

## ***“The Gospel According to Dr. Seuss: One Final Time”***

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Matthew 5:1-16

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

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

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

Dr. Seuss stories are modern myths. The word *myth* has been used to imply something that's false. But Merriam-Webster's first definition says that a myth is a story that serves to unfold part of a people's world view...<sup>21</sup> It refers to things that are *deeply* true.

Today in our final exploration of *The Gospel According to Dr. Seuss*,<sup>ii</sup> I thought we'd consider this idea of myth. Think about some of the ways that artists use lies to tell the truth.<sup>iii</sup>

We begin with *Yertle the Turtle* who got the idea that he was king of all that he could see.

He sat on a rock and could see all the pond,  
But Yertle could not see the places beyond...  
So, he ordered nine turtles to swim to his stone,  
And using these turtles he built a new throne.

Nine turtles climbed on each other's backs and Yertle got up on top. At one point he could see for a mile. Now his domain included a cow, a mule, a house, a blueberry bush and a cat. But as he climbed higher, Yertle became less and less satisfied.

We don't need to go any further to see the truth in this story.

In our scripture lesson, Jesus says, "Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth." This line has been misunderstood to mean that we should be doormats – shy, passive, always giving in to the other. But in truth, Biblical meekness is about humility. It's about seeing ourselves truly, as we really are, no better or worse.

Yertle had trouble with this. But like us, he was able to learn.

The question of who we truly are suggests another children's story, about a land where everyone wore a crown. One day a traveler came, a photographer. They made a living taking pictures of royal families. This photographer set up their camera and started taking pictures of everyone who was wearing a crown. All day and night, people came, children and adults.

"How can this be? Is the royal family so large?" They started asking questions. "Excuse me, Waitress-with-a-Crown, how are you related to the king?"

"I'm one of his children," she replied. "I guess I'm a princess." And so it went. The candle-maker was also a princess. The baker said he was a prince. So did the shepherd.

Confused, the photographer headed to the castle. Meeting the steward, who also wore a crown, they asked, "How can there be so many crowns?"

The steward explained, "The king issued a decree that everyone in the land be a member of his family. So everyone has a crown. We have one for you, too. The only rule is to remember that he's the king."

Is this a parable? Living meekly means knowing who we are, understanding that we are human creatures and that God is God.

Knowing who we are requires us to spend time tuning in to ourselves. American theologian Howard Thurman asked, "...can you find a way to hear the sound of the genuine in yourself? There are so many noises going on inside of you, so many echoes of all sorts, so many internalizing the rumble and the traffic, the confusions, the disorders by which your environment is peopled that I wonder if you can get still enough – not quiet enough – still enough to hear rumbling up from your unique and essential idiom the sound of the genuine in you. I don't know if you can. But this is your assignment."

Scripture and history record the stories of people who had the faith, who listened to God as Spirit within them, and who stepped beyond what the world intended for them. These people trusted God and God's offer to bring them beyond the boundaries we tend to impose on ourselves. People like Moses, Esther, Nehemiah, Ruth, Deborah. John Wesley

That last one endured fierce opposition as he traveled around England preaching and teaching. Yet, as people would stand for hours to hear his proclaim God's truths, Wesley knew God's grace. Knew that he was living as God called him to live.

Is there anything to prevent worship, or our soon-to-begin Wednesday programing, from drawing twice as many people each week? Is there any reason for us not to foster such an outpouring of God's grace that the PNC could supply the needs of all of our community?

What is our God-sized vision for First United Methodist Church of Wausau? This is what we ask as we pray our Breakthrough Prayer. Where can we be 3-5 years from now? Just as a clue, it's not where we were before! God does not need us to be the church of 50 or even 5 years ago. Where is God calling us?

That was the message in last week's look at Dr. Seuss' *On Beyond Zebra*, a story that challenges us to imagine life beyond margins. There's a great world beyond Z – a world of leaving our self-imposed limitations and entering God's possibilities.

We might say that Jesus was an *On Beyond Zebra* kind of leader. He gave his disciples new words and even new identities. Instead of buying into Roman addictions to power and wealth, Jesus favored the poor and the marginalized, and the sick and the differently-abled. Romans worshiped the Emperor, but Jesus referred to God as his Father-Mother.

In fact, early Christians were persecuted, not because they believed in Jesus or the God of Israel, but because they would not worship the Emperor. Christianity is an *On Beyond Zebra* kind of faith. The Apostles Paul and Silas were once attacked by a mob, calling them people who had “turned the world upside down.” (Acts 17:6)

Horton the Elephant turns the world upside-down, in his own small way. In *Horton Hatches the Egg* this kind-hearted elephant warms the nest of a lazy bird. He promises to do his duty faithfully; and nothing will keep him from carrying out this mission. Autumn turns to winter and Horton stays on the nest. Hunters come and Horton stays on the nest. He's caught and taken to be part of a circus and Horton stays on the nest because,

I meant what I said, and I said what I meant...  
An elephant's faithful – one hundred percent!

I was reading some of Joseph Campbell's words from “The Power of Myth” this week, he was talking about choosing actually to participate in life instead of letting it happen and saying, “I can't do anything.” Life, he said, “is a wonderful, wonderful opera, except that it hurts.” Life hurts. Yet, it is also so wonderful. And, the heroes are the ones “who can participate in it decently.”<sup>iv</sup>

Maybe this is part of what Jesus is talking about when he says, blessed are the hopeless and the grieving and the humble, the ones who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness or show mercy or have pure hearts or make peace. When we participate decently in life, when we actually show up and open ourselves to possibilities, we can count on God working through us. When we choose not to avoid the messiness of life or the pain but to care about people and love them deeply, then – through God as Spirit – we can accomplish great things. And then, we are living the blessed life that God intends for us.

God cares about you with a lovingkindness beyond all understanding. As much as you love your dog, your children or grandchildren, as much as you love life, God loves you more. And it is God's intention that you accept this life you've been given. Accept and live it – eternally, deeply in each moment, together with all of creation – celebrating the treasure it is. This is the parable of the pearl. This is the parable of the treasure in the field. This is the kingdom of God. This is the life God wants for you.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/myth>

<sup>ii</sup> This series draws heavily from James W. Kemp, *The Gospel According to Dr. Seuss*, Judson Press, Valley Forge, 2004.

<sup>iii</sup> Moore, Alan, David Lloyd, Steve Whitaker, and Siobhan Dodds. *V for Vendetta*. New York: DC Comics, 2005.

<sup>iv</sup> <https://billmoyers.com/content/ep-2-joseph-campbell-and-the-power-of-myth-the-message-of-the-myth/>