

## Mourning is not a curse, but a blessing

Matthew 5:1-4

September 23, 2007

*When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he sat down, the people gathered around him and he began to teach them ...*

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them.  
Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*

Some of you are mourning ...

Some of you are mourning husbands. Your husband died just seven months ago, or seven years ago. You have lived alone, still mourning, five years or fifteen years or, some of you, longer even than that. But, however long it has been, the mourning continues, your grief doesn't go away. It changes as time goes on, but it doesn't go away or get any easier. In fact, my mother has told me that for her it gets harder, it gets harder in the third year and the fourth year and the fifth year. She has been mourning her husband, my father, for six years now.

As one who has not known that kind of grief, I wonder: how can that be? How can grief grow deeper and stronger with each passing year, each passing day? Maybe because at first you are bravely dealing with your bereavement, figuring out how to live, how to survive, in a state of existence and in a state of mind that is entirely new to you, trying to prove to the world, and to yourself, that you can still live, that you will survive, that your life does go on ... and it does.

But as time passes and you make the necessary adjustments, the stark fact of your loss, of his absence from your life, is stubbornly and unchangingly there in front of you. You want to think: I've done my grieving. I've suffered long enough. It's time for an end to it. It's time to this to be over. It's time to have him back. But it's not over, and your grief remains.

Some of you are mourning fathers, or mothers -- or both -- and your mourning is a complicated mix of feelings. There is regret -- for the things you didn't get a chance to say, and for the things you didn't get a chance to do. There is deep gratitude -- for the things you did get a chance to say and for the things that were said to you, and for all the wonderful times and places and experiences you did share together. But mostly, you just miss your dad. You just miss your mom. There is so much you still want to share with them, so much you wish you could still show them and tell them.

Some of you are mourning brothers or sisters or dear friends. And some of you -- Lord have mercy! -- some of you are mourning children.

To all of you who are mourning, Jesus says this: You are blessed! You are blessed. You will be comforted.

Jesus does not say in what way or in what form your comfort will come, but it will come. It will likely come in different ways, in different forms, to different people, but it will come. You will be comforted -- in some way -- but part of the comfort is the mourning itself. Mourning is not a curse, but a blessing.

If that seems unlikely to you, let me ask you this: Would you rather not be mourning? It is almost certainly true that you would rather your husband or your father or your sister or your friend had not died, but since they have died, would you rather not be mourning? In the shadow of death, mourning is a blessing. Mourning is a blessing because it is a measure and a reminder of how good it was.

But mourning is a blessing too because it is an unmistakable sign that love goes on, living proof that a relationship still exists. He is not forgotten! He is not absent from your heart! She is not lost to you! She is still a part of you. You have not stopped loving him. It is not finished.

It is not finished! There is more of the story to be told! And your mourning is part of the story. But even your mourning is not the end of the story. There is more still to come! You will be comforted!

Some of you are mourning your own failings, your own mistakes, your own sins. Yes, we are sinners -- all of us! We fail God, and each other, and ourselves. We are selfish and greedy and irritable. We are impatient and unkind and unforgiving. We are uncaring. We are unfaithful. We do not love our neighbors as we love ourselves, and we do not love God with all our heart and mind and strength.

And, for some of you, that brings you great sadness. To all of you who are mourning, Jesus says this: You are blessed! You are blessed, and you will be comforted.

Your comfort will come in the form of mercy and forgiveness. Your comfort will come in the form of grace, God's extraordinary grace, that empowers you day by day to grow and be changed and be transformed or re-formed into the creature, the God-imitating creature, God made you and calls you to be. But part of the comfort is the mourning itself. Mourning is not a curse, but a blessing.

If that seems very unlikely to you in this case, let me ask you again: Would you rather not be mourning? Would you rather be untroubled by your failings, ignorant of your mistakes, callously indifferent to your sins?

Mourning is the sign of a good conscience, good evidence of a soul that is not yet dead! Mourning drives our desire for change. Mourning drives our desire for God. Mourning for sin drives us to God ... and that is a good thing!

There is a useful religious term that we don't use much anymore, but means the same as mourning for sin. It is "contrition." *The sacrifice God wants*, the psalmist wrote, *is a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart*. When I am contrite, I don't just say a quick "sorry" and move on. I don't just make excuses for myself or tolerate hurtful behaviors. I grieve and grieve some more until I am changed.

A contrite heart, a broken heart, a mournful heart, is a blessing because it makes us ready to receive the love and mercy of God. Mourning is a blessing because it shows that your love for God, and your genuine love for yourself, is not extinguished. You are not happy until your comfort comes. But you will be comforted!

Some of you are mourning the victims of terrorism, the victims of war, the victims of torture, the victims of hunger and poverty, the victims of injustice and prejudice and hate. You see the world as it is and you grieve the world as it is. You grieve the suffering and the killing and the abuse and the neglect. You grieve leaders who will

not see and nations that will not listen. You grieve the envy and revenge that spread like cancer through whole communities of people, and you grieve the apathetic disregard of those that have for those that have not. You grieve children scouring garbage dumps, and children locked in the deadly vise of drug addiction, and children reckoned the unavoidable casualties of an unavoidable war.

To all of you who are mourning, Jesus says this: You are blessed! You are blessed, and you will be comforted!

You will be comforted because God is not dead! God is not asleep! God has not abandoned his people or his creation! You will be comforted because God is a God of mercy and justice, a God of shalom, a God who will make things right, a God who will make all things new! But part of the comfort is the mourning itself. Mourning is not a curse, but a blessing. I know you will believe me now!

Mourning is restlessness. It is protest. Mourning gives a voice to the voiceless and makes the rest of the world see those who suffer invisibly. Mourning is a blessing because it challenges the silence. It challenges the indifference.

You have heard the quote: *All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing.* We might equally say: All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good people to feel nothing and to say nothing. Mourning is a blessing because it challenges evil, because it feels and speaks the pain of the world. Mourning is a blessing because it sees what could be, it sees what should be, and grieves that it is not. As long as mourning continues, what should be and can be and will be will not be forgotten!

*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*

You will be comforted, but in the meantime, your mourning is a blessing.