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Title: Job Description

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Scripture: [Micah 6:1-8](#)

Text: [Matthew 5:1-12](#)

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In preparation for this sermon, I pulled my job description. I am indeed supposed to preach occasionally. So far today, I'm right in line with my assigned tasks. Recently, the Personnel Committee of Geist Christian Church reviewed everyone's job description to make sure it was in line with what we actually do. I pull my job description every year when it's time for my annual review. I want to make sure what I'm doing is what the board and congregation think I should be doing. My job description is pretty clear. First, there are what are called "essential functions" - develop pastoral relationships, preach in the absence of the senior minister, responsible for facility maintenance at the Mud Creek Campus (that really means that I am the chief toilet plunger), and - are you ready - other tasks assigned by the senior minister. To Randy's credit, he doesn't abuse that last one. I won't say he doesn't USE it but he doesn't ABUSE it either.

Following the "essential functions" is a category called "core competencies." There are a bunch - things like COMPASSION, TEAMWORK, INITIATIVE, ORGANIZATION and INTERPERSONAL SKILLS. I have other job descriptions that aren't quite as specific. None of the others are written down but they are job descriptions nonetheless. I have a job description with expectations for my role as a husband and a parent. There are expectations in how I relate to colleagues and friends. I'm on a couple of non-profit boards and those positions have expectations as well. All of us have a variety of roles in which we have a wide variety of expectations.

It only makes sense then that we have some expectations as Christians - roles and responsibilities - essential functions and core competencies - that defines us as Christians. In this season of Epiphany, we've been looking at the revelations that Jesus offers as he teaches and preaches around the Galilean countryside. Today, we come to the first sermon that Jesus preaches as told in the Gospel of Matthew. In Matthew, it's known as the Sermon on the Mount because of its location - on a mountain. In Luke, Jesus preaches an abbreviated version of the same sermon - we preachers do that occasionally only they are rarely abbreviated. There, in Luke, it is called the "Sermon on the Plain" because it happens on a "level place."

While the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew is best known because of the what we know as the Beatitudes in chapter five which we'll look at today, the

sermon itself actually extends for three chapters ending almost at the end of chapter seven. You won't find the word "beatitude" in scripture but we've defined these first 12 verses of this sermon as such in the centuries since because they fit the definition. The dictionary definition of "beatitude" is "supreme blessedness, exalted happiness, a state of utmost bliss."¹

At the end of chapter four, Matthew tells us that Jesus was "teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness". At the end of the ninth chapter, the same phrase is repeated. But this repetition is not a case of lazy writing. Rather, Matthew's summary statements are like bookends that help his readers know how to understand the chapters in between.

The Sermon on the Mount offers an example of the teaching mentioned in Matthew 4 and 9, and the miracles of chapters 8 and 9 give a glimpse into Jesus' healing ministry. The healing accounts there declare loudly that God's coming kingdom will have no brokenness, oppression, sadness, or loss. The Beatitudes are a proclamation of God's kingdom — of how things should and will be because it is already breaking into the world whether it looks like it to us or not.

Let's start with how each of the Beatitudes begins — "bless-ed." You may pronounce it "blessed" — either (either) is fine and it doesn't change the meaning. It's pretty popular right now to identify as being "blessed." Athletes use that language when they win a game — "I'm blessed." Celebrities use the language when they receive an award. "I'm blessed." We use that language when talking about our children or grandchildren or health or a good job that we have. "We're blessed." Almost always when we use the "blessed" language today, it refers to something good that has happened in our life — we rarely use the "blessed" language when tragedy strikes or health deteriorates or we have been downsized from our job.

We like feeling blessed. Even how we respond when someone sneezes encourages such language — "God bless you," we say. Blessing someone who sneezes dates back to the middle ages when there was fear of the plague.² Our blessing of others when sneezing — even the German "gesundheit" meaning "health" — wishes blessings on another when there is the fear of the unknown that may come upon us.

So, each of the beatitudes begins with "bless-ed" but as we read them we understand that there is a disconnect between the positive, earthly blessings that we associate with blessings and what Jesus is talking about. If we dig a little deeper we start to see how these beatitudes describe who we are called to be as Christians. Jesus is setting the tone for his teaching in this sermon

about what it will mean to follow him and it is different from the job description that you find in other parts of your life.

Each beatitude not only begins with "bless-ed" but "bless-ed are." In the Greek or Hebrew, there is no such word as "are" so the translators had to add it to try and make sense of the sentence. Jesus didn't speak in Greek; he spoke in Aramaic which is a type of Hebrew which was used in that time. There would have been a phrase that he and his listeners would be familiar with - "O the blessedness..." If you listen, there's a subtle difference in the meaning between "O the blessedness" and "blessed are."

This is important because the Beatitudes are not saying, "You'll be blessed *if you do this, or if you live like this*" but rather that this is the experience in the here and now of the Christian. This description is the essence of life in God's Kingdom, the joy of the Christian life here and now as well as in the hereafter. The Christian life is one full of blessing making it impossible for there to be such a thing as a miserable Christian!

Author and stay at home mom, Sarah Walton addresses this head-on with examples from her own life.

She describes hearing statements as I talked about earlier such as, "I am so blessed to have three healthy children!" or "I received the promotion that I've been waiting for...I feel so blessed!" or "We just bought the home of our dreams. We are incredibly blessed!" or "We are blessed to live in a country of such comfort, freedom, and opportunity, aren't we?" And then she asks the hard question - what happens when you don't feel so "blessed" in your current circumstances?

One of Sarah's children has multiple disorders that have often left their family devastated, broken, and uncertain about the future. Are they no longer considered blessed? Her husband lost half of his salary, forcing them to lose their home and all they had worked for. Are they no longer considered blessed? Sarah herself has battled multiple health issues for most of her life. Did she just happen to draw the short straw and miss out on the blessings that so many others seem to have been given?³

We do most often associate being blessed with positive circumstances, wealth, comfort, and the absence of problems – earthly blessings. Let me suggest that earthly blessings – those things that we understand as blessings and what Jesus would define as blessing are two very different things. So, what is this other understanding of blessing?

Oxford says it's "made holy, consecrated, endowed with divine favor and protection." The Greek definition comes from *makarios* which describes a believer being in an enviable position to receive God's provisions.⁴ I find it enlightening that even in the English dictionary, the primary definition of the term "blessing" is not wealth or comfort like we like to think of blessing, but rather "being made holy." Since we are made holy through the grace of God in Jesus Christ - the truest form of being blessed is to be made aware of our need for that grace and led to a profession that Jesus is our Lord and Savior. All other earthly blessings should greatly pale in comparison.

If we think that following Christ will guarantee us an earthly blessing - and there are plenty that preach a prosperity gospel - then we need to open the Bible and reread the Beatitudes. It won't take long to realize that Christ promised completely the opposite. We are promised that in this life of ours, we will encounter suffering, hardships, and disappointment as we strive to reach our earthly desires. If we do not reframe our thinking to view our circumstances through the eyes of the incredible blessings and assurances we have in Christ, we will quickly question God's goodness and love when earthly "blessings" seem to fall on everyone but us.

I am sometimes intrigued by the way the Message Bible reframes our language. Let me remind you of when Jesus says God's blessings come to you - first in the way I read it to begin the sermon and then from the Message, perhaps giving a new perspective. See if you can find blessing given a new, less earthly definition.

- O the blessedness if you are poor in spirit - at the end of your rope...
- If you mourn - if you feel you've lost what is most dear to you...
- If you are meek - you are content with just who you are - no more, no less...
- O the blessedness if you hunger and thirst for righteousness - when you've worked up a good appetite to know God...
- If you are merciful - if you care, then you find yourself being cared for...
- If you are pure in heart - when you get your inside right, you can see God outside...
- O the blessedness if you are peacemakers - when you show how to cooperate rather than fight...
- If you are persecuted for righteousness sake - when your commitment to God drives you deeper into God's kingdom.
- If people speak falsely against you on account of Jesus - truth may be too close and they are uncomfortable.

These words of Jesus, the summing up of his teaching to his disciples about the Christian life speak of a joy, peace, and contentment that nothing can touch, a joy that can see us through pain, troubles, grief, and loss, persecution and insult, a joy that nothing – not even death – can take away.

So is the task on our Christian job description to seek to be poor in spirit or to mourn or to seek persecution? Of course not. But seeing God's blessing – seeing how we are blessed, not just when we're on top of the world but seeing we are blessed when we are in the valley of the shadow of death is what Jesus speaks to us this day. The Beatitudes are both an encouragement and a challenge for Christians because they don't speak of what might be, rather they say to us that this should be our experience now. If it's not, then we need to ask ourselves why – what's stopping us from knowing the joy - the blessed-ness that Jesus talks about. Is it that our definition of "blessed" is wrong?

There is this wonderful hope which is summed up in those words of Jesus to his disciples, what we've come to call the Beatitudes – we are truly blessed as we live out our Christian life in the love and presence of God, and this blessing, this joy, can sustain us through all adversity. As Christians, we should see ourselves blessed in each and every situation in which we find ourselves. That new understanding is not easy but is an essential part of finding spiritual depth in your Christian walk.

So, finally (people love that word in a sermon) let me flesh out this Christian job description for us.

Core competencies:

1. You are blessed because spiritual blessings outweigh earthly ones
2. You are blessed because you are a child of God, an heir to God's promise of salvation
3. You are blessed to be a blessing to others

You have these core competencies already because they are a gift of God. The essential functions? Some people will make them into a long, arduous, complicated list but that's not what scripture does. The essential functions of your job description? You heard them earlier when they were read:

1. do justice
2. love kindness
3. walk humbly with God

Whether you knew it or not, whether you remember it or not, you accepted the terms of this job description when you made your profession of faith in

Christ Jesus. And...while it doesn't happen annually, at some point there will be a review.

¹ This definition of "Beatitude" found at www.dictionary.com.

² Information about the origin of "God bless you" when sneezing comes from the Library of Congress article found at <https://www.loc.gov/everyday-mysteries/item/does-your-heart-stop-when-you-sneeze/>

³ Sarah Walton story found in her blog post from 2015 found at www.unlockingthebible.org in an article titled "What Does It Really Mean to be Blessed?"

⁴ Ibid. The information about definitions and Greek meaning also taken from Sarah Walton post cited above.