

It sounds so simple:

do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with your God.

But on closer inspection, are these instructions really so simple after all?

How can we be sure we are seeking God's justice and not our own?

How are we to love kindness and not merely like niceness?

How do we walk in humility without feeling humiliated?

Fortunately we have an excellent teacher and guide... Jesus Christ.

His sermon on the mount in Galilee are some of his best-known words.

The Beatitudes, the "Blesseds" are perhaps the most famous of all.

When we pay attention to the future tense

***"they will be comforted ... they will inherit ... they will be filled"***

It's easy to hear these sayings as a series of promises,

of rewards to be allotted in the afterlife,

or in the new creation at the end of times.

Doubtless those promises will hold true in the new creation,

but is that enough consolation to us now,

when we mourn, or hunger, or are persecuted?

A disillusioned man in a song by Sting says of inheriting the earth,

***"What good is a used-up world, and how can it be worth having?"***

Jesus is also calling us to a deeper and more challenging understanding.

Twice he says, ***"Theirs is the kingdom of heaven."***

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus proclaimed...

***"The kingdom of heaven has come near."***

Jesus tells us... the kingdom is so close we can reach out and touch it.

If the kingdom is truly at hand,  
then all these blessings are not afterlife consolation prizes...

But *present-tense realities*.

Here's a Present tense version:

- Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they *have* the kingdom of heaven.
- Blessed are those who mourn, for they *are* being comforted.
- Blessed are the meek, for they *are* inheriting the earth.
- Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
  - for they *are* being filled.
- Blessed are the merciful, for they *are* receiving mercy.

The blessings become strength and guidance for doing justice...  
loving kindness... walking humbly with our God...

These days... justice is most often punishment and reparations.

Applied well... our justice systems protects the innocent

Shields the vulnerable... Ensures equity.

Applied poorly... it protects the powerful... and condemns the weak.

But justice in the kingdom of heaven relies on the mercy  
and the righteousness of God.

Our Baptismal Covenant calls us to

***“strive for justice and peace among all people,  
and respect the dignity of every human being.”***

Our tools for this *heavenly* justice system

are mercy and righteousness and peacemaking.

If we use *these* tools to administer justice...

look at the blessings that follow!

Receiving mercy... being filled with joy... becoming children of God!

Better yet, the blessings are not only a reward to us,  
but also a source of motivation and guidance.

Because we have received God's mercy,  
we have a model for being merciful and the desire to extend mercy.

Because we have been forgiven and restored to peace with God,  
we are strengthened to forgive others  
and work for peace and reconciliation.

Because we are filled with God's spirit,  
we hunger and thirst more and more to see righteousness in the world.

But what about the times when it's hard to see righteousness in the world,  
when we ourselves are persecuted, or when we are in mourning,  
or when we feel empty in our own spirit?

Jesus assures us that blessings are present even in the midst of these times.  
Perhaps he's even teaching us... that at these moments...  
we are most open to perceiving... and receiving... the grace of God.

In the midst of persecution and slander,  
Jesus calls us to rejoice and be glad  
for we are walking in the kingdom of heaven as well as in an unjust world.

When we mourn, stirred by our emotions of grief and anger,  
Then the compassionate presence and compassion of God break through  
how gloriously we are changed!

Walking in the kingdom of heaven  
means learning more and more how close God is to us  
when we are in need.

Jesus even assures us  
that we have the kingdom of heaven just when we feel poorest in spirit.  
Just when you feel emptiest, he says,  
keep reaching out to the kingdom that is at hand.  
In other words... *walk humbly with your God.*

Humility is all about letting go of our need to know and to control.  
When we can finally let go of asking...  
why we must grieve, why we must feel alone,  
why we must witness and experience evil in the world  
when we are given the blessing of letting go and keeping silence

Then... we find anew that God is walking by our side.  
To be meek is to set aside the sense of our own power;  
when we stop trying to control our surroundings,  
we rediscover our own freedom to enjoy the gift of the world.

The Beatitudes call us above all to a sense of openness before God.  
We don't see God until we see the face of Christ in others  
we learn to do that... by pursuing justice and kindness toward all people.  
We don't see God until we stop trying to control,  
and begin learning to walk humbly in God's presence.

We place our hope on Christ, who offered hope to the hopeless.  
And through Jesus, we approach the world with a spirit of hope...  
even when the outward signs indicate otherwise.

When we are hopeful...  
We stand in the world... confident that there will come a day...  
when mercy, humility, peace, and love will define everyone.

Henri Nouwen said...

***Compassion grows with the inner recognition  
that your neighbor shares your humanity with you.***

This cuts through all walls that keep us separate.  
Across all barriers... of land and language...  
wealth and poverty... knowledge and ignorance... we are one...  
created from the same dust... subject to the same laws...  
destined for the same end.

We are distinct, but more importantly,  
All human being share the divine gift...  
...of being created in God's image.  
We belong to one another... We are family.

So...  
Do justice  
Love... kindness  
Walk humbly with your God.

Rejoice...

And be blessed.