

Matthew 4:23-5:3

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

²³ Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming ~~the good news~~ of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. ²⁴ So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them. ²⁵ And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

⁵¹ When Jesus saw *the crowds*, he went *up the mountain*; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ² Then Jesus began to speak, and taught them, saying:

³ **"BLESSED** are the **poor in spirit**, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 15:21-28

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

²¹ Jesus left **that place** and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. ²² Just then a **Canaanite** woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." ²³ But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." ²⁴ He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." ²⁵

The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12) are identified as the essential teaching of Jesus. Recorded in Matthew, within the larger section of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) they have been taken seriously from literal to metaphorical, from concrete pragmatic directives to poetic unrealistic hopes of how heaven is. They include a tension between now, and what is to come, as each beatitude contains the first verb in the present tense, with a dependent clause articulated in the future tense.

~~the good news~~ : εὐαγγέλιον • [euangélion] Don't forget that this is the translation of the words "hangellion" meaning: the Gospel. Can you hear how evangelism comes from this word?

the crowds. While the crowd seems like a faceless mass, the text implies that it's made up of all those we've heard about suffering from illness, disease and social rejection in Matthew 5:23-24.

up the mountain : Mountains were sacred place, a sort of throne room of God/the gods in the ancient world for both the pagans Greeks-Romans (think of Mt Olympus as the home of the gods) and for the Hebrews. Remember that Moses went up the *mountain* to receive the 10 commandments, both he and Elijah went up the *mountain* to "see" God; Isaiah talks of the coming reign of God as a meal on *the mountain top*: "In days to come *the mountain of the Lord's house* shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills" Isaiah 2:2; cf with Isaiah 25:6; Micah 4:1.

he sat down: it was common in the ancient world to do the opposite of we do – the teacher sat while the students stood. It also implies the sitting down of Jesus upon a throne from which he teaches, leads, judges, rules his kingdom.

BLESSED: in Greek – μακάριος; pronounced [MAKARIOS]: (from mak-, "become long, large") most often translated at "blessed," "fortunate," or "happy." It also can mean "wealthy." The idea of the word **MAKARIOS** is difficult to translate in modern English. The word happy (is not adequate) as it comes from the old English "hap" which means luck or a favorable circumstance. The actual concept of "happy" would be expressed by a different Greek word than **MAKARIOS**. Means more a "satisfaction from experiencing the fullness of something." It seems to be tied to a notion of blessing related to material well-being, given by the gods (at least in Greek Pagan Greek thought). Here then Jesus seems to be saying something radically diverging from the established social-religious notion of blessing as possessing lots or good things. For Jesus **MAKARIOS** refers to the believer in Christ who is satisfied and secure in the midst of life's hardships, because of the indwelling fullness of the Holy Spirit. It's the presence of the Spirit which overcomes human participation in the numbing, nervous, and

But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." ²⁶ [Jesus] answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." ²⁷ She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." ²⁸ Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

Questions for the practice of Examen & Contemplation

- What grabs your attention in this reading?
- How, when, have you experienced poverty of spirit?
- How can such literal poverty lead to literal blessing?
- Who do you glimpse as a dog to avoid in your life, our church, our city? How might God be inviting you to open yourself to the reign of God through that situation?

INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN TODAY'S SCRIPTURE AND PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT

Friedrich Nietzsche, German Philosopher (1844-1900), wrote of the need to leave Christian Faith behind in the of the emerging power and reason of modernity and 20th century European civilization.

"What is good? All that heightens the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself, in man. What is evil? Whatever springs from weakness. What is happiness? The feeling that power increases that resistance is overcome. Not contentment, but more power; not peace at any price, but war; not virtue, but efficiency (virtue in the Renaissance sense, virtue, virtue free of moral acid). The weak and the botched shall perish: first principle of our charity. And one should help them to it. What is more harmful than any vice? Practical sympathy for the botched and the weak Christianity." *The Antichrist*, Aphorism 2.

How is the observation of Nietzsche correct? How is it a misunderstanding of what Jesus says in Matthew 5:3? How is the thought of Nietzsche foundational in our society and modern culture?

which empowers human participation in the purpose, person and passion of God (the kingdom of heaven). We could translate the irony of the word **MAKARIOS** by saying "congratulations" to the poor, the meek, the mourning.

poor in spirit:: The word translated as "poor" comes from the Greek word **ptōxós** which means "to crouch or cower like a beggar." It implies someone of extreme poverty, completely lacking resources, bent over in the burden of their helplessness. The word for **spirit pneumati** can also be translated as "breath" and "wind." It's what is in us making us "created in the image of God" according to the creation story of Genesis 2 in which God sharing the divine breath (spirit) creates human life.

It points to someone who is at the end of their rope, who has no where else to turn for help or deliverance in their need – whether it be spiritual, physical or emotional. It's a space of utter dependence on the brink of death or extinction.

that place – somewhere along the west coast of the Sea of Galilee to which the religious leaders (Pharisees) of the capital came in 15:1 to question Jesus and his unorthodox teaching and lifestyle. The text portrays it as a place removed or opposed to the central place of Jewish life, culture and faith: Jerusalem.

Canaanite: remember the Canaanites are considered throughout the Bible as the enemy of the people of God, the "other" people from whom they must reclaim their land after the Exodus. This story is also told in Mark where the woman is described as "Syrophenician" – again a foreign, non-desirable people. The emphasis is on the woman as "other" than the people of God, the people whom Jesus was sent to – the House of Israel.

the dogs : We, like the Romans and Greeks, like dogs, thinking of them as loyal, faithful pets. But the Hebrews thought of them negatively as dirty and disgusting. (Look at how the word is used in Revelation 22:12-15 as opposed to the **BLESSED** ones). The woman seems to be saying to Jesus, "I know that you and your people see me as a dog, but nonetheless God loves and includes *even* me." She challenges the worldview of Jesus, in her hopeful assertiveness and poverty of spirit she persists in asking for his help. In this encounter Jesus goes from not listening, refusing to help, to praising the woman for her faith as an example to emulate. Could it be that the woman and her assertiveness, her insistence upon the innate worth of her life (and her daughter) even if she's "other" opens Jesus to a deeper truth, knowledge of God's love and power?