

Matthew 5:1-12

NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION UPDATED EDITION

5 When Jesus saw **THE CROWDS**, he went up the **MOUNTAIN**, and after he sat down, **HIS DISCIPLES** came to him. ² And he began to speak and taught them, saying:

³ “**BLESSED** are the **poor in spirit**,
FOR theirs is the **kingdom** of heaven.

⁴ “**BLESSED** are those who mourn,
FOR they will be comforted.

⁵ “**BLESSED** are the meek,
FOR they will inherit the earth.

⁶ “**BLESSED** are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
FOR they will be filled.

⁷ “**BLESSED** are the merciful,
FOR they will receive mercy.

⁸ “**BLESSED** are the pure in heart,
FOR they will see God.

⁹ “**BLESSED** are the peacemakers,
FOR they will be called children of God.

¹⁰ “**BLESSED** are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness,
FOR theirs is the **kingdom** of heaven.

¹¹ “**BLESSED** are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

¹² Rejoice and be glad, FOR your reward is great in heaven, FOR in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

Matthew is one of four gospels – telling the story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth and his teachings. Matthew is the only one of the four to include today’s text and the larger sermon on the mount (Chapters 5 to 7).

The nine beatitudes are spoken in the present, moving to the future. Concrete language about what God is already doing, not pie-in-the-sky wishes. Notice how the first 8 are “blessed are those...” and the 9th changes to the more directed “blessed are YOU.”

THE CROWDS.. HIS DISCIPLES:: He has a double audience – those on the outside, looking in or checking him out and those who have committed to his teaching and way of life. The whole sermon is then both a call to conversation/faith and a deepening teaching of spiritual maturity and formation.

to speak and taught them:: He continues the message of the “god news of God’s coming kingdom” in 4:17 and 4:23 – mentioned in 5:3.

MOUNTAIN :: these are holy places – think of the stories around the encounter of God on mountain tops (the burning bush, the giving of the 10 commandments, Elijah on the mountain, and visions of Isaiah 2; 25 and Micah 4). Think too of Mt Olympus for the Greeks.

BLESSED:: teaching with beatitudes was a form widely used in the Greco-Roman world and Jewish wisdom and apocalyptic writings. They concern not just emotions, but primarily God’s favor for certain human actions and situations. They declare God’s transformation or reversal of present dismal circumstances. They are directed to present and future ages. (Warren, p. 130)

poor in spirit:: these are the literal, physical poor, the destitute, those who live in social and economic hardship, lacking adequate resources, exploited and oppressed by the powerful and despised by the elite. They include the stranger, the orphan, the widow, the needy, the physically maimed and powerless. (Lev 19:10, 15; Proverbs 14:31| 28:15; Deuteronomy 24:19). Then there is poverty in the spirit, the spirit is like economic poverty: without resources and hope, subject to larger forces. (Warren, p. 131)

kingdom:: in Greek the word βασιλεία pronounced “basileia” (from where we get “basilica”) means kingdom, empire, dominion, or reign...it’s both a geographic space and a way of being not defined to one space.

The focus of Jesus' teaching concerns the "good news of God's empire/reign (kingdom)". The sermon is not, though, a comprehensive manual or rule book, nor a step-by-step "how to" book. Rather it offers a series of illustrations, or "for examples," or "case studies" of life in God's empire, visions of the identity and the way of life that result from encountering God's present and future reign. The sermon is direction-pointing, more than giving commands, suggestive and illustrative rather than comprehensive. Jesus' subsequent discourses and actions will elaborate this vision of life in God's empire.

The scenes in Matthew 4:17-25 have indicated that God's empire, present in a world dominated by Pax Romana, is disruptive and transformative. The sermon sketches an alternative world marked not by oppression but by restructured societal relationships, and by redistributed and accessible resources. It resocializes disciples into a world of justice which differs from their previous life and which conflicts and contrasts with the values, commitments, and practices of the majority who have not encountered it."

In grasping the audience's imagination with these scenarios, the sermon shaped the perspective, practices, and character of the community of disciples, training them to discern and live in ways faithful to and imitative of the reign's just presence and future. Given that these commitments and practices often differ from current cultural practices, the sermon portrays and invites its audience to a voluntarily marginal way of life as a minority community."

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & EXAMEN:

- What engaged you, enraged you, or surprised you in these texts?
- What questions are you left with as you hear this reading? What is unclear to you; mysterious; hard to believe?
- Jesus talks about blessed life and blessing in the here and now (not just in the then and there of the text). How have you experienced the truth of God's transformative kingdom in your life?; in our community life together?
- The kingdom of God that Jesus announces and brings is also portrayed as where the last are first, and the first last (Matthew 20:16); where the blind see, the deaf hear, and the lame dance (Matthew 11:5-7) – how is this good news disruptive and transformative of the way in which our world usually operates and invites us to be together? When? Where? How have you tasted the good news of God's kingdom disrupting the status quo or *modus operandi* of our world?
- What invitation do you hear the Spirit of God speaking to you – *or to us, as a church* – to act, speak, be, or change, through this word of scripture?