

Welcome & Announcements

-United Methodist summer camp registration is open! With programs for all ages, such as grandparents camp, family, basketball camp, and many more, there are lots of things to discover at our summer camp! There are discounts for registering early, discounts for using our church code which was included in our weekly update email, and additional scholarships for anyone who want to go to camp but can't afford it.

-We're still recruiting volunteers for anyone who would like to participate in various ministries in the church, from helping with worship through reading, through the praise team, technology, or helping with service projects and education and so much more, if you want to help support a ministry we can find a place for you and would love to have your help. Just let us know either by contacting me, or touching base with one of our leaders.

***Call to Worship**

Leader: Blessed are the poor in spirit, the downtrodden and despairing,

People: They will rejoice in God's reign forever.

Leader: Blessed are those who mourn, who are grieving.

People: They will be comforted in God's reign forever.

Leader: Blessed are the ones who seek justice and righteousness,

People: They will find it in God's reign forever.

Leader: Blessed are we when we love our neighbors and seek their needs.

People: We will live in God's reign forever.

Leader: Blessed are we all when we seek to serve others in God's name.

**People: Let us worship together, serving one another and serving our Mighty God.
Amen.**

***Song**

All Who Hunger

TFWS 2126

Pastoral Prayer

-Those in our Church and families fighting cancer, addiction, depression, and other illnesses.

-Update from Margaret: her nephew's surgery went well, and Margaret herself has some additional follow-ups to make sure she is getting the treatment she'll need.

-Per our prayer bulletin board: today, we pray for the poor. Accordingly to census estimates, roughly 12.3% of the state of South Dakota live in poverty, which represents almost 112,000 people.

-War in Ukraine, and for safety for the refugees and others who are caught in the midst of the conflict.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

***Song**

Where Charity and Love Prevail

Hymnal 549

Scripture

Matthew 5:1-12 (NRSV)

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he began to speak and taught them, saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Children's Moment

-What makes you happy? You and I probably have different ideas of where happiness comes from. Sometimes it seems like we'd be really happy if it snowed a lot and school got cancelled. Maybe you'd be happy if people were kind to you. Or when we're sick, we'd be happy if we were healthy again. Well, in Jesus' very first sermon, he talked about nine different things he thought real happiness came from. He called it being blessed. Being blessed is like getting a special scoop of happiness from God. Some of the ideas Jesus can be hard to understand, but I want to talk to you about two of them.

-First is that Jesus we are really blessed, truly happy, if we are merciful. Showing mercy means being kind and generous. Being merciful means helping people with what they need, just because they need it. I love it when people are merciful to me. When someone helps me do something hard, it makes my life better and I am really thankful.

-The second way Jesus said we are truly blessed, really happy, is if we are peacemakers. Being a peacemaker means helping other people get along. If people are having an argument, and we help them get past it, that's being a peacemaker. Sometimes one of the people having an argument is you. When you are having an argument, you are usually feeling really mad.

-But I don't think Jesus was saying we should pretend that we aren't mad. And I don't think he meant that we could just make our mad feelings go away. But I do think that Jesus was telling us that when we feel mad, we have a choice about what to do with our feelings. If we are mad, we can choose not to hit people, or not to say mean things about them. That's how we can be peacemakers. If we put our mad feelings into helpful words, and work together to solve the problem that made us mad, then we are doing a lot to make peace.

-These are things that God said would bring about true happiness, and they're really all about the kingdom of heaven. These things he talked about are really about what God is like. God is always merciful, so we are blessed if we are merciful too. God is always working to make peace, so we are blessed if we are peacemakers too. Real happiness comes when we learn to do the kinds of things that come straight from God's heart. That's what life in the Kingdom of Heaven is all about. Let's pray.

-Dear God	Help us to remember	to count on you
For real happiness.	Help us to be	merciful and peacemakers
Just like you.	For we love you	And we praise you
For all that you are	And all that you do.	It is in your name that we pray.
Amen.		

***Song**

Make Me a Channel of Your Peace

TFWS 2171

Sermon

Blessed Are

Friends, today our worship series on the glimpses continues with a look at perhaps one of the most famous teachings of Jesus from the gospels: the Sermon on the Mount. We'll be focusing on this sermon for the next few weeks, and today we're going to look at the first part of Jesus' sermon and what are called the Beatitudes, these powerful statements of blessing and promise, glimpses of what living in the kingdom of heaven is like. As we get into these transformative words, will you please pray with me once more? O Lord, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each and every one of our hearts be holy and pleasing to you, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

In recent years, there has been some controversy over having the Ten Commandments posted or otherwise featured in courthouses, and on other government properties. Naturally, there are those who are concerned about the whole idea of associating such a prominent religious image with a government office. I don't necessarily want to get into the weeds on the whole issues surrounding the separation of church and state, but others have asked that if we *were* going to post a religiously significant article on our courts of law, what if we looked to the Beatitudes instead? "Blessed are the merciful" might read differently on the wall of a criminal court, don't you think? But then, others would argue we can't do that for any number of reasons. Some might even call it impractical, saying that it wouldn't fit. It is a place of law, not mercy.

And that's sort of the "problem" with the Beatitudes. They aren't all that practical. Some would even argue that they are impossible. How in the world are we supposed to live up to the kind of standard that they set for us? It is simply not within our power to live into each of these elements, no matter how much we might want to. So, do the Beatitudes function like the law? Do they simply show us how far short we fall from what

we are supposed to be? Do they layer guilt upon guilt on us so that we turn to utter despair to our Savior, confessing our complete and utter worthlessness?

That is how some have presented these verses — as a measuring rod for entrance into the Kingdom of God. But if that's true, then why did Jesus introduce each segment with the word "blessed"? The actual word used is *Maka,rioi*, which can also be translated as "happy." You've maybe heard that translation of these verses before... *Happy are those who...* It could also be translated as "blissful." It's hard to reconcile the supposed layers of guilt with the word "blissful" to describe a condition we can't reach. So maybe these aren't law. Maybe the Beatitudes are something other than a challenge to better living. Maybe they are something more.

But maybe it's helpful to first explain at what the Beatitudes are *not*. They are not Hallmark greeting cards. Jesus wasn't just waxing sentimental when he spoke of blessing, favor, happiness, and good fortune. He wasn't offering us platitudes. It's easy for us to make a word like "blessing" bland and meaningless. It's just as easy to equate happiness with material comfort and personal success. The Beatitudes are not band-aids. They're not meant to settle, soothe, and lull us to sleep. They're meant to startle us awake. Yes, they can give us hope, but hope is not a sedative. Hope is what gets us up and out the door.

The Beatitudes are also not a list of to-do items. They're not suggestions, instructions, commandments, or transactions. It is *not* the case that if we try hard to be poorer, sadder, meeker, hungrier, thirstier, purer, more peaceable, and more persecuted that God will love and reward us more than God already does. The Beatitudes are also not some pie-in-the-sky lessons. When Jesus promises his listeners the "kingdom of

heaven”, he is not asking them to grit their teeth and wait patiently for death to come along and alleviate whatever torment they’re living in. He isn’t handing them a vague hope in the afterlife, as if our messy, earthly, ordinary lives here and now don’t matter. To assess the kingdom, to experience comfort, to inherit the earth, to be filled, to receive mercy, to see God, to be called children of God, and to receive a reward in heaven — these are not *just* about life and death. They are about the kingdom that is already here, *and* the kingdom that is to come. It is the realm of God that is both present *and* coming, the reign of God’s perfect just and mercy that is both within us and ahead of us. The promise is not an either/or, it is a both/and. The Kingdom is coming, and the Kingdom is now.

Now, the question remains: just what *are* the Beatitudes? Well, the Beatitudes are blessings. I know that seems obvious, but it’s still something we tend to forget. The first words Jesus offers as his inaugural sermon are words of blessing. And maybe there’s something for us to learn there. That blessing comes *first*. Maybe, like Jesus, we should *begin* with blessing. Blessing, not judgment, not terms and conditions, not penance. Blessing.

Jesus began his teaching ministry with a word of encouragement, not an impossible standard to attain. In the previous chapter of Matthew’s gospel, before the Sermon on the Mount begins, there are several amazing events. Chapter four begins with the temptation in the wilderness, where Jesus declare the kind of Messiah he intends to be — to himself, to God, to Satan, and to all of us. Then he returns and calls together the community of followers within which he will work his earthy ministry. Finally, he teaches and heals and draws increasingly larger crowds. And then chapter five lets

us know his teaching. But in between the wilderness and the calling of the disciples, he makes this statement: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” And “repent” in this case isn’t “shame on you,” but rather, “get on board, turn around and follow me.” He starts his ministry by telling the disciples who and what they already are: *they are blessed*. Blessed, fortunate, privileged, favored. They are near and dear to God’s heart. Whatever else they go on to learn and do in the future is simply a result of what is *already* fundamental to their being. They are blessed, without condition or measure, and so they’re freed to bless others.

So what if the Beatitudes are a snapshot of the community of faith, instead of a measuring rod? What if Jesus was saying, Blessed is the community who makes room for peacemakers? Blessed is the community who makes room for the meek, for those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, who are poor in spirit. Blessed is the community who makes room for those who mourn at the brokenness of the world, who is unstained by the impurity of the world. Blessed is the community who knows persecution is inevitable, and still decides to make room for those the world thinks are unimportant.

Today, some two thousand years after this sermon was first delivered, I think Jesus is inviting us to look again, and see who we are, see what is among us. He is reminding us of what we have forgotten, showing us our true selves. And there is call here, too. Jesus pronounces blessings on the meek, the hungry, the impoverished, and the oppressed. But what does he do before and after this pronouncement? He empowers the meek, he feeds the hungry, he cares for the poor, and he demands justice for the oppressed.

Jesus spends every waking moment he has on earth alleviating suffering. He doesn't tell the hungry to tighten their belts. He doesn't tell the poor to get a job. He doesn't ignore the cruelty of the religious elite and politically powerful. He doesn't turn a blind eye to the incarcerated, the ostracized, and the demonized. He doesn't leave the sick to die, he doesn't abandon the dead to their graves, and he never tells anyone to just "grin and bear" their pain because heaven will fix things. Jesus acts. He doesn't simply *speak* blessing. He lives it. He embodies it. He incarnates it. Through his words, his hands, his feet, his life, he brings about the very blessings he promises. He works to bring healing, abundance, liberation, and joy to everyone who crosses his path.

This is our call, too. It is the work of the kingdom — the work of sharing the blessings we enjoy. But it is not an impossible call, because it is already among us in the community of faith. We learn from one another because we are gifted; we are blessed in different ways. We celebrate the Church as a gift that we dare not keep to ourselves. We are not blessed to feel better about ourselves. We are blessed to be a blessing. Blessed are *you*. And you, and you, and you, and you. For those of us living comfortable lives in the wealthiest nation the world has ever known, how can we embody these beatitudes? How can we pursue justice, righteousness and peace? How can we embody God's promises to those that are poor, mourn, and oppressed?

Obviously there are opportunities to serve and share those blessings here in the Church... Ways to make use of our blessings to make a difference for good and for God. There are various study groups, community service projects, children's and youth ministries, prayer teams, feeding ministries, worship opportunities, hospitality ministry, and many other ways we can embody those beatitudes as a Church family. But our call

is not limited just to this church and her ministries. The Kingdom of God is ever expanding, ever growing, ever moving us to look outward, to envision new ways of sharing God's blessings with others.

So let us go and become what we are, give away what we seek, bless what God blesses, and turn this world on its head. Let us rejoice and be glad, for we are God's children, and the kingdom of heaven is ours, and the One who blesses us is near. Let's pray.

Offering

Doxology

Hymnal 95

As we enter this time of offering, I want to encourage you to consider this an expression of worship, and a means of responding to what God is doing in your life. Give out of joy, not simply because you feel an obligation to give. If you would like to support our ministry through e-giving, that is set-up on our website, and you are welcome to make use of the pew cards to still participate in the passing of the offering plate, and to allow your gift to be recognized and celebrated. Now matter how you choose to give, thank you in advance for your generosity, and thank you for the other expressions of generosity you share outside of your finances, such as your time, your energy, and acts of service.

Musical Offering

Gabe Gebhard

***Song**

Hymn of Promise

Hymnal 707

***Benediction**