

The Rev. Theresa C Lewallen, Deacon
Preached at Church of the Resurrection, Alexandria
February 8, 2026

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

Year A

Micah 6:1-8

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Psalm 15

Matthew 5:1-12

In a recent conversation with David Rubenstein, Fareed Zakaria, an internationalist, commentator, and journalist, talks about the Beatitudes. He learned them in a Christian school in India. Zakaria summarizes them as the central message of Christianity. He goes further to say that the Beatitudes are “revolutionary and upend[ing] the old hierarchy of the world.” He notes that the Sermon on the Mount is often overlooked by Christians as he sees the interactions in this country and around the world.

I, and perhaps you, have not before considered the Beatitudes revolutionary. Thinking of them as a contrast to the culture and hierarchy of the empire opens up a new way of seeing Jesus’ message. The message of the Beatitudes as revolutionary seems especially appropriate for Epiphany, as we are reminded again of the characteristics of God revealed in Jesus. The Word made flesh lives among us, shining light on God’s mercy and love for those who least expect it when we least expect it is a message the people in the crowds needed to hear and we need to hear today.

By the time we see Jesus in today’s Gospel, he has already raised the attention of the people across the kingdom. He’s been baptized and proclaimed as God’s beloved. Jesus has faced temptations of ministry and leadership in the wilderness, recognizing that those around him will bring their own understanding of what it means for him to be The Messiah. Their understanding does not often match the truth of his saving work among us. After beginning to gather his closest community of followers, Jesus has already been teaching and proclaiming the Good News through his words and actions. The crowd around him becomes larger and larger and travels with him.

In a culture that regularly discards people or uses them for its own benefit, Jesus looks into the faces of those who follow him. He is present with them, attentive to their needs. Jesus heals them, answers their questions as he teaches, and knows deeply about the oppression they suffer at the hands of the empire. In fact, Jesus begins his ministry after his cousin John is beheaded.

The people following Jesus are hungry for hope, they are hungry for peace, they are hungry for justice. Jesus, God among us, reminds them and us that God is always making

something new in the midst of the terror, poverty, injustice, and oppression that can easily lead to hopelessness, grief, and paralysis.

Through the Beatitudes Jesus offers the crowd the gift of being recognized and acknowledged as individuals who are struggling to be seen. In contrast to those in power who use them for their own benefit, Jesus focuses on the needs of the people sitting with him. He has witnessed the burdens they carry and the pain and grief they've experienced. He sees the people around him and does not accuse them of causing their own issues. He doesn't tell us to "get over it." He also doesn't use the crowd's situations as a measure of their worthiness for God's love or God's mercy.

Unlike the empire that uses people for its own enrichment, Jesus reminds them that they are God's Beloved. Jesus' actions and teaching make clear that the Kingdom breaking into the world, the kingdom of God overturns the old order and brings a new way of being community into the world. The new order that recognizes the children of God as those who will inherit the kingdom is indeed so revolutionary that Herod knew it right from Jesus' birth. The leaders in power are easily alarmed by the size of the crowds Jesus is drawing and the message he is teaching. Jesus' followers, the apostles and the crowds, bring their whole selves together with others from a variety of places and backgrounds. They are hungry and broken in body, mind, and Spirit and recognize in Jesus, the one who heals and brings the promise of new life. They recognize that Jesus is moving them to the center and keeping the focus on them as he carries out his ministry.

During a recent online event sponsored by Faith in Action, the pastor of a Latino church in Minneapolis described the expected and very unexpected ways that the community has come together. Speaking specifically about a grocery delivery and accompaniment program for people afraid to leave their homes, the pastor noted that conservative and progressive houses of worship have come together across their theological differences and have welcomed the over 1,000 volunteers with different backgrounds, socioeconomic status, and identity. They are working together to bring light to the community and to each person and family living in fear. The pastor's final words echo the words of Jesus in today's Gospel, "God is making something new in the midst of this crisis."

There are times when we are hungry for justice and peace. There are times when we feel that no one notices that we are broken in body, mind, and Spirit. And in these days, our neighbors, many of whom came to the US seeking peace, may be feeling discarded and pushed to the margins. They may be living ethical lives, yet they are viewed as expendable criminals because the immigration system changed as they awaited their immigration hearings.

We need the revolutionary teachings of the Beatitudes to remind us that we are called to actively work toward a new world. Jesus will ignite our Spirits and enlighten our paths. Being in relationship with our neighbors reminds us that we are all Beloved. We are called

to work together to change the systems that hinder peacemaking, that push aside those who are grieving or seeking justice. Working together toward the kingdom that God intended gives us glimpses of what is to come and encourages us to stay in the work together. Without each other will not hear the ways in which God is calling us to be part of making something new.

Through his example, Jesus shows us that our actions begin with prayer and that each of us is called in a distinctive way to carry out God's work. In that work, Jesus reveals through us God's love and God's mercy in the world.

Jesus makes it clear that walking with him in the ways of peace, justice, and mercy may cause conflict or we may be reviled or labeled. We may be persecuted. Jesus reminds us that love and courage will always be with us as we share the Good News through our words and through our actions. God and our community will be with us as we walk together, doing the work to bring about revolutionary love, mercy, and peace to those around us and the wider world.

Please pray with me.

For Victims of Terror and Those Who Seek Peace

Almighty God, source of justice and our everlasting hope, through your prophet Isaiah you spoke of a day when terror shall give way to peace. Through Micah, you remind us that we are called to do justice, love kindness, and to walk humbly with you. We mourn with all communities shattered by violence, where lives are stolen, and fear thrives in darkness. Comfort those who grieve and shelter the wounded in your mercy. Strengthen all who stand for justice and peace in places torn by hatred. Guide leaders and neighbors alike to reject vengeance and pursue reconciliation. Give us courage to name evil, faith to hold fast to your promises, and love to overcome fear. Through Jesus Christ, our light in the darkest hour. Amen.

From *Weekly Prayers* Published by the Episcopal Church, Office of Government Relations

Other Resources

[History with David Rubenstein | Fareed Zakaria | Season 7 | Episode 4 | PBS](#). Transcript available.

Matthew: The Gospel of Promised Blessings. Matthew L. Skinner. Abingdon Press, 2024.