

We've all got one, if we're honest way more than one, embarrassing story from our school years. For me, one of these such stories comes from my first week of college, and while many of our stories probably revolve around parties or interactions with friends, being the nerd that I am, mine is solidly due to an interaction that I had with a professor around my schedule.

One of the requirements that Gettysburg had for every student was four semesters of foreign language, with the caveat that if you took a language in high school and planned to continue with that language, you could take a placement test to see if you could skip some or all of the semesters. So, the week before classes began, I sat down to take my French placement exam. I had taken three years of French in high school, so there was a certain degree of hope that I could at least bypass a semester of intro work. One of the things that they told us before we began the exam was that your placement was final, there was absolutely no moving or changing once you found out where your test score landed you.

The results came back to inform me that I would be skipping a whole year of French and going straight to French 201. I was a little surprised, but figured, ok, that's a whole year of classes I can use to take something else. Well, then I got to my first day of class. Our professor was a native French speaker to the point that he was uninterested in having any of the class, even

the syllabus and instructions be in English. After that first class, it was glaringly apparent to me that regardless of what my placement test scores said, I was not ready for this class. The next day, I woefully made my way to the chair of the French-Italian department and explained to him my feelings. This man...was not the nicest of men...he also completely missed that one of his professors, the above mentioned French 202 professor had a penchant for flirting with students, so ya know...but he was insistent and gruff. My test results put me in 202 and that was where I needed to be.

Y'all...my 18 year old self broke down in complete tears in that man's office. Like full on, overwhelmed, oh my goodness I am in college overwhelmed crying in front of this man who was uninterested in another kid coming into his office with waterworks going. It was one of the most embarrassing moments of my college career. Yet...it was effective. Amazingly, I left that meeting with a shift down into French 102, with a professor I ended up adoring. It didn't matter what it said on paper, I knew what I needed. 3 years of middling high school French hadn't fully prepared me, and so I needed to go back a bit. I needed a reorientation, a little bit of French basics to get me back to even footing. It wasn't quite French 101, but it was close enough and exactly what I needed.

And we do need this sometimes, a refresher, a primer, a back to basics approach to any number of things in our lives. It doesn't matter how long we have known something, how innately it seems it comes to us, or how much we can dredge from our memory when we're under pressure. Sometimes, we need that 101 class to center us, to prepare us for what is to come. There's nothing wrong with needing to hear the introduction again, and thank goodness for that, because that is exactly what we find in our gospel this morning. This morning, we sit down on the mountain with Jesus, for The Beatitudes, AKA Apostleship 101: Intro to discipleship.

Jesus' ministry is just getting off the ground when he takes the newly called disciples up the mountain and begins to preach to them. It's a vital point to remember, because often when we think of the Sermon on the Mount, we have visions of Monty Python in our heads, throngs on people crowding around Jesus to hear him teach and someone bellows, "Did he say 'Blessed are the *cheesemakers*?'?" Yet, that's not the reality. The reality is the crowds have gotten so big that Jesus takes the disciples off separately to teach them. He knows that he has asked them to follow him and they have willingly come along, but he realizes, they need the basics, they need an introduction to what they're signing on for, otherwise he would be sending

them off into these crowds ill-equipped to really talk about the kingdom, and the Beatitudes are the first lesson on the syllabus.

When we hear this, and let's be honest, we have all heard this *a lot*, to the point that we could probably quote most it verbatim, it's instinctual for us to look for ourselves in it, wondering where is my blessing in this list? Am I meek? Am I a peacemaker? Am I mourning? Where in this vision of God's kingdom is Jesus proclaiming my place among the blessed? There is absolutely nothing wrong with that reading, because sometimes we need that reminder, that reassurance, especially when things are hard or we feel like the world is against us, that the kingdom of heaven is for us, we are blessed, Jesus came to turn the world upside down and we will benefit from that topsy-turvy worldview. Yet...if I'm honest, I'm not sure that's the only point of view Jesus wants the newly minted disciples to have on this teaching. Like I said, this is apostleship 101, so what does this mean for these new recruits who have signed on to help Jesus spread the word?

These are men who have grown up in a very structured, very black and white world, particularly as they have lived in an oppressed society in the midst of Empire their whole lives. So for them, they have been taught that the blessed are the ones with power, the strong, the mighty, the wealthy, the ones who have it all together. That is the worldview that they know, it's

how their lives have been oriented, and Jesus is about to blow their minds that the ministry they are about to embark on is going to flip all of that on their heads. Now, it could be true that some of them need this message. Maybe Simon the Zealot, the not Peter Simon of the disciples, who feels a hunger for righteousness needs to hear that hunger will be filled. Maybe Matthew who has not always felt like his spirit is up to snuff having spent his life as a tax collector needs to hear that the kingdom of heaven is his, but even more so, Jesus needs them to hear that *these are the people they are being sent out to bless*. These are the people, the ones that the world ignores, judges, or looks down upon are the ones that are going out to find in order to tell them the good news of the kingdom of God.

If one of the course outcomes of apostleship 101 is to be able to know and identify who you will bring the message to, the Beatitudes are the answer. Jesus is sending them out into the world to minister to the meek, the merciful, the persecuted, the pure in heart whose bodies may be dubbed unclean but who still long for the kingdom. This is Jesus' basic outline for ministry: bring comfort to those who are mourning, fight for justice and righteousness with those who long for it and need it, touch those the world says are unclean but whose hearts are in the right place, find those who have been told their faith isn't strong enough and welcome them in. This is who

you are called to be, the people who dispense blessings on a world in desperate need of it, and you're going to bless people the world has chosen to ignore for most of their lives.

Just like the disciples who went before us, we need this reminder, this reorientation and refresher about just what it means to sign on to following Jesus. It doesn't mean blessing and bowing down to those the world proclaims are worthy of worship and adoration. It means finding those the world has excluded, shunned, abandoned, or ignored and telling them that the kingdom of God is for them. Jesus didn't come proclaiming a gospel that comforted the wealthy, the well-established, the perfect, it afflicted all of those people, shook them out of their doldrums, and it comforted those who had only ever experienced affliction their whole lives.

It is possible that today, your heart needs to hear a word of blessing, and the grace of the gospel is that within these words, we all find blessing, yet all of us today also need to hear the proclamation of *who* we are called to be in the world, we need to hear anew the blueprint God has for the world, and remind ourselves who we are blessed to bless. Those who you turn away from, judge, critique, slander, or just simply think aren't good enough? Those are your siblings whom Jesus has called you to bring a word of blessing to. And it's possible that in a world where the beatitudes have

become so rote in our minds we need an update to them. A new syllabus for apostleship 101. So maybe we need to hear these new beatitudes, written by Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber.

*Blessed are the agnostics.*

*Blessed are they who doubt. Those who aren't sure, who can still be surprised.*

*Blessed are they who are spiritually impoverished and therefore not so certain about everything that they no longer take in new information.*

*Blessed are those who have nothing to offer. Blessed are the preschoolers who cut in line at communion. Blessed are the poor in spirit. You are of heaven and Jesus blesses you.*

*Blessed are they for whom death is not an abstraction.*

*Blessed are they who have buried their loved ones, for whom tears could fill an ocean. Blessed are they who have loved enough to know what loss feels like.*

*Blessed are the mothers of the miscarried.*

*Blessed are they who don't have the luxury of taking things for granted anymore.*

*Blessed are they who can't fall apart because they have to keep it together for everyone else.*

*Blessed are those who "still aren't over it yet."*

*Blessed are those who mourn. You are of heaven and Jesus blesses you.*

*Blessed are those who no one else notices. The kids who sit alone at middle-school lunch tables. The laundry guys at the hospital. The sex workers and the night-shift street sweepers.*

*Blessed are the forgotten. Blessed are the closeted.*

*Blessed are the unemployed, the unimpressive, the underrepresented.*

*Blessed are the teens who have to figure out ways to hide the new cuts on their arms. Blessed are the meek.*

*You are of heaven and Jesus blesses you.*

*Blessed are the wrongly accused, the ones who never catch a break, the ones for whom life is hard, for Jesus chose to surround himself with people like them.*

*Blessed are those without documentation. Blessed are the ones without lobbyists.*

*Blessed are foster kids and special-ed kids and every other kid who just wants to feel safe and loved.*

*Blessed are those who make terrible business decisions for the sake of people.*

*Blessed are the burned-out social workers and the overworked teachers and the pro bono case takers.*

*Blessed are the kindhearted football players and the fundraising trophy wives.*

*Blessed are the kids who step between the bullies and the weak. Blessed are they who hear that they are forgiven.*

*Blessed is everyone who has ever forgiven me when I didn't deserve it.*

*Blessed are the merciful, for they totally get it.*