

Sermon draft for February 1, 2026

Text: Matthew 5:1-12

Sermon: “Blessed”

Have you ever been “blessed” with something you didn’t necessarily consider a blessing—red hair, freckles, greater than average height? At first sight, that’s how one might see the blessings in the Sermon on the Mount.

The word for today’s worship is “Blessed.” “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 those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,” and so on. These blessings, the Beatitudes, are some of Jesus’ most famous words. And, indeed, they remind us this day that we saints have been blessed beyond belief.

It was a sunny day, not a cloud to be seen. I was driving. As I looked out the windshield, large expanses of farmland were on either side. Suddenly, a flock of birds lifted from the ground. They travelled from one side of the highway to the other, but it was not as simple as that.

When they lifted from the ground, they did so in a beautiful formation. Rather than taking a direct route, they flew circles and half circles, rising like smoke in the air. They curved one way and then another, folding in upon themselves. One moment they were fluid and elongated, and the next they contracted into a ball. When they landed on the other side of the highway, the sky looked lonely, longing for the beauty that had recently been there.

I continued driving, but I was struck by the beauty I had seen. Something as simple as crossing from one field to another could be filled with such wonder.

That is what I hope happens as people encounter our gospel reading this morning. In the opening words of our Lord's sermon on the mount, He reveals how an eternal grace takes us from one place to the other. His blessing is filled with the movement from now to not yet. The mourning will be comforted, the meek will inherit, and the hungering will be satisfied. Everything will be changed. And in that simple transition, there is great beauty. In that change is grace. Jesus reveals the splendor of God's blessing.

Someone sneezes and we say, “God bless you.” The words pass by so quickly, we do not even know what they mean. In our gospel reading this morning, Jesus slows things down so that, suddenly, we are aware of the beauty of God’s blessing.

God’s blessing claims our present moment with the grace of eternity. God claims our present moment. Part of the beauty of the text is that Jesus takes the world as He finds it. Jesus is not asking people to get into shape in order to be His disciples, to muscle up and power through whatever difficulties their life provides. No, He claims the world as it is. He has come into a world filled with sin and suffering, marrying and mourning, injustice and survival, persecution and plenty... and He takes the world as it is. He is traveling around Galilee and people are following. They come from the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and even beyond the Jordan. They bring their broken lives with them. And Jesus receives them. Why? Because He has come to claim them as His own. When John the Baptizer was calling people to a baptism of repentance, Jesus entered in.

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Jesus not only claims our present moment, but He does so with the grace of eternity. The beatitudes are filled with promises of future blessing.

Those who are mourning will continue to mourn. Their days will pass slowly and memories, if not handled carefully, will cut like a knife, but... in the end... they will be comforted.

Those who are hungering and thirsting for righteousness will still burn with a holy zeal for God. They will continue to see poverty and injustice where others see a life of bad choices that reaps what it sows. They will walk in the halls of justice and cry out in the places of power, but... in the end... they will be satisfied.

The peacemakers will still hit it hard against years of angered silence. They will try to live honestly in places where betrayals have broken community. They leave lines in the sand that are easier to live with than to speak with hope, but... in the end... they will be called children of God.

The writer of Ecclesiastes tells us there is a time for everything. There is a time to be born and a time to die, a time to laugh and a time to mourn, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing. Jesus is the Lord of eternity and brings us from the times of this world into the eternity of His blessing.

Jesus can do this because He has travelled along the road with us. He has identified with sinners, not only in His baptism, but also in His death. Taking our punishment upon Himself, dying under our failed dreams, our lost hopes, our unrewarded efforts, and He has transformed all of that in His resurrection from the dead. The dead do not stay dead. They rise and live in Him.

And, in His resurrection, Jesus promises us that His Kingdom will come. The mourning will be comforted, the hungry will be satisfied, and the peacemakers will be called children of God.

Every once in a while, as we journey, God startles us with promised beauty. As we drive through the winter of our discontent, seeing fields that are barren and cold, Jesus awakens us to what things will be in His eternal Kingdom. Suddenly, the barren landscape, becomes a place of beautiful transition, and the God who holds even the birds in His hands will bring us from this world to our eternal home.

To Christ belong all blessings. And so, to us in Christ also belong his blessings! To the believer in Christ belongs the kingdom of heaven, the comfort of salvation, the inheritance of the earth, the fullness of righteousness, the mercy of the Father as exhibited in Christ's resurrection, the right to see God, the right to be called a child of God.

Amen