Once again we have a beatitude that is completely contrary to the thinking of the modern world. It is opposed to everything which we normally assume are the requirements for being competent, successful and making a difference in the world. The world thinks in terms of strength and power, of ability and charisma, self-assurance and aggressiveness. Yet Jesus says "Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth."

One problem with the English word “meek” is that it is very similar to “weak.” People have linked the two words together for years. A popular dictionary offers a definition of meek as “too submissive; easily imposed on; spineless; spiritless.” So perhaps it is quite reasonable to question why Jesus would say, “Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5).

According to a newspaper column some time ago, J. Upton Dickson, with tongue thoroughly in cheek, said he was writing a book entitled Cow Power for a group he was founding for submissive people he was going to call DOORMATS. This stands for "Dependent Organization of Really Meek and Timid Souls" – that is, if there are no objections. Their motto would be: "The meek shall inherit the earth -- if that's okay with everybody else." Their symbol would be the yellow traffic light.

But in direct contrast to this popular idea of meekness, the Greek scholar W. E. Vine says that meekness in the Bible is an attitude toward God “in which we accept his dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting.” We see this in Jesus who found his delight in doing the will of his Father. So meekness is a willing submission to a trustworthy authority higher than oneself.

Meekness is also humility. The Greek word translated “meek” is praeis and refers to mildness, gentleness of spirit, or humility. Other forms of this Greek word are used elsewhere in the New Testament, including James 1:21 and James 3:13. Meekness is humility toward God and toward others. It is using one’s power only to help and never to hurt. Paul urged meekness when he told us “to live a life worthy of the calling [we] have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love” (Ephesians 4:1–2).
People who are truly strong and powerful feel no need to go around proving it. It is only the bullies, the cowards, and the insecure who feel the need to posture and preen, to yell, strut and intimidate, to throw their weight around.

Jesus seemed to be very weak when he was arrested like a common criminal, beaten and hung to die on the cross. But actually he was very powerful. He said at one point he could call 12 legions of warrior angels, that’s 60,000 seriously strong beings to come rescue him (Matt. 26:53). But he refrained because he was accomplishing a greater good, the will of his Father.

Meekness models the humility of Jesus Christ. As Philippians 2:6–8 says, “[Jesus], being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!” Being “in the very nature God,” Jesus had the right to do whatever He wanted, but, for our sake, He submitted to “death on a cross.” That is the ultimate in meekness.

The meek can be people who are very powerful and capable. But they are people who carefully restrain their power. As good fathers teach their sons by both precept and example – no man, who is a real man, would ever strike a woman or someone who is weaker than himself. A man who would do such a thing is contemptible, not to be respected as a man at all. Rather, a truly strong man uses his strength to protect those who are weaker than he.

At my daughter’s wedding I witnessed something that gave me a great blessing. I noticed my son approach his brand new brother-in-law. Jeff and my son are both tall and very strong men. My son has a quiet and godly disposition. But he is fiercely protective of his sister. So my son approaches Jeff and gets very close to him, only inches apart, and says in a very soft but firm voice these simple words, “Remember Jeff, she will always be my sister.” Jeff wisely replied, “That’s good to know, I give you my word as one man to another she will never have a hand raised to her or a harsh word directed toward her.” Wow, did I ever feel good about that. My daughter now has three men sworn to her protection. She always had her daddy and her brother, but I am happy to report she has a husband who is worthy
of that title. I would not guarantee the long-term health of any man who would try to harm her.

The image most closely associated with "meek" and its meaning is that of the horse. The Greek historian Xenophon used the very same word Jesus used to describe a horse broken to saddle, so that it is under control.

A horse is a powerful animal. It is a symbol of strength in the Greek world. But wild and untamed the horse is not useful. It cannot be used for any of the tasks a person has for it. However, if the horse is broken it can be used for all kinds of tasks for which it was created. It can be tamed and then taught. A tamed horse is a picture of power under control.

A.W. Tozer once wrote, “The meek man is not a human mouse afflicted with a sense of his own inferiority. Rather he may be in his moral life as bold as a lion and as strong as Samson; but he has stopped being fooled about himself. He has accepted God’s estimate of his own life. He knows he is as weak and helpless as God declared him to be, but paradoxically, he knows at the same time that he is in the sight of God of more importance than angels. In himself, nothing; in God, everything. That is his motto."

Jesus told his weary, burdened followers, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matt. 11:29). He was the perfect model of meekness. He is strong and capable but someone who can be trusted. When we are tired and troubled, Jesus invites us to discover the peace of meekly trusting him.

It is the meek who truly do inherit the earth. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said in, *The Cost of Discipleship*, "The renewal of the earth begins at Golgotha, where the meek One died, and from thence it will spread. When the kingdom finally comes, the meek shall possess the earth. The phrase “inherit the earth” is a figure of speech to indicate the possession given to the faithful.

Meekness was also demonstrated by godly leaders in the Old Testament. Numbers 12:3 says that Moses “was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth” (ESV).

Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the non-Hebrew woman whom he had married… and they said, "Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?" And the Lord
heard it. Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth. And suddenly the Lord said to Moses and to Aaron and Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the tent of meeting."

What happens in the following verses is that the Lord rebukes Miriam and Aaron by giving them a dandy case of leprosy and vindicates his servant Moses.

Now what is the point of calling Moses meek right here in this context — right between bitter opposition and God's vindication? I think the point is that meekness means committing your cause to God and refraining from defending yourself. Just where we would expect Moses to display the violent temper we know he had and justify himself against the charge of Miriam and Aaron, the story makes the point that he was the meekest man on the earth. Moses doesn't say a word. Instead he waits patiently for the Lord. He does not fret over these critical words. And God comes to his defense.

Believers are called to share the gospel message in gentleness and meekness. 1 Peter 3:15 instructs, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.” The KJV translates the word for “gentleness” here as “meekness.”

Someone who is an apprentice to Jesus and follows him closely will be growing in meekness. It may seem counterintuitive, but Jesus’ promise stands—a meek person will be happy or blessed. Living in humility and being willing to forego one’s rights for the benefit of someone else models the attitude of Jesus Christ. Meekness also helps us to more effectively model the gospel message with others. Striving for power and prestige is not the path to blessedness, meekness is.

To see another feature of the portrait of meekness let’s turn to the book of James. We read in 1:19–21: “Know this, my beloved brethren. Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, for the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God. Therefore, put away all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.”

James has in mind two kinds of people here. He pictures on the one hand a person who does not like to listen to what other people have to say, especially if they speak with authority. This person is quick to speak and quickly
becomes angry if the words of others challenge his or her preconceptions or call his or her behavior into question. These people are not receptive to the Word of God. They filter it through their own desires and receive it selectively, if at all. They hear the word but go out and do just as they please regardless of what that word teaches them.

The opposite of meekness is stubborn willfulness. Stubborn and willful people will nod and smile when they are exposed to the word of God but still go out and do exactly opposite of what they are taught, often with destructive and painful results to themselves and others.

On the other hand, James pictures another kind of person. This person is slow to speak, and quick to listen (v. 19). This person recognizes the limitations of his or her knowledge and the fallibility of his or her thinking, and so is eager to listen and learn anything valuable that he can. If they hear something new or contrary to their own view, their first reaction is not fretful anger but rather they are open to learning something new and honestly applying it to their own lives.

Over eighty years ago G. K. Chesterton spoke about the dislocation of humility. He said, “What we suffer from today is humility in the wrong place. Modesty has moved from (a guard against) ambition. (Instead) modesty has (compromised) our convictions; where it was never meant to be. A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth; this has been exactly reversed. Nowadays the part of a man that a man does assert is exactly the part he ought not to assert — himself. The part he doubts is exactly the part he ought not to doubt — the Divine Reason . . . We are on the road to producing a race of men too mentally modest to believe in the multiplication table.” (Orthodoxy, p. 31f.)

We are no longer on the road. We have arrived. All too often we use the precious word of God only as a means to justify what we really want and grace and mercy as a license to engage in all manner of sinful activities figuring we can always ask for forgiveness later. Despite what we profess to believe, too many professed Christians trot right alongside the secular world in which we live that has rejected the idea of unchanging absolute truth. All truth has become relative. Our lips say one thing; our choices we make say quite another.

Robert Bellah, the author of Habits of the Heart, described the basic
The doctrine of twentieth-century American culture like this: “It is an understanding of life generally hostile to older ideas of moral order. Its center is the autonomous individual, presumed able to choose the roles he will play and the commitments he will make, not on the basis of higher truths but according to the criterion of life-effectiveness as the individual judges it” (p. 47). In other words, people do what they feel like doing no matter what.

That is the world we live in. That is the spirit of this age. It is the very atmosphere we breathe. And unless we are extraordinarily alert we will breathe it right into the church as so many have already. And one of the ways it will make its way into the church is if we are so naïve as to mistake it for meekness.

Now let’s stand back and see if we can see the whole portrait. Meekness begins when we put our trust in God. Then, because we trust him, we commit our way to him. We roll onto him our anxieties, or frustrations, our plans, our relationships, our jobs, our health. And then we wait patiently for the Lord. We trust his timing and his power and his grace to work things out in the best way for his glory and for our good.

George Washington Carver was a brilliant black scientist back in the 1920s in the deep South at a time most white people thought all blacks were stupid. One day when George was a young boy, he went out into the woods and prayed, “God, why did you make the universe and all that it contains?” God answered him, “Oh little man, that question is too big for you. But do ask another.” George thought and thought and the next time he went out into the woods he prayed, “God, why did you make human beings the way they are?” God answered, “O little man, that question is too big for you, but do ask another.” Again George thought and thought and went out into the woods and prayed, “God, why did you make the peanut?” God answered, “O little man, that question is just right for you. Let’s explore the answer together.” George Washington Carver would go on to discover over 200 practical uses for the peanut which helped revitalize the economy of the South.

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