have left their father's trade. These young men who probably would never have left their father's town, now being called by Messiah, who we've been waiting for for literally hundreds of years. Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And then right on the heels of that, we read about the public ministry of Jesus, some of the biggest public ministry that Jesus does in Matthew 4, 23. Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness among all people. And so his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics, and he cured them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan. Can you imagine how these young men must have felt at this moment?

Walking alongside Messiah, Messiah who's healing and preaching and teaching with power. These young men who never thought they'd leave their hometown, let alone see people from exotic places like the Decapolis. And maybe I'm reading into the text, but I'm thinking about conversations that they might have been having with one another. And maybe with some folks who are coming along, like maybe some young women who had sort of strolled along, like, yeah, we're with them. Sooner or later here, we're going to get the Jesus juice, you know, we're going to have the powers. We're going to take on Rome.

We'll have our victory, but do you have a phone number? Like, can I look you up when I get back? You know, they're young men. That's the point. They're young men. And so Jesus then does something that no pastor has ever did before or since. It says in Matthew 5, 1, when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain. When he saw the crowds, like if Tommy saw the crowds, if I saw the crowds, if Dan saw the crowds, we'd run to the crowds. You know, that's what pastors do. But when Jesus sees the crowds, something's going on here. Maybe I need to take these young men, maybe this larger group of disciples who are following him at this point, and ascend up this hill and talk to them about the nature of the kingdom. What is this life of the kingdom? What is this life of flourishing?

What does this life of wholeheartedness really look like? And Jesus says to them, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs are the kingdom of God. Blessed are the poor in spirit. The patokos is the word, the poor. Blessed are the broken, you might say. Blessed are you when you've come to the end of yourself. Again, can you imagine what these young men must have been thinking?

[9 : 59] Are you talking about someone else? Blessed are the broken? You should be saying, blessed are the winners. We are the winners. We won the lottery. We're your disciples, and we're going to take on Rome together. Blessed are the broken? What are you talking about? It's sort of like, to my mind, the modern day equivalent of, accept Jesus and your life will go completely well. It'll all be good for you. But Jesus was suggesting something else. Sort of like where Bill Wilson, the founder of Alcoholics Anonymous started. That in a sense, wholeness begins with your experience of powerlessness.

Wholeness begins when you come to the end of yourselves. Yesterday, we talked about fragmentation, inner division, and finding our enoughness in all sorts of different things. Our achievements, our accomplishments, our relationships, our spirituality. But I think that what Jesus is saying is you've got to be broken of these things. You've got to be broken of these strategies, these things that you find yourself enough in. Blessed are the broken. Blessed are you when you come to the end of yourself. Okay, well now the disciples are thinking that's one doubt, but that's only one. Surely there are more beatitudes, and they've got to be a lot happier than that one. And then on the heels of that, Jesus says, blessed are the mourners, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the mourners?

Are you kidding me? Are you following this right now? Blessed are the mourners? We've been waiting hundreds of years to celebrate, and now we're being invited to mourn? What are you talking about?

The word here for mourning is a word that, well what it gets at is like taking all the gunk and yuck on the inside and bringing it outside into the light for God to see, so that the gunk, the junk, the pain, the brokenness can be healed. It's about opening up yourself. It's about revealing what's really going on in the inside. You see what's going on here? It's about wholeheartedness. It's about ending the inner divisions, the incongruency, the hiddenness. Take what you've hidden and bring it out into the open. In the Old Testament, this is called lament, right? This is called lament. It's about mourning.

[12 : 14] It's about grieving before the Lord. It's an invitation to a profound honesty before God. And they weren't living out of honesty. In fact, when I think about the four main Jewish groups during that time, they all had their own unique security strategies, you might call them, to deal with the ache of living in exile. The Sadducees with their political strategies, and the Pharisees with their moralism, and the Zealots who wanted to take up arms and march on Rome, and the Essenes who went out to the desert and just thought, well, let's just be morally pure. And into those movements, into those security strategies, Jesus says, no, come and mourn. Mourn the loss. Mourn the fact that you've been living out of these strategies, and there's a different way. There's a way of life. There's a way of flourishing offered to you. So he goes on, and he says, blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are the meek. Blessed are the meek? Like, shouldn't he be saying, blessed are the powerful? Don't we get that power that we just saw on display? Blessed are the meek? Now, oftentimes when people read this, they think meek sounds like weak, but that's not really what's going on here, actually.

Meek is actually a word that gets at, in that culture, in that time, a wild horse who's sort of chaotic and going in all sorts of different directions, being tamed, not losing its strength, but its strength being devoted in a singular direction. Does that make sense? You know, so blessed are the meek is blessed are those who've been broken of their chaotic strategies for getting their needs met, for finding life in all sorts of other places, and whose heart is moved in a particular kind of direction. It's a movement toward wholeheartedness, a single-heartedness in life. Blessed are those who hunger for righteousness, for they will be satisfied. Yesterday, we talked about scarcity and the way that we satisfy ourselves in the midst of scarcity. We try to be enough and do enough and consume enough and acquire enough. And into this, Jesus says, long more deeply. You've been satisfied for smaller things. I want you to be satisfied in bigger things. I mean, again, you can imagine these young men saying, Jesus, I thought that this would be the end of hunger. I thought this would be the end of thirst. I thought this would be the end of longing. And instead, Jesus says, no, you've been seeking the satisfaction of your longings in all sorts of smaller ways. Hunger more deeply for a righteousness and a justice that will come in a way that you could not have imagined. He goes on, blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the merciful? I thought we were going to be shown mercy. Like, it's our time to be shown mercy. You ever feel that in life? Like, I've

been, like, the bargain that we play with God. I've been doing it. I've been reading my devotions, Jesus calling every morning, you know. I've been going to church. I've been listening to Tommy's sermons, both on Sunday and online. You know, I tithe. Come on, it's my time to receive mercy. [15:29] But blessed are the merciful. What could he be talking about here? I think that when we move toward others with compassion, something happens. And the word here literally means sort of like a movement toward others that actually moves you in the process.

I had a friend in town, I think it was last week, maybe two weeks ago. His name is Paul Trudeau. He does justice and mercy work in San Francisco. Paul moved there in 2005, and he did the slow work of moving toward the Tenderloin District in San Francisco. Addicts, people in pain, people who are incarcerated now trying to find a life, oftentimes on the streets. And Paul did the slow, beautiful work of building relationships with these folks. And now there's a community center, and there's a hotel which provides a kind of halfway house for addicts, and opportunities for our students to go out there and do this kind of work alongside Paul. It's a beautiful thing. But the most memorable thing that Paul said to the seminary students that week is, he said, your lives must be shattered. For you to do the kind of work you want to do, your lives must be shattered. And he told his own story. He said, when I first started doing this, I felt pretty good about myself. The very first man I worked with recovered, he stopped drinking. He got sober. And I thought, I'm pretty good at this. You know, I got my master of divinity, but I'm also pretty good at doing this whole sobriety thing with people.

And then he gets a phone call one day, and the guy relapsed. And he died. And Paul's life was shattered. His sense of enoughness was shattered. Do you see what's going on here? There's a work that's being done. There's a process that's going on within us where God is stripping away everything that isn't Jesus to give us more and more and more of him so that we can live in oneness and worthiness in Christ. But we've got to confront these inner divisions. And that's what Jesus says next.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the pure in heart. And I think maybe the disciples, as they heard this one, they said, oh, good. Finally, one we can do. We know purity.

[17:40] Like we can do the right thing, you know. Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? He who has clean hands and a pure heart. We know how to do the right thing. We know how to clean ourselves up. We know how to make sacrifices. But really the word here, *katharos*, is blessed are those with an undivided heart.

They will see God. Blessed are those with an undivided heart. You can't see very well if your eyes are turned in a thousand different directions, right? If you're trying to keep your eye on the road, but if it's on your phone and on your radio and on your spouse, it's very hard to see the road, right? And so there's a singularity of vision that Matthew is getting at here, that Jesus is inviting us to hear.

Blessed are those with an undivided heart. And that scholar who was in town a couple of weeks ago said there are two words that trick people up in the Sermon on the Mount, *katharos* and *teleos*. *Katharos*, the word we're talking about right here, purity, and *teleos*, which is later on in Matthew 5, which is be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect. Have you heard that before and thought to yourselves, well, that's weird. Like, how do I do that? And he says both have been mistranslated. He says if you take both as you hear them, you think of this Christian life as a worthiness game, as a climbing up the ladder to

God, but rather *katharos*, blessed are you when your heart is undivided. And *teleos*, which actually is wholeness, be whole as your heavenly father is whole. Seventy years ago, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a letter and in it he translated it, be whole as your heavenly father is whole. This is not about climbing the ladder up to God. This is about being stripped of everything that is not Jesus, that is not saturated in Christ in your lives so that you can become more wholehearted. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are the peacemakers. And I think maybe when the disciples heard this, they said, okay, good, good, good. I like peace, but can we just like take down the Romans first and then do the peace thing? You know, like the preemptive strike, you know, I'm in Washington, D.C., so this language should be familiar to you. You know, let's just take down our enemies and then we can have peace. Or maybe for some of you, you hear this and it's like, ah, blessed are the peacekeepers. I'm an Enneagram 9. I love my peacefulness. You know, I'm going to sit in my Zen. No, that's not what's going on here. Blessed are the peacemakers, the ambassadors of Shalom.

These are people who don't go in, so just trying to make it better. These are not conflict-avoidant people. These are people who speak into pain. These are people who speak into sin. These are people who speak into idolatry. I'm thinking now as I'm standing here of Isaiah chapter 30 when Isaiah sends ambassadors back to Egypt, reversing the course of the Exodus, and the prophets are angry about it. And they go out and they say to these ambassadors that Hezekiah said, don't go back to Egypt? Don't. Don't go back there. That's not good. You revert. We're not trusting God in this.

And the response of the ambassadors was, prophesy illusions. Tell us what we want to hear. And that's so often how we respond, right? When ambassadors of Shalom come to, I don't want to hear that. Give me something that's more palpable, more easy to hear. I don't want to do the hard thing. [21 : 05] And yet if you notice the Beatitudes continually being pushed to do the inner work, to do the hard thing, and then finally, blessed are the persecuted for righteousness sake, for they will inherit the kingdom of God. You may die on this journey. That's the word here. You may die on this journey, but as one theologian says, you have the choice to die before you die. That's the invitation of the Beatitudes, to do this work in such a way that if and when the opportunity in this day, the opportunity of martyrdom was a real thing, if the opportunity comes, you won't be saying, no, no, no, no, no.

But you will say, I've died. I've died in Christ, and I'm ready to be raised in Christ. I can do this. Death has lost its sting. The Beatitudes, this picture of flourishing that requires us to do this inner work that breaks us of our old stuff and invites us to something new. It kind of reminds me, can I tell a story real quick? It kind of reminds me of the butterfly garden that we had when we lived in Florida. My daughters were young. We had a beautiful pool screened in porch, and then outside of the screen in porch, we had all these butterfly plants. And so we'd sort of watch, we'd sort of watch the action out there, and then we'd take a branch or something like that with a chrysalis on it. You know what a chrysalis is? And we sort of watched the process happen. There's not a whole lot to watch, right? But we knew that there was something going on in there. I did some studying on the butterfly sort of cycle. And do you realize that butterflies start out as worms or caterpillars, right? And that these are basically consuming creatures. They consume, and they consume, and they consume.

And I think that's kind of where we start out. You know, even sometimes when we come to church, we consume, we consume, we consume. Tommy, can you preach on this? Can we do this program? Can we have this thing? Can we read this book? We consume, and we consume, and we consume.

But then what I've learned about this, and there's a thing called leopardologists, I think is what they're called. People who study butterflies. That's right, right? Okay. I just sound intelligent saying it probably. But leopardologists who study the life cycle of butterflies, and they say at some point there's this like dormant imaginal cell that sparks within the life of the caterpillar.

[23 : 28] And it says something like this, you were made for something more. You were made for something more. But to get there, you're going to have to die. Ouch. And these imaginal cells multiply within the life of this caterpillar, and eventually the caterpillar realizes, no, I've got to go through the death cycle. So it weaves its chrysalis. And within that, there's something magical that happens, something transformational that happens. And then you know the rest of the story, right? You see this butterfly trying to break free, and you can imagine what's coming next, what my daughters tried to do, right? My daughters tried to help the butterfly get out of the chrysalis. You know, daddy, daddy, he's trying to push his way out. Can I get him out? You know, and they're trying to pull it away, and I'm like, no, no, no, no, no. But eventually, the sun is shining. Inevitably, later on one day, we walk outside, and we see this butterfly with its arms raised, free, and ready to fly. And what's extraordinary to me, and I'm going to end with this, is at the very end of Matthew chapter 5, we move immediately into, you are the salt of the earth. Verse 14, you are the light of the world. A city built on the hill cannot be hid. You see the purpose of this journey of wholeheartedness. It's a movement from the inside out, from brokenness to givenness for the sake of the world. I talked about this yesterday, the Eucharistic life, that our lives are no longer led by the liturgy of acquire, consume, digest, and be dissatisfied. That's the liturgy of the world that we live in. Acquire, acquire, acquire, consume, digest, and then we're just never, ever satisfied.

But instead, this table marks our life together. We're taken. Jesus calls his disciples. We're blessed. Become my followers. We're broken. You've got to go through this life cycle, this transformational

life cycle, where everything that is not Christ within you is purged so that you could live into Christ, so that your lives would be hidden with Christ and God, as we read from Colossians chapter 3, so that you can be given for the sake of the world, your light and your salt. And so that's why we come to the table this morning. As I said yesterday, oftentimes we come to the table with all of our baggage, right? And the invitation today is to, as you're coming to the table, be mindful, what is that baggage? What have been those strategies of enoughness that I've looked toward to appease, if that's the right word, the scarcity of my life, to make me feel just a little bit better, to dull the ache? What if I just left them behind, come to the table with hands open, believing that this is where Jesus meets me, saying, everything I have is yours.
In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.