

The Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

February 1, 2026

Text: Matthew 5:1-12

*“Blessed by the King”*

Jesus’ ministry of preaching, teaching and miraculous deeds demonstrated that He is the Christ, God’s promised King. His mighty words and acts, like the rising sun, cast bright beams of heavenly light to chase away the darkness that had hung over Galilee for so long. Crowds of people showed up to hear and see Him in action, and Jesus served them.

This morning, from our Lord’s royal teaching, we heard the Beatitudes. Jesus headed each of its nine statements with the word, “Blessed.” He first gave this teaching to His disciples, those from the crowds who had heard His call to follow Him. They had begun to trust Him. Through Beatitudes, Jesus teaches us as well. He describes the life of faith that rests upon His saving promises.

“Blessed, blessed, blessed; blessed, blessed, blessed; blessed, blessed, and, yes, you guessed it, blessed.” Jesus’ words overflow with the promise of good for those who believe in and follow Him. But what have we done to deserve such divine blessing? Do the beatitudes themselves teach us how we ought to merit such blessing from God in heaven? Some have thought so. Inspired by these words, men and women have devoted themselves to lives of poverty, separation from life in the world, and all manner of self-denial. More recently, others have heard the beatitudes as

Christ's mandate to His Church to work to bring heaven to this earth by advocating for social justice and peace upon it.

But are these responses to the beatitudes really fitting? Are they Christ's marching orders for His followers? Jesus uses grammar that describes life under God's reign, rather than explicitly prescribing it. He speaks not of what should be, but of what, in fact, is, not by our efforts to make it so, but by His royal pronouncement. The beatitudes paint us a picture of life given by Christ to those who live under the reign of God in repentance and faith.

We will consider them today in related pairs. First, Jesus said, *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* Then, *"Blessed are those that mourn, for they shall be comforted."* Jesus declares blessed people who live in two states or conditions that do not seem so blessed in eyes of the world. "Poor in spirit" describes all people since the fall into sin. We have nothing to offer God, the Father of all spirits. Sin corrupts our powers of reason, and it drives us to obsessively pursue our desires, though they are often selfish and harmful. None of us know God truly; we misplace our trust in things that ultimately disappoint us and further estrange us from our Creator.

Jesus' words introduce to us this unpleasant truth: we are spiritual paupers. We may reject or discount this, but our attempts to defend ourselves from the truth prove self-destructive. Long ago, through Isaiah,

God promised a Servant who would preach good news to the poor (Isaiah 61), and Jesus does just that for us in His first beatitude. It is as if Jesus says to us, “Dear child, I see what sin has done to you. Nothing you do can will set things right, for you haven’t that wisdom or power. Yet you are blessed because I have come to give you heavenly riches out of my royal treasury. Poor though you are, I am your King, and I will bless you forever.” This is Christ’s promise to you: He became poor like you, for you, so that He could make you rich with His forgiveness, His Spirit of grace, and His eternal salvation. So, we rejoice in Christ who deigns to be the King over paupers like us.

The recognition of our spiritual poverty also gives us grief. Though God graciously adopts us as His dear children in Baptism, somehow, we still struggle with arrogant attitudes and selfish desires. We trust that our way is best, and we demand that others fall in line with us. Our tongues speak words that slash and burn through whoever gets in their way. Though God graciously calls us saints, daily evidence mounts to show us that we remain, very much, sinners. So, we mourn. With Paul we cry, “*O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*” (Romans 7:24)

Jesus answers our cry. “*Blessed are those that mourn, for they shall be comforted.*” Now, our Lord already comforts us with His promise of daily forgiveness for our sins. “*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to*

*forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness*" (1 John 1:9). Further, Jesus promises us the eternal comfort of the bodily resurrection, for then our bodies that die will be raised to live forever free from sin and death. As often as we hear the absolution, recall God's promises to us in Baptism, and eat and drink the body and blood of our Lord, Jesus gives us His Word that we are forgiven now, and that we will continue to be forgiven for His sake until the great Day comes when forgiveness will be needed no more.

The next two beatitudes teach us more about the tension we feel as we live under the Lord's reign by faith in His promises. *"Blessed are the meek [or lowly] for they shall inherit the earth."* And then, *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied."* In this world, those who mourn for their spiritual poverty and receive Christ's royal comfort in His grace are counted as next to nothing. Wealth, power and decisive action are the accepted hallmarks greatness and fame. Meekness is weakness in the eyes of fallen humanity. But our Lord knows that those who rely upon themselves, who count themselves worthy and sufficient, are destined to be humiliated when they stand before their God. Our King, who humbled Himself to serve and save us all, has promised to exalt the humble and the meek with the gift of an eternal home when He comes as Judge to set things right in His creation.

Those who trust this promise then set their hearts, not on the earthly glories that they can acquire for themselves, but on the eternal glory that our King has promised to reveal in us at the end of this age. Though we are meek and powerless in the eyes of the world, often despised for our “foolish” faith in Christ, we trust in our King who gives us His righteousness, to make us delightful to His Father. The forgiveness we receive through God’s Word and Sacraments, awakens in us an ever increasing appetite to love and serve our Gracious Father. We hunger and thirst to live completely holy and without blame in the company our God and Father. When Jesus returns, He will satisfy us forever, for He will give us every good thing in the everlasting life that He brings.

With His third pair of beatitudes, Jesus bestows on us two names graciously define us as people of His kingdom and describe our destiny. First, Jesus calls us “the merciful”. In a parable, Jesus tells of a servant who is hopelessly indebted to his master. But the master is merciful, forgiving him his entire debt. Sadly, the servant fails to see the opportunity his master has given him. Having been saved by his master’s mercy, he has been given a new life to live, free of his crushing debt, free for bestowing on others the gift he has just received. Jesus calls us merciful because He, by His death and resurrection for us, has set us free to be merciful with each other. Under Christ’s reign, mercy is the air that we breathe in faith. It is heaven’s chinook that fills us with the hope and joy of eternal spring. *“Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy.”*

Jesus also calls us “the pure in heart.” He may have lifted that name from Psalm 24, which asks and answers the question, “*Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place?*” (Verse 3). This liturgical question may have called the Jewish High Priest to acknowledge his high calling with the reply: “*He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false*” (Verse 4). He relied upon the LORD who had prescribed the sacrifices of animals to purify him within and without for his work in the Temple.” None but the LORD of Israel could make him holy and pure.

Jesus calls us “the pure in heart” on the basis of the one for all sacrifice of Himself that He made to God the Father on our behalf. He is our High Priest before God. Jesus calls us to follow Him as priests of God, by faith fixing our eyes upon Jesus, listening to His holy Words, for only through Him can approach God’s throne now by grace. Through Him, we will finally see God, as He has promised.

A final pair of beatitudes remain. They set us apart for lives of service and suffering with Jesus. “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*” We were commissioned for life as peacemakers when we were baptized, for then we were graciously reunited with the God from whom sin had estranged us. “*Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Romans

5:1). We have peace with God, so that we can live at peace with each other: *“let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which you were called in one body”* (Colossians 3:15).

Everyone wants a peaceful life, but not necessarily the peace that God gives to the world through Jesus Christ. The weary psalmist reflects: *“Too long have I had my dwelling among those who hate peace. I am for peace, but when I speak, they are for war!”* (Psalm 120:6-7). Paul, the veteran missionary, taught the Corinthians to be ready for conflict to arise as they served the Prince of Peace: *“we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men”* (1 Corinthians 1:23-25). Upon any hardship that we may suffer as people of Christ, whether it be ridicule or slander, unkindness or violence, Christ has pronounced upon this holy benediction: *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

You and I are the blessed of King Jesus! With these precious promises He fits us to live by faith, believing that we are what He calls us, though we don’t see or always feel the truth of what He says. We are poor in spirit and mourners, and we are blessed. We are meek and hungry for things to be right and good, and we are blessed. We are merciful and pure

in heart; oh, how we are blessed by our Lord! We are peacemakers in this quarrelsome world, and we are blessed. Blessed be the name of Jesus our Lord, who, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns over us, now and forever. Amen.