

Sunday, February 1, 2026

Epiphany 4A

Matthew 5:1-12

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

"Achoo!"

"God Bless you!"

My Friends,

Someone sneezes, and we say, "God bless you."

The words pass by quickly.

So quickly, we do not even know what they mean.

In our Gospel Reading, Jesus slows things down.

He slows things down so that we see the beauty of God's blessing.

God's blessing claims our present moment with the grace of eternity.

God claims our present moment.

When someone sneezes, and you say,

"God bless you!",

what is going on?

Are you commanding them?

Are you advising them?

Are you laying expectations on them?

Instinctually, we understand that a blessing is something given.

Blessing is not something earned.

Blessing is God's mercy entering our lives.

But often, when Jesus says,

"Blessed are..." we try to turn it into a checklist.

The beatitudes are not a list of Christian virtues
we are meant to endeavour to attain.

They are Christ responding to the sin-sick sneezing of His people.

This is God entering the lives of the broken and suffering.

God is entering their lives and claiming them as His own.

*"Seeing the crowds, [Jesus] went up on the mountain,
and when He sat down,
His disciples came to Him.
And He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:
"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:1–3)*

I.

My friends,
The poor in spirit are blessed.

But who are the poor in spirit?

They are not the morally lazy.
They are not indifferent to God.
No.

They are those whose piety has driven them to honesty.
Those who take God's Law seriously.
And because they take it seriously,
they know they do not meet its demands.

They come to God with empty hands.
Not because they refuse to give.
But because they have nothing to offer.

The poor in spirit are those who know the truth.
They do not have what God requires.

The contrast is the Pharisees.

The Pharisees were rich in self-spirituality.
Satisfied with self-righteousness.
Confident in their obedience.
At least outwardly.

They appeared to take the Law seriously.
 But they emptied it of its power.
 They reduced God's Law to manageable rules.
 Rules that a person could follow—
 if you had the right position,
 the right resources,
 the right privilege.

They focused on controllable behaviours.
 And ignored the heart.

This is still how the sinful nature works.
 The heart cannot be tamed.
 It cannot be reformed.
 It is, as Scripture says, desperately sick.

God says, "You shall not lust."
 But making rules about skirt lengths is far easier.
 Making a rule to never go to the theatre or watch TV is easier.
 We prefer rules we can measure.
 Rules we can check off.

And with enough rules, you can feel spiritually wealthy.

But the heart remains unchanged.
 No human rule can reach it.

Jesus says,
*"From within,
 out of the heart of man,
 come evil thoughts,
 sexual immorality,
 theft, murder, adultery,
 coveting, wickedness, deceit,
 sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.
 All these evil things come from **within**,
 and they defile a person."*

The rules that the self-righteous esteem are all about what is without.
They can't handle what's within.

In Jesus' day, everyone assumed the Pharisees were blessed.
They were successful.
Respected.
Religious.

And the poor in spirit looked at them and thought, "I will never belong."
But Jesus says the opposite.

To the poor in spirit, the quiet ones in the land,
Jesus says, "You are blessed."

And He gives a promise.
"Theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Present tense.
Now!
Not someday.
Now!

Not "if you improve."
Not "when you get better."

Jesus gives the kingdom now.
Forgiveness.
Belonging.
Righteousness.
An inheritance.

To those who have nothing,
He gives everything.

II.

My friends,

These Beatitudes are one blessing with many descriptions.

Jesus is not naming eight different kinds of people.

He is not giving us a ladder to climb.

He is circling the same crowd,
describing them again and again.

These are His disciples, seen from different angles.

These blessed ones are Christ's Church.

This is what life looks like under the cross.

Jesus does not wait for us to get our lives in order.

He does not tell us to power through difficulties.

He does not demand spiritual strength.

No.

He comes to us as we are.

He comes into a world full of sin and sorrow.

A world of mourning, injustice, and persecution.

And His people come to Him with broken lives.

And Jesus receives them.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit."

We come with empty hands.

As the hymn says, "Nothing in my hand I bring."

And into those empty hands,

Jesus places the kingdom of heaven.

Christ alone supplies the Law's demands.

"Blessed are those who mourn."

We come grieving to Jesus.
 We grieve the broken world.
 We grieve our own sin.

We carry the wounds of loss, death, and failed dreams.
 But we are blessed.
 For Christ will comfort His Church.

"Blessed are the meek."

We come to Jesus in humility.
 We do not seize power.
 We do not trust politics or force.
 We entrust ourselves to Christ.
 We serve under the cross.
 And in the end,
 everything that belongs to Christ is ours.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness."

The Church takes God's commands seriously.
 We truly want to live as Christians.
 And so we see how much we lack.
 We come to Jesus, starving for righteousness.
 And with **His** righteousness,
 we are satisfied.

"Blessed are the merciful."

Those who live from mercy now live mercifully.

"Blessed are the pure in heart."

Not by effort.
 But by confession and baptism.
 Washed by grace, we shall see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers."

Christ has reconciled us to God.

And now we speak that peace to others.

For we are His children,

and He has "[*entrusted*] to us the message of reconciliation."

(2 Corinthians 5:17–19)

"Blessed are the persecuted."

Because they belong to Christ, the world rejects us.

Our blessing is hidden.

But it is real.

For ours—right now—is the kingdom of heaven.

III.

My friends,

God's blessing—His happiness—

is for the broken and destitute.

It is for the poor in spirit.

Because they are the ones

Jesus identifies with.

In His baptism, Jesus does not stand with the righteous.

He steps into the river with sinners.

He takes His place among those confessing their sin.

He numbers Himself with the poor in spirit.

And in those waters,

Jesus claims them as His own.

Throughout His ministry,

He is surrounded by the poor,

the sick,

the neglected and the rejected.

Jesus does not bless from afar.

He sits in their midst.

He opens His mouth.

And He speaks.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

We must remember who is speaking.

This is the Eternal Son of God.

The One through whom the world was made.

The One who upholds the universe

by the Word of His power. (Hebrews 1:2-3)

His Word creates.

His Word sustains.

And this Word says, "You are blessed."

Therefore, it is so.

Jesus says the kingdom is yours.

You shall be comforted.

You shall inherit the earth.

You shall be satisfied with righteousness.

You shall receive mercy.

You shall see God.

You shall be called sons of God.

These are not wishes.

They are declarations.

The Lord of eternity speaks the riches of eternity

into the poverty of our present.

There is a time to mourn.
A time to suffer.
A time to die.

Jesus enters those times.
And He will bring them to an end.

For Jesus did not only stand with sinners.
He died for sinners.

Jesus became the truly poor one.
He hungered and thirsted for us.
In meekness, He bore persecution for our "righteousness' sake."
On the cross, Jesus endured the deepest poverty of spirit.

"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

Jesus took our punishment on Himself.
He died under our failed dreams.
He died under our lost hopes.
He carried our infirmities.
And He transformed it all in His resurrection.

Because of Jesus, the dead do not remain dead.
They rise and live in Him.

This is the comfort of those who mourn.
This is the blessing of the poor in spirit.

In His resurrection, Jesus promises His Kingdom will come.
The mourning will be comforted,
the hungry will be satisfied,
and the peacemakers will be called Children of God.

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My friends,
The beatitudes do not ask,
"are you good enough?"

Christ's blessings declare mercy to those who don't deserve it.
The beatitudes proclaim grace to those God loves.

To the poor in spirit,
Jesus does not say,
"try harder, earn some dough."
He says,
"Yours is the kingdom of heaven."

Christ's blessings do not wait for improvement or effort.
They come with Christ.

Blessed are you,
not because you have climbed your way to God,
but because God in Christ has come
all the way down to you.

*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
Amen.*