

Last week we discussed the difference between the Moses profit and the Jesus profit. We also discussed taking action and the need to staying faithful. Why is Jesus relying on us to take action in our lives in order for the “Good News” to spread? What does this action really accomplish in our lives and the lives of those around us?

Luke 6:20-23 – “Looking at his disciples, he said: **“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.”**

These are the Beatitudes which we studied in **Matthew 5:3-12**.

Virginia Stem Owens – (1941-) Born March 4, 1941, in Houston, TX; daughter of Clarence Lamar (in U.S. Air Force) and Esther (a secretary) Stem; married David Clinton Owens (a clergyman). “As a writer and thinker,” stated a writer for *Image* magazine, “Virginia Stem Owens is a combination of Texan toughness, intellectual curiosity, and literary grace.” She has struggled with her own faith, her life, and her developing blindness, and has written about her life in books like *Assault on Eden: A Memoir of Communal Life in the Early '70s*, *Daughters of Eve: Women of the Bible Speak to Women of Today*, *Looking for Jesus*, and *Caring for Mother: A Daughter's Long Goodbye*. “When you read Virginia Stem Owens,” the *Image* contributor concluded, “you're along for one helluva ride.” “My general attitude toward life leads me to expect the worst,” she told David Neff in *Christianity Today*. “When that doesn't happen, you can be pleasantly surprised.” Neff added: “But don't think of her as a pessimist. Think of her as a survivor. Of her blindness she says, ‘It's something you absorb and go on.’” “In short,” the *Image* writer declared, “she is a lady of parts.”

Ms. Owens writes about her students and their responses to reading The Sermon on the Mount. “I did not like the essay ‘Sermon on the Mount.’ It was hard to read and made me feel like I had to be perfect and no one is.” “The things asked in this sermon are absurd. To look at a woman is adultery? That is the most extreme, stupid, un-human statement that I have ever heard.” “This essay now cannot be taken the same way it was written. It can be used as a guideline for good manners.”

Have you ever thought of scripture as a good basis for how to live but irrelevant for today's modern times? Why is this incorrect? Owens goes on to explain this is the same mindset of hedonism during Herod's rule. “...the Bible remains offensive to honest, ignorant ears, just as it was in the first century.” Why can we take peace in knowing that scripture is offensive? What if it wasn't?

Frederick Buechner – (1926 – 2022) was an American author, Presbyterian minister, preacher, and theologian. The author of thirty-nine published books, his career spanned more than six decades and encompassed many different genres. He wrote novels, including “Godric” (1981 Pulitzer Prize finalist), “A Long Days Dying” and “The Book of Bebb”, his memoirs, including “The Sacred Journey” and theological works, such as “Secrets in the Dark”, “The Magnificent Defeat”, and “Telling the Truth”. Buechner was named “without question one of the truly great writers of the 20th century” by *viaLibri*, a “major talent” by *The New York Times*, and “one of our most original storytellers” by *USA Today*. Annie Dillard (Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*) called him “one of our finest writers.” Buechner's works have been compared to C.S. Lewis and G.K. Chesterton and have been translated into twenty-seven languages.

Buechner asks: “What kind of people would Jesus pick out for special commendation?” “Not the spiritual giants, but the “poor in spirit”, as he called them, ...nothing to give and absolutely everything to receive, like the Prodigal son.” “Not the ones who are righteous but the ones who hope they will be someday ...”. Telling the meek and poor that they are blessed was and is a bold statement when they are “worked over and cursed out on his account.” What hope was Jesus giving them? And what hope does Jesus give us today?

John Dear (1959-) is an American Catholic priest and peace activist. He has been arrested 85 times in acts of nonviolent civil disobedience against war, injustice, nuclear weapons. Dear was born in Elizabeth City, North Carolina, on August 13, 1959. He graduated magna cum laude from Duke University, in Durham, North Carolina, in 1981. He then worked for the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Foundation in Washington, D.C. In August 1982, Dear entered the Society of Jesus, commonly known as the Jesuits, at their novitiate in Wernersville, PA. He then spent two years studying philosophy at Fordham University in the Bronx, (1984–1986), during which time he lived and worked for the Jesuit Refugee Service in a refugee camp in El Salvador for three months in 1985. For his period of regency, he taught at Scranton Preparatory School in Scranton, PA from 1986 to 1988. He then spent a year working at the Fr. McKenna Center, a drop-in center and shelter for the homeless, in Washington, D.C. From 1989 to 1993, he attended the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California, and received two master's degrees in theology from the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley. He was ordained a Catholic priest in Baltimore, Maryland, on June 12, 1993, and began serving as associate pastor of St. Aloysius Church in Washington, D.C. Dear founded Bay Area Pax Christi, a region of Pax Christi USA, the national Catholic peace movement, and began to arrange for Mother Teresa to intervene with various governors on behalf of people scheduled to be executed on death row. Dear was arrested in scores of nonviolent civil disobedience actions against war, injustice and nuclear weapons—from the Pentagon to Livermore Laboratories in California. On December 7, 1993, he was arrested with three others at the Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in Goldsboro, North Carolina, for hammering on an F-15 nuclear capable fighter bomber. He was jailed, tried and convicted of two felony counts, and served seven-and-a-half months in North Carolina jails and four-and-a-half months, under house arrest in Washington, D.C., followed by 3 year's probation. As part of the Plowshares disarmament movement, the defendants argued that they were fulfilling Isaiah's mandate to “beat swords into plowshares,” and Jesus' command to “love your enemies.”

Dear says to look at the opposite of the Beatitudes to discover who Jesus really is. Dear says: “Blessed are the rich. Blessed are the violent. Blessed are those who hunger for injustice. Blessed are those who show no mercy. Blessed are the impure. Blessed are the warmakers. Blessed are those who are never persecuted and who never struggle.” These are the anti-beatitudes of the world and its culture. Can you see the rebellious nature and counter culture of Jesus in what he said in comparison to the world's values?