



Blessed to be a Blessing  
 Rev. Dr. Glenda Hollingshead; March 1, 2026  
 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Lent  
 Micah 6:6-8; Matthew 5:7-12

Last Sunday, we began a journey into Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, exploring why these teachings—so central to the heart of Jesus—still feel both radical and necessary today. We noticed how Jesus begins not with rules or condemnation, but with blessing—spoken from the bottom up, to people living within rigid hierarchies and real hardship. The Beatitudes, we heard, are not sentimental slogans or impossible ideals, but an invitation into a new way of life—God's dream for a new world—where grace is given freely and justice, humility, and compassion shape our common life. Today, we continue with Jesus' words of blessing, listening again for how we are called not only to receive blessing, but to become a blessing for others.

Let's start with our reading from Micah. The prophet's words are aimed at a people who, like us, wonder what God *really* wants. Do we give more? Do we try harder? Jump through more religious hoops? But the prophet cuts through all the noise with stunning simplicity: God has already told

you what is good—*do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with your God*. Micah reminds us that faith is not measured by religious performance or grand gestures of devotion. Faith is measured by how we live—how we treat our neighbors, how we hold power, how we show up with compassion and humility in a hurting world. And that brings us back to Jesus and the Beatitudes. Because what Micah names in prophecy and poetry, Jesus names in blessing. When Jesus says, “Blessed are the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake,” he is not offering a new list of virtues. He is describing what it looks like to *do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God*. The Beatitudes are not abstract ideals. They are Micah 6:8 embodied. They are what blessing looks like when it takes form in a community that chooses mercy over vengeance, peace over domination, humility over self-importance, and justice over comfort.

So today, we consider the remaining Beatitudes as an invitation to receive God’s blessing—and to become a blessing in return.

### **Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.**

In his book, *Jesus’ Plan for a New World: the Sermon on the Mount*, Richard Rohr explains that mercy, by definition, cannot be earned. If it could be earned, it wouldn’t be mercy. Forgiveness is the whole gospel—God’s love given freely, without transaction, without worthiness or achievement. It’s the end of all buying and selling in the temple of our hearts.

Rohr admits that he once imagined God’s mercy as patient tolerance, or a reluctant pardon. But as the years passed, he began to see mercy as God’s very nature—God breaking God’s own rules in love, reaching for us with joy even in the midst of our failures, inviting us into grace. Mercy, then, is not weakness. It is God’s radical refusal to dominate, control, or withhold love. And when we receive that mercy—truly receive it—it changes us. A lifetime of forgiveness allows us to become mercy—that’s the Beatitude. So, when Jesus stands on the hillside and says, “*Blessed are the merciful*,” he is naming the family resemblance of God’s children. To be merciful is to look like God. To practice mercy is to practice the divine life.<sup>i</sup>

### **Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.**

Here, Jesus links the heart and our seeing. When the heart is clear, our vision is clear. When the heart is clouded by resentment, shame, or the desire to wound, we cannot see rightly—neither God nor one another. Jesus calls us to purity of heart—not as a moral perfection, but as a cleansing of vision—because when our hearts are made whole by love, we begin to see God everywhere and in everyone. And when we truly see God, our hearts, too, are filled with light. So, to be pure in heart is to have eyes softened by grace, so that the world shines again with the presence of God.<sup>ii</sup>

### **Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.**

This is the only time the Bible uses the word peacemaker—a literal reconciler of quarrels. Here, Jesus stands on the side of nonviolence, insisting that the means and the ends must be one. There is no path to peace except through peacemaking itself. Too often, the world mistakes control for peace. Empires call it *Pax Romana*. In ancient Rome, those who lived in the city *believed* they had peace—life felt stable, orderly, secure—to those at the top of the heap. But, down through the ages, do we have any idea how much oppression and slavery, how much torture and killing, how many lives have been crushed on the margins of every empire so that those at the center could claim they had peace? Those who benefit most from a false peace are the least likely to recognize its cost.

In his sermon, Jesus defines peace differently. We call it the *Pax Christi*—the peace of Christ. In the remaining Beatitudes, Jesus will show how this peace is inseparable from justice and self-sacrifice. While the *Pax Romana* enforces a false peace by sacrificing others, the *Pax Christi* pursues true peace by surrendering our hunger for power, prestige, possessions. This way of peace will never become national policy. It will never be championed by political parties. It will never be popular. It turns out that following Jesus as a peacemaker means you'll usually be in the minority — living for God's kingdom in a world that still believes power and control will save us.<sup>iii</sup>

**Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

Make no mistake, when you work outside the system, you will not be admired. In fact, you may be seen as dangerous, subversive, unpatriotic. It's funny. Jesus was called a lot of things by those who felt threatened by him—a glutton, a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. But one thing they could never call Jesus was a patriot.<sup>iv</sup> Because he was not interested in supporting *Pax Romana*. He was bent on naming a far larger world, a kingdom that transcends borders, powers, and human allegiance. In reality, persecution for the cause of justice is inevitable, yet notice what comes next.

**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.**

There are some who say that this might be considered the ninth Beatitude, but most scholars agree that it is an explanation of the previous one. Herein, Jesus points out that it matters how his followers respond to being mistreated. When believers who are committed to the way of Jesus live with joy and courage even under persecution, the world may not understand—the world may hate us for it—but the world *will* take notice. Living the Beatitudes out loud is risky business. But still, we press on, because our lives are in the gracious hands of God. Surely, there is no safer place to be.

When we sit with them long enough, the Beatitudes begin to reshape how we understand power—God’s power and our own. Holy power looks like vulnerability, mercy, humility, and courage. When we grieve with the one who sits in the hospital waiting room, when we choose kindness over control, when we refuse to accept injustice as normal, when we forgive even if revenge feels easier, when we walk into conflict without weapons, when we build bridges where others build walls—then we bear the family resemblance of God. This is God’s kingdom breaking in—shaped by grace, where love has the final word. This is the upside-down gospel of Jesus. And in this gospel, we are named and sent—blessed to be a blessing—for the sake of the world God so deeply loves—God’s dream unfolding, here among us, now and forever. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Richard Rohr, *Jesus’ Plan for a New World: The Sermon on the Mount*, 136-138.

<sup>ii</sup> *Ibid.*, 138-139.

<sup>iii</sup> *Ibid.*, 139-141.

<sup>iv</sup> *Ibid.*

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