

## **“Blessed”**

### **Matthew 5:1-12**

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain;  
and after he sat down, his disciples came to him.

Then 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 righteousness’ sake,  
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.

## **“Blessed”**

Matthew 5:1-12

February 1, 2026

Rev. Michael P. Catanzaro

(Communion Sunday, Annual Congregational Meeting)

### **I.**

This morning we find Jesus delivering what has come to be known as the Sermon On The Mount, which is unique to Matthew’s Gospel, though something akin to the shorter, so called, “Sermon on the Plain” is found in Luke’s Gospel. Prior to this, Matthew relates how John the Baptist emerged from the wilderness preaching a gospel of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Then, the much heralded Jesus appears, and is himself baptized by John, and the spirit of God descends upon him and a voice from heaven declares, this is my son in whom I am well pleased. Immediately after this Jesus is led by that same spirit into the wilderness for 40 days, just as the people of Israel had struggled 40 years in the wilderness. Soon after Jesus calls Peter, Andrew, James and John to be his disciples and to become fishers of people.

### **II.**

With the stage set, Jesus then embarks on his ministry by going throughout Galilee teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the arrival of God’s Kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. The result is that great crowds begin to follow Jesus from Galilee, to Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan. Then, one day, Jesus looked out upon the crowds, and like Moses going up Mt. Sinai to receive the 10 Commandments (or “the Law”) Jesus went up the mountain to speak of, and teach, the old Law in a new way: Not what *Thou Shall* and *Shall Not Do*, but that *Blessed Are*, so *A Blessing We Must Be*.

### **III.**

Whenever Jesus talks about the Kingdom of God it is never some far off or fantastical thing. Rather, that is is imminently real and astoundingly near. So much so, that by these virtues alone the Kingdom of God elicits in us a demand for change, or repentance, as the only available option that remains. This week, through our scripture reading from Matthew chapter 5, we begin to see the picture that Jesus paints of what that change will look like.

The Sermon on the Mount articulates seven distinct features of character which are internal and active and exhibited *by* the believer; and, depending on how you count, 1 or 2 passive and external circumstances which are visited *upon* the believer. The seven features of character are poverty of spirit, mournfulness, meekness, the hunger and thirst for righteousness, mercifulness, purity in heart, and peacemaking. The two circumstances are a general, persecution for righteousness sake, and, more specifically, being reviled, persecuted and having false and evil things uttered against you on account of Jesus/Christ.

#### IV.

Just as the 10 Commandments formed the basis of religious life for the descendants of Abraham, so, too, these eight blessings, or Beatitudes, will form the basis of religious life for the followers of Christ. In other words, these are the changes which are to be made because of the Kingdom drawing near. Suffice to say, the Sermon on the Mount is the basic structural framework of life in God's realm. Given this, I would like to ensure that we have a correct understanding of *each* beatitude. Now, we talk about a lot of things on Sunday, but these beatitudes are the meat on the bones, they matter a great deal. Not just to our humble spiritual community here on the Park but, also, to the world beyond us.

#### V.

Before we do this, however, first understand that the word "blessed" as used by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount denotes happiness. Not a happiness that comes from an external source but, instead a happiness that arises from within.

**Blessed are the poor in spirit.** Happy are those who are truly humble, those who are aware of and accept their own weakness, frailty, mortality, and sinfulness. Those who whatever their outward situation in life may be, however affluent and exalted, think modestly of themselves, and neither desire human praise, nor covet high things in the world, but are content with the lot God assigns them, however low or poor. To these belong the Kingdom of Heaven because the knowledge which they have of themselves, and their humility of soul before God, prepare them for the reception of Christ to dwell and reign in their hearts.

## VI.

**Blessed are those who mourn.** Happy are those who empathize with, and feel, at an emotional, heart-wrenching level not just their own spiritual poverty but, more importantly, the spiritual poverty of their neighbor and our world. Those who are steadily and constantly serious, those who are watchful, circumspect, and honest about the pain and suffering brought about by our spiritual poverty. To these is the promise of comfort, of solace, which comes with the forgiveness of sins, that the grief which springs forth in the world and the grief which inhabits own hearts, will be assuaged and, finally, healed through the grace of that forgiveness.

## VII.

**Blessed are the meek.** Happy are those who have a gentle, quiet and forgiving spirit. Those who are slow to anger, and neither resent injury or return evil for evil but who, by their sweetness, affability, and courteousness endeavor to seek reconciliation and who, in their patience, keep possession of their own souls. To these is the promise of the inheritance of the earth because while not immune to the calamities of life, such afflictions and trials are not fed or fueled by resentment. Instead, they are diminished and disarmed by a quiet spirit and a contented mind which chooses, instead, to savor the sweetness and comfort of God's providence.

## VIII.

**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.** Happy are those whose deepest cravings are to live in right relationship with God, who desire, more than anything, not power or prosperity, but pardon and peace. To these who yearn, the cross will fill them to overflowing; slaking their thirst with holiness of heart and satiating their hunger with absolution of the soul.

**Blessed are the merciful.** Happy are those who are tender-hearted, compassionate, kind, and always willing to forgive the faults of others. Those who understand another person's misery as their own, who weep over the calamities of others, and use their utmost endeavors to relieve and comfort others. To these who offer mercy, knowing that need and granting forgiveness shall, themselves, be shown the same from God. As ye sow, so shall thee reap.

## IX.

**Blessed are the pure in heart.** Happy are those who see only God and look beyond their own vain thoughts, self-will, and discontent. Who have a conscience purged of impatience, envy, and ambition, and who are not judged by outward acts but, rather, by an inward moral simplicity. To those who seek such a pure heart, to them will be given the ability to see God not only in the wonders of creation, in the providence of events, in the grace found in the vicissitudes of this life but, also, face to face in the hereafter.

**Blessed are the peacemakers.** Happy are those who are more than peaceful in demeanor but, moreover, seek to energetically promote peace in others and mend the peace when it is broken. Those who study to be quiet and, as much as it falls to them, live peacefully with others and the creation. These shall be the called. Owned by God as divine children, they will be perfected and made whole.

## X.

**Blessed are those who are persecuted reviled and falsely accused for the sake of Christ.** Happy are those who bear the truth of their faith and suffer not for their opinions, but for their right conduct which reflects a beautiful character. Those who are truly humble, feel empathy for the world, yearn for righteousness, act with mercy, see the face of God in all things and every person, possess a pious heart, and understand that the only peace which is possible is that which we are willing to make. To these is given the Kingdom of Heaven. Not just as a great reward, but as the means by which the Kingdom is *created*, the process in which the Kingdom is *attained*, and the practice through which the Kingdom is *enjoyed*.

## XI.

I have no desire to project my anxieties and doubts upon all of you this morning, but speaking for myself, I am struggling *mightily* these days, way down, *deep* in my soul. Not just about the state of the world, but about what, if anything, we can do, in actuality, to attend to it. I maintain my hope for virtuous government, wise leadership, benevolent action, generous sensibilities and the goodness of humanity. I admit, though, I am no more *hopeful* now than I have ever been. Perhaps even less so. I have a sense of foreboding. I am not crippled by it. It does not render me unable to function or unable to find purpose or joy in life, but neither does such purpose and joy

assuage the nagging ache I feel in my soul that *something* is amiss. Perhaps people in every age feel this too, I do not know. However, I have the sense that such a feeling has a greater consequence now than ever before.

## **XII.**

If we, as a society, as a nation, and as a world community, have, indeed, reached a tipping point, let us have the insight to recognize, the wisdom to admit, and the courage not to ignore that even *at* a tipping point, we can still tip in any direction. Certainly toward that which is evil but, also, toward that which is good. Perhaps, now more than ever before, it precisely *because* we have reached *such* a precarious tipping point, a magnificently unique moment has arrived when our actions might be so amplified as to actually allow the chance for real change. Perhaps the picture Jesus paints for us in the Sermon on the Mount, is the image of the Kingdom of *Heaven* come so near, it is seen as a tipping point here on *earth*. And, perhaps, the very things which will have the power to tip us to the good, so as to finally usher in the Kingdom of Heaven, are our humility, empathy, righteousness, mercy, purity of heart, and peace-making.

## **XIII.**

Be warned, however, and have no doubt that as the prophets before us were persecuted, so too will we be persecuted for uttering such things on account of Christ. We no longer live in a world based on what *Thou Shall* and *Thou Shall Not Do*, Instead we live in a world where *Blessed Are*, so *A Blessing we MUST Be*. So, then, turn with me to the insert in the bulletin and let us begin to speak, and teach the world, saying:

Blessed are you the poor in spirit, for ours is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you who mourn, for we will be comforted.

Blessed are you the meek, for we will inherit the earth.

Blessed are you who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for we will be filled.

Blessed are you the merciful, for we will receive mercy.

Blessed are you the pure in heart, for we will see God.

Blessed are you the peacemakers, for we will be called children of God.

Blessed are you who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for ours is the  
kingdom of heaven.

Amen.