

26.2.1 – “Blessed Are You”

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Text: Matthew 5:1–12

The Beatitudes are one of the most beloved passages in the Gospels, among Jesus’s most familiar teachings. For many of us, they are so familiar that we might miss how strange they really are.

The word *beatitude* comes from the Latin *beati*—blessed, happy, fortunate. *Beatitudo* means a state of blessedness. At first hearing, the Beatitudes sound gentle and comforting, like words meant to reassure us that everything is going to be okay.

But when we slow down and really listen, we discover that Jesus isn’t offering sentimental comfort at all. Rather, he’s offering a powerful reorientation to how we see the world, ourselves, and each other.

This morning we read the Beatitudes from Matthew’s Gospel. In fact, Jesus delivers these words in two different sermons: here in Matthew chapter 5, in the Sermon on the Mount, and also in Luke chapter 6:20–23, in the Sermon on the Plain. Same teacher. Same essential message. But two very different angles.

Matthew blesses the poor in spirit. Luke blesses the poor.

Matthew blesses those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Luke blesses those who are hungry now—and those who are weeping now.

Matthew’s version sounds more internal, more personal, perhaps more spiritual. Luke’s is more down-to-earth—more outward, more social, even more revolutionary.

Matthew’s version also includes blessings Luke does not: the meek, the merciful, the pure of heart, and the peacemakers. We don’t find those in Luke. Instead, Luke offers a list of woes: woe to those who are wealthy, well-fed, and well-spoken of... those who laugh now.

I invite and encourage you to read these two passages side by side and ask yourself two questions:

Which version am I drawn to more—and why?

And what might I learn from the other?

Because whichever version you read, one thing is clear: with these blessings, Jesus flips the script on our conventional wisdom.

Much of our conventional religious thinking assumes the opposite of what we hear here. Throughout scripture—especially in the wisdom literature—faithfulness is often linked with visible success. Wealth is read as God’s blessing for the righteous (Proverbs 10:22; Psalm 112:1–3). Stability is evidence that things are going the way they should (Psalm 1:1–3). A good reputation confirms that you’re on the right track.

Misfortune, on the other hand, is often assumed to be God’s judgment. Failure becomes a sign that something has gone wrong—spiritually or morally.

And Jesus stands in that tradition... and then turns it on its head.

Looking out over a crowd of people living under the oppression and occupation of an empire, he says:

“Blessed are the poor.”

“Blessed are the hungry.”

“Blessed are those who weep.”

“Blessed are you when people reject you and revile you on account of my name.”

Jesus is not describing the world as it is. He is declaring the world as God is committed to it becoming.

We are used to a retributive theology—a transactional idea of God rewarding the faithful with good things and withholding blessings from those who fall short. But Jesus offers a reversal theology. “You’ve heard it said, but I say to you...”

This stands in stark contrast to the prosperity gospel so pervasive in our country today. We tend to think of people who “have it all together” as the truly blessed ones:

- A well-paying job
- The perfect marriage
- The perfect nuclear family
- 2.5 kids and a golden retriever
- A nice house, two cars
- Time and money for vacations—and the confidence to post them
- Thin. Tan. A full head of hair

As Tevye sings in *Fiddler on the Roof*:

“It’s no shame to be poor... but it’s no great honor either.”

And if that’s our definition of blessing, Jesus would look at those folks—and at many of us—and say: *You don’t need to hear a blessing, because you’ve already received your blessings.*

But there are those who do need reminding that they are blessed.

In a sermon on this passage, ELCA pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber suggests that Jesus is doing something deeply subversive. Instead of instructing, Jesus is *pronouncing* blessing as an act of performative solidarity. The Beatitudes don’t describe who is blessed because of how holy or faithful they are. They declare who God is *for*.

In the kin-dom of heaven, God’s blessing flows toward those we might otherwise assume are cursed:

- People living in cages
- People with criminal records—or without documentation
- People whose checks bounce and credit cards are maxed out
- People without stable housing
- People living with addiction
- People with disabilities
- People with dementia
- People working three jobs and still coming up short
- Parents who feel like they're failing
- People who are neurodivergent and neuro-spicy
- People who are queer and questioning
- People unsure whether they want kids
- People unsure what they believe—or if they believe at all

Nadia says Jesus blesses the doubters, the atheists, and the agnostics.

And I know this: there are stories in this community. Stories we don't post. Stories we don't always have words for. There are people here carrying heavy burdens—for themselves, for loved ones, for children or parents they cannot fix.

There are people here who feel more cursed than blessed. Worn down. Behind. Left out. Forgotten. Like they must have done something wrong, because life keeps being so, so hard.

If that's you, I want you to hear this clearly:

You are not cursed.

You are not forgotten.

You are not a spiritual failure.

Jesus looks directly at people like you—weary, grieving, overwhelmed, unsure—and says, *Blessed are you*. Yours is the kin-dom of heaven.

Not because the pain is good.

Not because suffering is holy.

But because the Holy One is near to you, with you, right by your side, in the midst of it all.

Here's another thing. I know that by most conventional standards, I am blessed. I know that I live a life of privilege. Maybe others feel the same.

And here's what I'm wondering: maybe Jesus isn't scolding people like me and you. Maybe he's inviting us to see the world differently—to stop confusing comfort with faithfulness, to stop mistaking success for righteousness, and to notice where God is already at work.

The Beatitudes don't tell us how to climb higher or how to be more faithful. They tell us where God has already gone.

And if we follow Jesus there, we may discover that blessing is not something we achieve or possess, but something we participate in—something that has been there from the beginning and can only be recognized and received.

Indeed, God's blessing was—and is—for all of us from the very beginning. We just need to be reminded from time to time.

So, in closing, hear this and let it settle in your body:

You are blessed even when your best feels like barely enough.

You are blessed—as you are, and as you are becoming.

You are blessed. Full stop. End of sentence. Amen.