

Let us pray.

Today, we are going to be hearing a portion of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. At this point, Jesus has been baptized and tempted in the wilderness. He has called His first disciples and has begun His public ministry in Galilee: teaching, proclaiming the good news of God's kingdom, and healing people from diseases and illnesses. The entire Sermon on the Mount covers more than what we will focus on today. Today, we will be hearing from the introduction-- Jesus' proclamation of the Beatitudes, which come right before He goes on to teach about the fulfillment of the Law, piety, and finally concluding with an exhortation for His followers.

In Matthew's account, Jesus heads up a mountain, which is probably more likely an amphitheatre setting, and teaches from there. Why did Jesus preach from a mountain in Matthew's account? I think Matthew is trying to draw parallels between Jesus and Moses-- Moses delivered the Law from Mt. Sinai; Jesus delivers His sermon from a mountain. However, Matthew shows us the preeminence of Jesus. Not only does Jesus tell His hearers what the Law is, He gives an exposition of the Law and even reinterprets it. In fact, Jesus isn't just the lawgiver as Moses was, He is the very embodiment of the Law and its ultimate fulfillment.

Listen now to the Word of the Lord from Matthew 4:23-5:12.

The Beatitudes contain both a strong present and eschatological tone, highlighting attitudes and actions that demonstrate what authentic discipleship means, as taught by Jesus. But, before we go deeper into a few of the Beatitudes, let's take a moment and talk about the crowd.

We heard in the Scripture that great crowds followed Jesus and a great crowd was present the day of His sermon. Who were these people? Some were Jewish, others were Gentiles. Some were from the margins of society. Some were teachers, lawyers, laborers, poor, rich-- they were from all walks of life, just as we are. And, like us, they came to hear Jesus for different reasons. Some came because they were curious--who is this man they say has been healing people wherever He goes? Some came because they were in need of healing. Some came to test Him. While others came to hear Him, to listen and learn from Him.

*Why have you come?*

Maybe you've come today because you are a seeker. Maybe you heard about this Jesus and wanted to know what He's all about. Maybe you were invited here today and came with a friend. Maybe you were

driving by and decided to stop in. Maybe your wife dragged you in or your parents made you come, and you don't even want to be here right now.

Maybe you are like a woman I met this week. As I sat and listened to her, she began to tell me about where she believes God is calling her. Then, just as quickly, she gave me a myriad of reasons why she wasn't good enough, why she wasn't "Christian" enough, why she wasn't enough to be called by God to do God's work. Maybe you feel like that too. You think you aren't good enough.

Maybe you've come because you've had a long week, and you're just tired, exhausted, fed up with the crushing weight of the world--so much to do, too much stress, and you need to be filled so that you can go back out and face it all over again. Maybe you are here because you've been hurt so many times, you find it hard to trust anyone, let alone God, who you can't see and don't know, but you're giving God one more try. Maybe you're here because you are trying to piece your life together. You don't know what to do and you need some direction. Or, maybe you're a disciple.

Look, whatever the reason, you/*we are* here, a part of the crowd, and Jesus, through His Words taught then, and He is still teaching us today.

In the Beatitudes, Jesus teaches that certain ways of being, certain situations and virtues are blessed. He teaches that the poor in spirit are blessed. Are you poor in spirit? Do you trust and depend on God with your whole heart? Or do you hold onto pride, thinking you can do it your way? Jesus is calling you to empty yourself. Take up what Matthew Henry calls, "a gracious disposition of [the] soul". Let go and be filled with the Spirit of Christ. Give up your way of doing things and wholly depend on Jesus to teach you how to live.

Jesus teaches that those who mourn are blessed. Have you lost someone close to you and it has broken your heart? Does your heart break for the victims of the mass shooting that took place this week in New Zealand, or for those who lost their lives, families and homes as a result of the cyclone that hit Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Malawi? Have you suffered oppression or empathize with those who suffer? Maybe you mourn your sinful life and the way you used to live. Well, Jesus promises to bring comfort to those who mourn. Those of you who are brokenhearted today, the Lord is near to you. And, if you bear your grief as your shame, look to Jesus. He will remove your shame and make your face radiant again with His overwhelming love and grace.

Jesus teaches that peacemakers are blessed. Are you a peacemaker-- one who seeks justice and reconciliation? Jesus calls peacemakers, "children of God" because their actions are in accordance with

God's reconciling love for the world. Some of you are peacemakers outside the walls of this church, but will give the side-eye to your brother or sister right here in this sanctuary. Jesus is calling you to lay your divisive ways down at His feet and be reconciled to God, and in this reconciliation, receive peace, and let the peace of Christ drive you to be at peace with all people!

Jesus teaches that those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake are blessed. Maybe you don't connect with being persecuted for righteousness' sake. Well, Jesus is calling you to get in the fight! Do people outside these walls even know that you are a follower of Jesus, or have you hidden your light under a bushel? Have you told people about the love that kept Jesus on the cross until all the essentials of reconciliation were finished? Have you told someone about the grace and mercy of Jesus, how He made a way out of no way, and how you don't know why He loves you, but somehow He does?

Listen, you're in the crowd, but today, Jesus is calling you out of the crowd and into relationship with Him as His disciple. Follow after the One who with a single word from His lips could heal those near and far away. Put your trust in the One who with just a whisper, commanded demons to flee, minds to be renewed, and told sickness to back off.

Come to the One who causes the chains of injustice to fall away and bestows favor by His proclamation. Depend on the One who dresses the lilies of the fields in more splendor than Solomon could ever dream. How much more will the Lord do for those who follow Him? Jesus, Himself, will teach you how to live authentically as His disciple.

During this season of Lent, God is calling us to really examine ourselves and after we have done that, while we are doing that, we can examine the character of Jesus, our Teacher, who calls the broken into a closer relationship with Him, who calls the poor into His blessing, calls the wealthy into His suffering, calls the lowly into the richness of His grace, calls each of us into Christ's presence, so that we might taste and see that the Lord is good and follow Him with everything that is within us. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.