

(Un)hidden
Matthew 5:1 – 12; 1 Corinthians 1:18 – 31
Sunday, February 2, 2020

A couple of weeks ago, I saw a movie called *A Hidden Life*. It is based on the true story of Franz Jägerstätter, a farmer and devout Christian who lived in Austria in the 1930s. He lived with his wife and three daughters outside a rural village where they spent their days working and playing in the fields, dancing, laughing, caring for their local church, and sharing a quiet, happy life together with the others in their village. But in 1940, after German troops invaded Austria, Franz was conscripted into the German army to fight for the Nazis. While a lot of the men around him were quietly resigned to having to do this, Franz really struggled with it. He knew that Hitler was an evil man, and as a Christian he wrestled with the morality of war. So he got several deferments as a farmer, but in 1943 he was called to active duty. He reported to be sworn in but refused to swear the oath of loyalty to Hitler and declared himself a conscientious objector. He was arrested and taken to prison, where he was regularly beaten and abused, until he was sentenced to death in a military trial.

All throughout his time in prison, the guards and Nazi officers would taunt him, saying, “Do you really think that what you’re doing here is going to make any difference? Do you think anyone is ever going to *know* about what you’re doing? If you agree to fight, then you might get to see your family again. But if you don’t, you will never see your wife and daughters again.” And he really struggled with that, because he did not want to leave his family alone. But he resisted. And the Germans continued to say to him, “What difference is this going to make?” At his trial, one of the officers says to him, “Do you imagine that anything you do will change the course of this war? That anyone outside this court will ever hear of you? No one will be changed. The world will go on as before. You’ll vanish.”

As you're watching the movie, you feel like it's building up to this point where what he's doing *does* matter. That his resistance *does* make a difference, and he inspires others to do the same. Or maybe the war will end before he is executed, and he will get to survive and go back to his family. You just feel like he will be proven *right*, and what he is doing *will* make a difference. But that's not what happens. After four months in prison, Franz is executed. His wife and daughters struggle to go on without him; their life is very hard. And by the end of the movie, you're left with this feeling of, "Was it all for nothing? Did his resistance – did his *faith* – matter?"

Throughout the movie you're thinking that this "hidden life" that the title refers to has to do with his *prayer* life, his life of *faith*. He is constantly praying and calling to God for strength and help. That he has this *internal* life that no one else can see, and that *that* is the life that matters. But at the end of the movie, after he dies, this quote appears on the black screen that is on the cover of our bulletin. It's by a woman named Mary Ann Evans, who had to write under the pen name George Eliot to have her work taken seriously. She writes, "...the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs." It's this idea that the things that make this world better are things that we may never *know about* or *see* – unhistoric acts. That many of the people who make a difference in this world will never be known to us. But how much worse would the world be without them; if we all just blindly went along and gave in to the evil around us.

We may not always be able to see the difference that faithfulness makes in the world. But *God* sees. And those lives that are hidden from the rest of the world are not hidden from God.

We see this in the Beatitudes. Jesus begins his ministry by proclaiming a series of blessings, announcing God's favor for those who are not typically favored by the world around us:

Blessed are the poor in spirit – not those who are *rich* in spirit, whose spirits are *high* and *full*, but those whose spirits are *empty*; those who *struggle* with their faith and with a sense of the presence and love of God in their lives. They may not see God, but God sees them, and the blessing of God is *for them* because they *need* it.

Blessed are those who mourn – those who are hurting and have suffered loss; those for whom the pain of life is more than they can bear. They may not see God in the midst of their grief and pain, but God sees them, and the blessing of God is *for them* because they *need* it.

Blessed are the meek – those who feel powerless, who get taken advantage of and walked all over; those who cannot speak up for themselves, and so no one else hears their voices. *God* hears their voices, and the blessing of God is *for them* because they *need* it.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness – not those who *are* righteous, but those who are *not* and yet *want* to be; those who are *starving* for the goodness of God in their lives. They may not feel close to God, but God is close to them, and the blessing of God is *for them* because they *need* it.

Blessed are the merciful. This might not seem like such a bad thing, until you think about how the world around us can look upon acts of mercy. If someone hurts you or does you wrong, we are expected to stand up for ourselves and hold them accountable and fight back and get even. Imagine if, after the terrorist attacks of September 11, the United States had responded with

mercy on Osama bin Laden. How would *that* have gone over? But Jesus says that those who pay back evil *not* with evil but with *good*, while the rest of the world might not see the *strength* of what they are doing, *God* sees, and the blessing of God is *for them* because they *need* it.

Blessed are the pure in heart. Again, not such a bad thing; something we all strive to be, right? Until you think about what it *means* and *takes* to be pure in heart. It means that our hearts are *singularly focused* on God. Our lives are *devoted* to the kingdom of God, the *will* of God, and so we are not distracted by the temptations of the kingdom of man. We have to forsake the things of this world that everyone else just gives into and goes along with. Think about what that *costs* you. People don't always understand that. They think you're weird. It can be alienating and isolating. To push away the temptations of the world means that you will *be* pushed away by the world. But God draws you near, and the blessing of God is *for you* because you *need* it.

Blessed are the peacemakers. Have you ever tried to intervene and make peace between two people who are fighting or at odds? It's not easy, and it's not fun, and it can be dangerous. To put yourself in between two warring factions means that *you* can be the one who ends up getting hurt – physically or emotionally. And in a world that has wholeheartedly bought into the myth that violence can solve our problems, to make *peace* is viewed as *weak*. The rest of the world might not see the *courage* it takes, but *God* sees, and the blessing of God is *for them* because they *need* it.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake – those who are opposed and oppressed and abused for doing the right thing. And Jesus *adds* to that, blessed are *you* when people *hate* you and *hurt* you and *lie* about you because you are striving to follow him and have set your sights on this bigger picture of a life lived in faithfulness and love. While the rest of the

world might not see the *value* in that, *God* sees, and the blessing of God is for *you* because you *need* it.

Like Paul says to the Corinthians, the rest of the world may look at you and think that you are *weak* or *foolish*, but God has *chosen* what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, and God has *chosen* what is weak in the world to shame what is strong. God chooses what is low and despised, the things that are *not*, to reduce to nothing the things that *are*, so that no one can boast in their own ability and say, “Look how wise and strong and faithful I am. Look what *I* have done to earn the love and blessing of God!” Rather, God *blesses* those who are hurting and broken and looked down upon, those who the rest of the world does not consider *worthy* of blessing, so that we might say, “Look how wise and strong and faithful *God* is. Look what God has made possible *in* and *through* me.”

The *good news* that Christ proclaims here is that wherever you find yourself in life, there is a blessing from God for you. When your faith is completely spent, and you are hurting and broken and tired, when the weight of life in this world is too much for you to bear, when you feel ignored and unloved and forgotten, when you feel like nothing you do matters or makes a difference, Jesus says that the blessing of God is *for you* because you *need* it. The Beatitudes cover the range of human experience, and what they promise us is that there is no black hole into which we can fall and disappear with God. No matter where we find ourselves, God *sees* us and is *with* us.

Nothing is lost on God; no life – no matter how unhistoric – no small, simple act of faithfulness is lost on God. Author N.T. Wright says, “Every act of love, gratitude, and kindness; every work of art or music inspired by the love of God and delight in the beauty of God’s creation; every

minute spent teaching a severely handicapped child to read or to walk; every act of care and nurture, or comfort and support, for one's fellow human beings and for that matter one's fellow nonhuman creatures; and of course every prayer, all Spirit-led teaching, every deed that spreads the gospel, builds up the church, embraces and embodies holiness rather than corruption, and makes the name of Jesus honored in the world – all of this will find its way, through the resurrecting power of God, into the new creation that God will one day make.”¹

So when we question – or when those *around* us question – whether this thing we are pouring our time and energy into matters, whether it makes any difference, whether our *lives* will make any difference, whether *anyone* will know about this, whether we should just give in and go along with everyone else, we are reminded that while the growing good of the world depends in part on unhistoric acts – small, simple, ordinary acts of faithfulness and love that might be hidden from the rest of the world – *nothing* is hidden from God. God *sees* us and draws *near* to us and *blesses* us, especially when the world around us does not.

You are not hidden from God. Your longing is not hidden from God. Your pain is not hidden from God. Your *life* is not hidden from God. It is all seen and valued and loved and blessed. And so as followers of Jesus, we must seek out those whose lives are hidden from the rest of the world and strive to see *them* as we are seen, value *them* as we are valued, love *them* as we are loved, and bless *them* as we are blessed, in Christ. Amen.

¹ N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, pg. 208.