

Blessed are you . . . the Beatitudes and discipleship

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April 1, 2014

I'm reading Bonhoeffer's *Cost of Discipleship* along with our Lenten Bible study on the Sermon on the Mount. I'm not sure when I last spent any time with this Christian classic (25 years, 35 years?). Coming back to it after all those years, it's striking both in the way it reflects its historical context and the ways in which it transcends its time and still speaks to us decades later.

For example, after going through the Beatitudes, explaining them, and showing how they speak immediately to the situation of Jesus' followers in the first century, Bonhoeffer asks whether the community described in the Beatitudes exists anywhere on earth. His answer:

Clearly, there is one place, and only one, and that is where the poorest, meekest, and most sorely tried of all men is to be found—on the Cross at Golgotha. The fellowship of the Beatitudes is the fellowship of the Crucified. With him it has lost all, and with him it is found all. From the cross there comes the call “blessed, blessed.”

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Earlier, he points out that Jesus called his disciples blessed in the crowd's hearing and that “the crowd is called upon as a startled witness.” From this he posits the essential unity of disciples and people. In his discussion of the Beatitudes, Bonhoeffer tends to emphasize the tension between Jesus' followers and the world, but here he stresses the commonality. It's easy to read him (and to some degree the Beatitudes themselves) and place ourselves on that same grid. We hear a lot these days about the persecution of Christians in U.S., for example. But I wonder whether the perception might change if the emphasis were on the ways in which the people of God are meant to be a blessing to the communities and world in which they live.

In [Genesis 12](#), God calls Abram and Sarai out from Haran into the Promised Land, telling them, “I will bless you . . . so that you will be a blessing” and “in you all the

families of the world will be blessed.” It’s easy to recoil, raise our defenses, withdraw, or try to fight back when we encounter opposition. The world sees plenty of that from Christians. What might it be like to offer oneself and one’s community of faith as a blessing to its neighborhood and the world?

*Originally posted at [Grieser's blog](#)*