

Conference Minister's Corner

Blessed are the...submissive?

By Rev. Amy S. Zimbelman

The following is an excerpt from a sermon I recently preached on the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12):

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

When I first looked up the definition of meek, it said: "quiet, gentle, easily imposed on; submissive."

Submissive? Hmm...I need to have some words with Submissive.

I've been working on a national study to hear the voices of Mennonite women in leadership and I'm hearing again and again how harmful it is when submission is imposed on them. One of the most common stories is women in ministry getting ignored or talked over. Female pastors have told me that sometimes they're literally silenced in church meetings: "Shhh. Stop talking. Shhh."

Meekness imposed on others is oppression. There's nothing blessed about that.

But what if there's a better way to understand meekness? I've found a second definition: "To be meek is to restrain one's own privilege for the sake of others." If that's what meekness means, then *you* can choose to be meek as an act of justice; not imposing it on anyone else, but giving up your privileges for the sake of the community. The next beatitude, of course, is blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, or justice. Maybe these two beatitudes are meant to go hand-in-hand.

And then this second part of the sentence: Blessed are the meek, *for they will inherit the earth*. I find it fascinating that the land itself is named here.

It's vital that we restrain ourselves for the sake of the earth, right? We could continue as a human species with unchecked growth, unchecked pollution, unchecked ways of living that destroy the environment.

Or we could collectively live in such a way that our children's children will *have* an earth to inherit.

Blessed are the meek, for they, and all who come after them, will be able to inherit the earth.

Watch the entire 15-minute sermon on YouTube [here](#).

(Facts to be aware of to understand the inside joke at the beginning of the sermon: Ryan Koch is the pastor of Glennon Heights, which is the church I'm guest preaching at. He is also our conference moderator, and on the CLC gifts discernment committee.

When questioned after the sermon, Ryan said [with a laugh] that he stands behind his determination that it is, in fact, painful to watch me play frisbee and that I should probably never do it in public again.)

