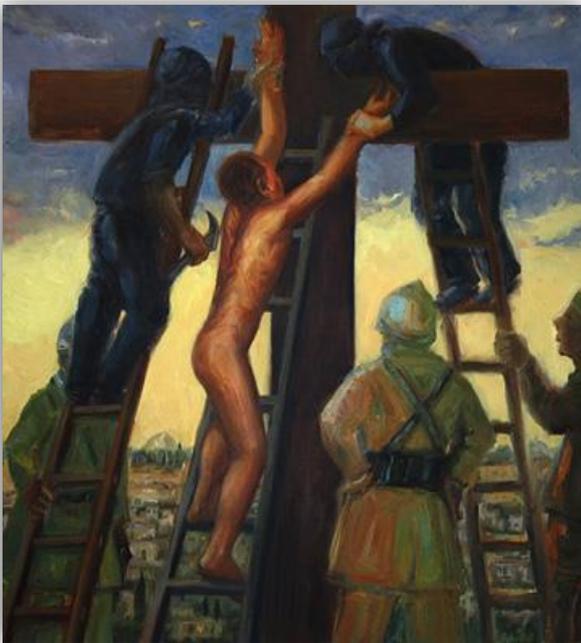


The Stations of the Cross and the Beatitudes, Week 6 2021ⁱ
Monday Mar 22nd - Sunday Mar 28th Palm Sunday

Beatitude Six: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”

Cleansing as a ritual is one thing. But what about cleansing the heart? What did Jesus or people in biblical times understand about the heart, or mean when they talked about it? Today, of course, we know the heart as a vital muscle that pumps blood throughout the entire body. If the heart stops working, we stop working. We also frequently speak of something as being the “heart” or “heartbeat” of an organization, suggesting that it is the key piece that enables the organization to exist and thrive. That is what the heart does. In our culture, we also tend to equate the heart with emotions and feelings – particularly love. We put hearts on love letters, emojis at the end of TXTS and we speak of loving someone “with all my heart.” There’s nothing wrong with this, but it’s not how people in biblical times understood the heart. In Jesus’ time, people considered the gut – the intestines or bowels – to be the seat of emotions. There’s a logical medical link here, for we know that an imbalance in our emotional health can lead to all manner of intestinal problems, and we speak of “butterflies in the stomach” as a kind of related experience. All this is to say that, for people in biblical times, “a pure heart” had nothing to do with emotions, but with the way they lived or “ran” their lives. According to this beatitude, when we cleanse our hearts of the priorities that we too often allow to overtake our living, then we are in a place where we can see God. Not only can we know God, we will see God, Jesus tells us. If living in God’s way becomes our second nature, we will find ourselves in the very presence of God, with a heart clear enough that we will see God.ⁱⁱ



Station Eleven: Jesus is crucified on the cross.

The Romans intended the cross to be a symbol of the dire consequences of defying the power of their empire. But the early Christians made it the symbol of the exact opposite. The early Christians made it the symbol of God’s realm of peace, justice, equality, and charity.

The early Christians believed that the structure of the universe had changed through the life and death of the Christ. In the Roman Empire, most people believed that the universe was a series of translucent discs on top of each other, in the sky above the earth. Each successive layer below was subject to the level above it, with God at the top and the earth at the bottom. They saw the universe much as they saw the structure of the Empire itself: a system with a supreme authority at the top, lesser and lesser authorities below, with common people at the bottom. This image of nesting spheres resulted in the phrase “seventh heaven” – the uppermost sphere from which God ruled, or St. Paul’s reference to the “third heaven” – first,

the earth at the bottom, second, the seven shells above it, and third, the uppermost heaven where God dwelled. It is also the origin of the phrase “the music of the spheres” – the levels of heaven were imagined to be like glass spheres that rubbed against each other to make subtle cosmic music. The early Christians believed that through Jesus, this order was permanently altered. From then on, God would rule the earth directly, without depending on the intervening cosmic powers getting in the way. The crucifixion, in their view, cracked open the cosmos and allowed pure divine power to pour onto the earth – and into our hearts.

Questions:

- i) When has your heart been pure enough to enable you to see God?
- ii) When have you experienced God through other people who are “pure of heart”?
- iii) What are you doing, and what can you be doing, to further the establishment of God’s reign on earth?
- iv) What are you doing to continue what Jesus did: turn the world upside down?
- v) How can your actions continue to transform the cross from a sign of death into a sign of hope?

Meditation on your Lenten Action:

Where do you find resonance, meaning, and inspiration in these Stations, and in this Beatitude, in the course of your work of service or advocacy so far?

Artistic expression:

Draw or make a cross which contains images of the kingdom of heaven on earth, as you imagine it to be.

ⁱ Recommended books to accompany this Lent study: adapted from [James Burklo](#)

Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary (Paperback)
by Marcus J. Borg (Harper One, 2008)

Campaign Boot Camp: Basic Training for Future Leaders (Paperback)
by Christine Pelosi (Polipoint Press, 2007)

The Last Week: A Day-by-Day Account of Jesus's Final Week in Jerusalem (Hardcover)
by Marcus J. Borg, John Dominic Crossan (Harper One, 2006)

Jesus: A New Vision by Marcus Borg (Harper One, 1991)

The Five Gospels: The search for the authentic words of Jesus, by the Jesus Seminar (Polebridge Press, 1993)

ⁱⁱ The Beatitudes for Progressives