

Epiphany 4 , January 29, 2017
Beatitudes - Blessings
Micah 6:1-8; Psalm 15; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; Matthew 5:1-12
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Fellow Ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,
Gracia y paz de dios del Padre, Hijo, y Espiritu Santo
Grace to you and peace from God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Count your blessings. A common trope of my childhood. Parents admonished their children with this phrase. Pastors comforted the sick, the dying and the grieving with this phrase. Had bumper stickers been a thing, it would have been seen everywhere.

We give thanks to God for our many blessings. What do we mean by this word, blessings? What do we count as blessings? Home, family, a good job, good health, peaceful neighborhoods? Jesus invites us to consider blessings in a radically different way. What we hear Jesus saying is foolishness to our 21st century ears. It sounded foolish to those who heard it the first time.

To be blessed is to be in favor with God.

In these first sayings of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus begins to tell the newly called disciples and us what it means to be disciples, followers of the Way.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. Jesus is not speaking of economic deprivation. He speaks of a deep acknowledgment of our spiritual dependency on God.

Blessed are those who mourn. Not those who seek comfort at the loss of a loved one. Instead, a broader sense of grief. Grief over the wrongs and sufferings of the world.

Blessed are the meek. What does it mean to be meek? A doormat? A wallflower? No! Meekness as in a quiet, gentle, obedient servant of God's will. To be meek is to humble our own will to God's will for the world.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Those who hunger and thirst after God's will for justice on the earth. Those who seek justice for the poor, sick and alone are blessed.

Blessed are the merciful, they will receive mercy. God's mercy is extended to everyone! All who receive God's mercy are called to give mercy to others.

Blessed are the pure in heart. Those who seek God's will for creation will see God...now...today.

Blessed are the peacemakers. Those who seek to bring about reconciliation are blessed. Those who work to heal brokenness wherever they see it will be called the children of God.

Even the peaceful protesters on the streets of Portland are peacemakers. Peace is the nature of God's work in the world. God's favor . . . blessing . . . rests on those who suffer persecution because of their loyalty to God's rule.

The Beatitudes should redefine our idea of what it means to be blessed by God. The world counts its blessings by counting its wealth and possessions. For the next few weeks we will be immersed in Jesus's teachings on the mountain. We will come face to face with what the world expects of us and compare that with what Jesus expects of us.

Who are the blessed ones of God? For Micah, they are those who do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. For Paul, they are the ones who find wisdom in the weakness of the cross. For Jesus, they are the poor, the mourners, the meek, those who hunger for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers.

Born into Christ in the waters of baptism we need not be consumed by the alternative facts of this world. We know the truth that sets us free to be inhabitants of the alternative world that is God's kingdom on earth.

We are easily distracted by the siren call of merit-based blessing. But God calls us back with a litany of steadfastness – God's unbroken covenant relationship that is in need of repair on our part.

It is true, we face enormous struggles and dangers, just like the children of Israel did. War, dangerous weather, hatred, political systems that favor some and toss others aside, individual leaders who are deaf to the cries of the people and economic systems that oppress the vulnerable.

We are no better, no wiser and no more civilized in this century than the hearers of Jesus words. To believe that we are is foolishness.

Jesus calls us to be fools for the gospel. Jesus calls us to advocate for those who cannot advocate for themselves. Jesus calls us to be the peacemakers and the merciful. It is hard work. But God has blessed us. And if WE get to receive God's favor, free of charge, then we must stand up to the Empire, the system and say immigrant lives matter, black lives matter, women's lives matter, LGBTQ lives matter, drug addict lives matter . . . the list is endless.

We are called to be allies with those who have no seat at the table. Blessed be God that all are invited to this table where Jesus comes to us in the bread and wine filling us with God's justice, mercy and humility.

The obedience demanded in today's biblical proclamation must be understood as a response to God's favor, not as an effort to gain greater blessing. All of creation is blessed by God. All of creation is loved by God. These are the facts! Facts that are radically alternative to what the world would have us believe.

Status, possessions, health, well-being, family, citizenship, none of these are God's blessings. God's blessings are inclusion and unity, not exclusion and division. No wonder God's blessings are foolishness to the world.

Let's go be fools!

Thanks be to God!