

## Matthew 4:23-5:5

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

<sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> 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. <sup>25</sup> And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

<sup>5</sup> When Jesus saw *the crowds*, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. <sup>2</sup> Then Jesus began to speak, and taught them, saying:

<sup>3</sup> **BLESSED** are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>4</sup> **BLESSED** are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

<sup>5</sup> "Blessed are the **meek**, for they will *inherit the earth*."

## Psalms 37:1-11

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup> Do not fret because of the wicked; do not be envious of wrongdoers,

<sup>2</sup> for they will soon fade like the grass, and wither like the green herb.

<sup>3</sup> Trust in the Lord, and do good; so you will live in the land, and enjoy security.

<sup>4</sup> Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

<sup>5</sup> Commit your way to the Lord;

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 first group of 4 beatitudes (5:3-6) is made up of 36 words (in the original Greek) closing with a reference to righteousness as does the second group (5:7-10), they are bound together with a strong literary influence from Isaiah 61 and the alliteration of the letter p (or π in Greek).

*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.

**BLESSED**: in Greek – μακάριος; pronounced [**MAKARIOS**]: most often translated as "blessed," "fortunate," or "happy." In the Ancient World could also mean "wealthy," seeming to be tied to a notion of blessing related to material well-being, given by the gods. Here then Jesus seems to be saying something radically diverging from the established social-religious notion of blessing as possessing lots or good things. Some modern translations place the meaning of the word as "congratulations." Some scholars lift up the dynamic momentum underneath the word which is not just an adjective, but a call to action and engagement extended to those who don't usually see themselves as actors worthy, capable and needed to participate in the transformation and redemption of the world. In that line of thought μακάριος could be translated as "Let's roll!" "Get up! Get going!" "Let's do this thing!" or the common Spanish expression "**Vamos!**"

**meek** [πραεῖς] the word in Greek means humble, lowly, meek, gentle. It doesn't imply timidity, passivity, wimpishness, weakness or cowardice. It can be understood as the antonym of the descriptions of Pharaoh as heard-hearted and the stubborn Israelites as stiff-necked (both in Exodus). Rather the word πραεῖς evokes a strength that is gentle, an expression of power with reserve, a patient centerdness in which one places one's hope in God. Trappist Monk Thomas Merton (and other mystics) have lifted the term up πραεῖς as meaning nonviolence, seeing it implying a call not to submission or passive flight; but rather a call to a deeper truer way of engaging the powers and transforming the word for everyone.

*inherit the earth* [κληρονομήσουσι τὴν γῆν] The expression taken from Psalm 37 is connected to the affirmation that the earth and all its resources belong wholly and completely to God alone. This is articulated in the story of creation, in particular Genesis 1:28-31 when humanity is called to be stewards or citizens, to manage the earth as a community in which all have access to the abundant resources given by God. This vision is also elucidated in Leviticus 25 and Isaiah 60. It confronts the political affirmation of the Roman Empire, which furthered the interest of the local land-owning elite over all those created in the image of God.

trust in him, and he will act.

<sup>6</sup> He will make your vindication shine like the light,  
and the justice of your cause like the noonday.

<sup>7</sup> Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him;  
do not fret over those who prosper in their way,  
over those who carry out evil devices.

<sup>8</sup> Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath.  
Do not fret—it leads only to evil.

<sup>9</sup> For the wicked shall be cut off,  
but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land.

<sup>10</sup> Yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more;  
though you look diligently for their place, they will not be there.

<sup>11</sup> **But the meek** [πραεῖς] **shall inherit the land,**  
and delight themselves in abundant prosperity.

<sup>12</sup> The wicked plot against the righteous,  
and gnash their teeth at them;

<sup>13</sup> but the Lord laughs at the wicked,  
for he sees that their day is coming.

<sup>14</sup> The wicked draw the sword and bend their bows  
to bring down the poor and needy,  
to kill those who walk uprightly;

<sup>15</sup> their sword shall enter their own heart,  
and their bows shall be broken.

<sup>16</sup> Better is a little that the righteous person has  
than the abundance of many wicked.

<sup>17</sup> For the arms of the wicked shall be broken,  
but the Lord upholds the righteous.

<sup>18</sup> The Lord knows the days of the blameless,  
and their heritage will abide forever;

<sup>19</sup> they are not put to shame in evil times,  
in the days of famine they have abundance.

<sup>20</sup> But the wicked perish,  
and the enemies of the Lord are like  
the glory of the pastures;  
they vanish—like smoke they vanish away.

<sup>21</sup> The wicked borrow, and do not pay back,  
but the righteous are generous and keep giving;

<sup>22</sup> **for those blessed by the Lord shall inherit the land,**  
but those cursed by him shall be cut off.

## Galatians 5:22-23

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<sup>22</sup> By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy,  
peace, patience, kindness, generosity,  
faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> **gentleness**, [πραεῖς] and  
self-control. There is no law against such things.

## Questions for the practice of Examen & Contemplation

- **What grabs your attention in this reading?**
- **How do you hear and react to the word “meek”?**
- **How is this teaching of Jesus contrary to the understanding of power & importance in our world?**
- **How do you struggle to see yourself as important, needed, called by God to be part of the divine plan for the universe?**
- **Where do you glimpse this truth of Jesus at loose in the world, making all things new?**

The great historical event, the coming of the Kingdom, is made clear and is “realized” in proportion as Christians themselves live the life of the Kingdom in the circumstances of their own place and time. The saving grace of God in the Lord Jesus is proclaimed to man existentially in the love, the openness, the simplicity, the humility and the self-sacrifice of Christians. By their example of a truly Christian understanding of the world, expressed in a living and active application of the Christian faith to the human problems of their own time, Christians manifest the love of Christ for men (John 13:35, 17:21), and by that fact make him visibly present in the world. The religious basis of Christian nonviolence is then faith in Christ the Redeemer and obedience to his demand to love and manifest himself in us by a certain manner of acting in the world and in relation to other men. This obedience enables us to live as true citizens of the Kingdom, in which the divine mercy, the grace, favor and redeeming love of God are active in our lives. Then the Holy Spirit will indeed “rest upon us”

and act in us, not for our own good alone but for God and his Kingdom. And if the Spirit dwells in us and works in us, our lives will be a continuous and progressive conversion and transformation in which we also, in some measure, help to transform others and allow ourselves to be transformed by and with others, in Christ.

The chief place in which this new mode of life is set forth in detail is the Sermon on the Mount. At the very beginning of this great inaugural discourse, the Lord numbers the beatitudes, which are the theological foundation of Christian nonviolence: Blessed are the poor in spirit . . . blessed are the meek (Matthew 5:3-4).

This does not mean “blessed are they who are endowed with a tranquil natural temperament, who are not easily moved to anger, who are always quiet and obedient, who do not naturally resist.” Still less does it mean “blessed are they who passively submit to unjust oppression.” On the contrary, we know that the “poor in spirit” are those of whom the prophets spoke, those who in the last days will be the “humble of the earth,” that is to say the oppressed who have no human weapons to rely on and who nevertheless are true to the commandments of Yahweh, and who hear the voice that tells them: “Seek justice, seek humility, perhaps you will find shelter on the day of the Lord’s wrath” (Sophonias 2:3). In other words they seek justice in the power of truth and of God, not by the power of man. Note that Christian

Excerpt from Thomas Merton, *The Nonviolent Alternative*.