

Sermon Notes – January 25, 2026
The Holy Gospel of St. Matthew 5: 1-12
Peace Lutheran Church
“The Blessed Ones of God”

Today's readings contrast human notions of what is pious and desirable with what God deems just, wise, and blessed. Micah's words constitute a covenant lawsuit (Heb. *riv*) against an ungrateful people, with all of creation as witness. God recounts historic divine faithfulness to Israel, spotlighting the exodus, Balaam's failed curse attempts, and crossing the Jordan-Shittim to Gilgal (6: 3-5). In response, the defendant asks what God requires and follows up with exorbitant but justified suggestions (vv. 6-7). The closing response (v. 8) is not only a conclusive verdict, but a summary of prophetic teaching on true religion. The key words “justice” (*mishpat*) and kindness (*chesed*) reflect these faithful activities and the essence of God (Exod. 34: 6-7; Deut. 32: 4).

The second reading begins Paul's response to disunity at Corinth (1 Cor. 1: 18-4: 21). Most instructive is how he addresses a practical situation with Christology: the “message about the cross” (v. 18). Though regarded widely as “foolishness,” this message is wisdom and “the power of God” to those who believe. Even elite experts (the wise scholars, debaters) are unable to attain God's foolishness and weakness, to say nothing of His wisdom and strength. Paul shifts rhetorically in 1:26 (“Consider your own call,” highlighting how “not many” at Corinth were wise, powerful, or of high social status - and yet God chose them. For Paul, this reflects the counter-intuitive mercy of God, “so no one might boast” (v. 29-31). Disrupters both at Corinth and of today are called to rethink reality through the lens of the cross.

The gospel reading leads off the longest teaching section in Matthew, the Sermon on the Mount (chaps. 5-7). Many readers miss how the Sermon - and all major teaching blocks in Matthew - primarily addresses disciples and shows what discipleship looks like in practice (5: 1; 10; 5; 13; 10; 18, 1-2; 24; 1-2). The beatitudes consist of two sections, each with four pronouncements (5: 3-6, 7-10), followed by a conclusion (vv. 11-12). While the Greek *makarios* (“blessed”) may be translated “happy,” here Jesus describes something more theologically profound than superficial happiness. In the first section, Jesus counteracts widespread ideas about divine favor upon the rich, powerful, and strong. Instead, He locates it with the meek and downtrodden, with promises of ultimate vindication (vv. 3-6). The second section describes traits of blessed living, marked by mercy, purity, peace, and kindness (vv. 7-10) - inviting hearers to live these out. The phrase reappears in verses 3 and 10 (“for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”) and gives a bookend frame to the beatitudes in between. The conclusion (vv. 1-12) aims to encourage

followers of Jesus facing dishonor for their faith. In sum, the beatitudes kick off Jesus' teaching in Matthew by counter-intuitively declaring God's presence and favor for those who hear and walk "the way" of the Christ.

Our readings call into question the things we might call pious, desirable, and blessed. We are invited to see how the cross reorients our expectations, redefines divine blessing, and shows the Father's mercy manifest where we least expect it!