

**Sermon Notes – January 29, 2023**  
**The Holy Gospel of St. Matthew 5: 1-12**  
**Peace Lutheran Church**  
**“Blessed are You!”**

Many of us spend our whole lives unlearning the unhelpful images of God we received at an early age. One such image for us is that of a dispassionate God who wisely stays an arm’s length away from the world He created. This week’s readings offer a counter-image of God that is worth retaining. The lection reveals a triune God who rejects the idol of objectivity and instead chooses to come in foolishly close to attend the particular needs of communities and individuals.

We preachers are often drawn to Micah 6: 8. The command “to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” is both familiar and powerful-so much so that we often overlook the verses that precede it. Before Micah tells hearers what is required of them, he recalls what God has already done for them. Citing the story of the Exodus, he reminds hearers that God evacuated the Israelites from Egypt and stuck with them, even when “the road [was] rough and the going [got] tough and the hills [were] hard to climb,” as the song goes.

Similarly, the gospel text squarely places Jesus with the crowd of ordinary people on a hillside. Words of blessing form His glorious refrain. The Greek word *makarios*, commonly translated “blessed” or “happy,” is consistently used to describe close proximity to the divine in early Jewish, Christian, and nonsectarian texts. Jesus is up close and personal with people like us - people who know what it feels like when the diagnosis isn’t what they’d hoped, people who mourn the death of someone who understood them, people who live under the thumb of the powerful, people who are waiting for the world to turn, people who are persecuted.

Getting close to human need is not usually considered wise by the world's standards. It is a wonder that proximity forms the basis for God's gracious initiative and for Jesus' ministry. We too are invited into the ministry of presence, which is always the ministry of the particular. The apostle Paul makes clear what we already know - that is, that this kind of life will be deemed foolish by those who benefit from the world's structures and who are uninterested in upsetting them. Knowing that this way of life won't be easy at best, and may be dangerous at worst, Paul offers sound encouragement when he reminds the gathered community that the source of their life is in Christ Jesus. It's this source that enlivens and empowers all of us to do the hard work to which We Are Called!