

6 Epiphany
February 16, 2025

Sermon by Rev. Steve Seibert

Jesus came down with the twelve apostles and stood on a level place. On a level place: Jesus is among the people. He has chosen the twelve apostles from among his disciples, after spending some time in the mountains with them, and after praying. The crowd gathered has heard the stories of the healings that Jesus has wrought. They have come with their loved ones, to hear him, to be touched by him and to be healed. **Those troubled by impure spirits were cured, and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all.**

Jesus is a good Jew. Just two weeks ago we celebrated the Feast of The Presentation, when Mary and Joseph follow Jewish law and visit the temple. Jesus is well aware of the history of the Jewish nation, the Exodus, of Moses and the Law, especially the Ten Commandments. He knows that the religious leaders teach that God rewards good behavior and hand in hand with that, God punishes bad behavior. After all, isn't that the history of the Jewish nation, God's chosen? Good?-worshipping in Jerusalem. Bad?-exiled to Babylon.

Jesus has everyone's attention; folks have even traveled from Jerusalem to see, hear and be touched by him. We might expect Jesus to say, "Do you like all these healings that are happening to you and your loved ones? Well, then, let's go over the rules of how you *shouldn't* live: the Ten Commandments. Worship only the Lord your God, no other gods, no idols, no taking God's name in vain. Do honor your parents. No murder, adultery, stealing, lying, coveting anything of your neighbor's." The ten commandments are rules for living and just as Jesus followed them, so are we called to follow them. They circumscribe our lives. Stay inside these boundaries! Let me be clear, I'm not saying we should ignore the ten commandments. Jesus never said that. But if our relationship God and with those we love is only defined by what we don't do to them, we are missing out.

Jesus called all who were with him on that day, and all of us, to live into an even fuller, deeper, more beautiful, and holier life. Jesus calls us to live into a different kind of community, not a one that excludes others, but rather a community that intentionally reaches out to draw others into it. Given the beliefs of those times, given the beliefs of our times, his words are shocking and counter-cultural. Let me read to you the Beatitudes from The Message bible.

You're blessed when you've lost it all, God's kingdom is there for the finding.

You're blessed when you're ravenously hungry, then you're ready for the messianic meal.

You're blessed when the tears flow freely, joy comes in the morning.

Count yourself blessed every time someone cuts you down or throws you out, every time someone smears or blackens your name to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and that person is uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens – skip like a lamb, if you like! – and all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company; my preachers and witnesses have always been treated like this.

In the 1960's, Paul Simon composed a song that is on "*The Sounds of Silence*" album of Simon and Garfunkel. It's a take on the beatitudes called *Blessed*.

*Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit
Blessed is the lamb whose blood flows
Blessed are the sat upon, spat upon, ratted on
O Lord, why have you forsaken me?*

When I went looking for some interpretation of the lyrics, there were the words of Paul Simon himself. Turns out, he had ducked into a church in London to get out of the rain, heard a sermon (on the beatitudes?) that didn't impress him and felt as though the meek were set to inherit...nothing! Not the inspiration I was hoping to hear from Paul Simon. Then it hit me. No matter what age they are spoken in, those words are revolutionary. Not matter what Simon thought he might have been saying, he was singing truth, God's truth, spoken by Jesus!

Our reading from Jeremiah calls us into a faithful relationship with God, with a beatitude of its own. Nothing in the beatitudes says life will be easy. Everything says we are precious, blessed by God. We are simply called to open our lives to the Lord.

**Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is in the Lord.
They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by a stream.
It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green;
In the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit.**

Jesus knew that the stuff of life is full of challenges, that there will be times when we might feel overwhelmed. He speaks words of comfort, words of strength, words of ...blessing. "I know things are crappy for you right now", he says, "I've got you".

Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.
It's me, says Jesus. Do not be afraid.

Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.
I am the Way, and the Truth and the Life.

Blessed are the sat upon, spat upon, ratted on.

Look, I am with you day after day after day, till the end of time.

Amen.