

“Lord, make yourself known to us.  
And teach us to follow you.” AMEN!

“Here’s a little song I wrote,  
you might want to sing it note for note...  
Don’t worry, be happy!

Bobby McFerrin’s worldwide hit reached  
Billboard #1 in 1988.

Many saw the song as a message about  
positive psychological perspectives,

as in worrying magnifies ones problems and  
the song is meant for encouragement.

There’s truth in that.

Others, though, said it was a form of “toxic passivity.”

As its lyrics force happiness and invalidates real pain  
that people experience and so there’s a  
feeling of guilt thrust on struggling people  
when they’re told to not worry,  
just be happy. (Pause)

However you feel about it.

It came to mind because of the famous excerpt

we read today called the Beatitudes.

Some might say they are Jesus' "Be-happy-tudes." :-)

That's because instead of the "Blessed" translation one could use the word "happy."

Why happy?

Well, because when people (or we) find ourselves poor in spirit, mourning, suffering, hungry for justice, etc...

we aren't to ignore or sugar coat them but when we are in those periods, we are to be ready for God will bring reversal.  
(Pause)

It reminds me a little of the movie *Parenthood* with Steve Martin.

The part is at the end when Gil, the character played by Steve Martin, goes on a roller coaster ride and

suddenly connects the events of his life to the ups and downs of the roller coaster.

It's an aha moment for him that reveals the rewards that often come following life's struggles.

Of course, this analogy lacks to what is truly being revealed in the sermon from Jesus.

On this fourth Sunday after Epiphany, we find Jesus teaching to the disciples and to a large crowd of diverse people.

In fact, the two verses right before our reading today read:

“the sick were brought to Jesus, along with those afflicted by diseases and pains,

demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics and he cured them.

And great crowds followed Jesus from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.”

This context, therefore, tells of a distinctively diverse community being formed by their encounter with Jesus.

Now, we are told, Jesus sat down to teach these followers.

The first three are about things happening TO them.

The next 6 are about the things they are urged to do.

And after each of the nine, we are given statements about what God does.

And instead of working to focus on all of them, I'm going to select the one which I believe is most specific to the need of our St. Stephen community on this day and in this age.

And I am led to verse 6, or the fourth beatitude.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”

Hungering and thirsting for righteousness means having a visceral desire for justice.

In a time of unrest, violence and turmoil, this kind of desire puts bodies on the line and brings forth resolve to speak up and confront systemic oppression, especially on the poor and marginalized.

It leads people to speak honestly and openly.

To denounce hostile aggression, death squads, and the disappearances of innocent people.

It leads us away from the disastrous move that allows for the extreme wealthy to take

the reigns of government decision making  
and national policy.

Hungering and thirsting for righteousness is equating  
the necessary desire for food and water  
to become the necessary desire for  
justice and fairness.

Groups of suffering people came to Jesus then  
and they/we come to Jesus now.

As we hold our breaking hearts together and  
watch videos of unarmed people being dragged,  
tackled, and shot in the street.

We struggle to understand how these actions have  
come to this day and this country,

as in the days of executions  
behind the Iron Curtain of East Berlin and  
the Berlin Wall.

That wall separated democracy from authoritarianism.

As this violence builds around communities  
we must gather strategies and practices  
which keep us from becoming  
numb and apathetic.

We must speak, gather together in prayer,  
open ourselves to the Living Presence

which draws us to movement and clarity.

We learn to train ourselves to see and name violence  
but not become violent.

We prepare our response to lies without being cynical,  
and propel ourselves to stay tender in  
the presence of suffering. (Pause)

Groups, multitudes, and crowds came to Jesus.

They were what the power brokers  
called the “cursed” people.

Jesus revealed that it was for these that he came  
and these are the benefactors of God’s empire.

This is, according to Jesus,  
the way God acts in the world.

It is what salvation looks like and  
it is the “foolishness” that Paul spoke about  
in 1st Corinthians.

God makes God-self known through the cross.

Through an implement of execution,  
meant and used to shame the prisoner  
and disgust the bystander.

God makes such an implement of death

the very thing we cling to as a faith community.

That's Paul's message to the church.

The church needs to be a cross-shaped community,  
else it's just a club or gated community.

God chose what is foolish, weak, and low.

God chooses us.

AMEN!