

November 25, 2018  
The 8<sup>th</sup> (and 9<sup>th</sup>) Beatitude  
Matthew 4:23-5:12  
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.

<sup>6</sup> **“BLESSED** are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

<sup>7</sup> **“BLESSED** are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

<sup>8</sup> **“BLESSED** are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

<sup>9</sup> **“BLESSED** are the **peacemakers**, for they will be called children of God.

<sup>10</sup> **“BLESSED** are those who are PERSECUTED for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>11</sup> **“BLESSED are you** when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted *the prophets* who were before you.

The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12) are identified as the essential teaching of Jesus. 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 in the future tense.

*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 at “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 divergent from the established social-religious notion of blessing as possessing lots or good things. It's also implies a dynamic 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. It could thus also be translated as “congratulations”; “Let's roll!”; “Get up! Get going!” “Let's do this thing!”; or the Spanish expression “Vamos!”

PERSECUTED::the word is a derivative of the verb διώκω [diókó] which means properly, to aggressively chase, (like a hunter pursuing a catch, earnestly desiring to overtake or apprehend it). By implication the verb means to persecute.

theirs is the kingdom of heaven:: notice the only repeated second phrase in the beatitudes indicating a link between the “poor in spirit” and the “persecuted”.

**BLESSED are you** :: hear in the final beatitude the formulation changes. It's no longer blessed are...but blessed are YOU- a direct address to the audience (us).

*the prophets*:: prophets don't foresee the future as much as speak and enact god's claim on their society. They thus live at odds with their dominant culture, called by God to work for and in the dominant culture, naming the tension and discrepancy between how things are and how God desires them to be. Their biblical stories demonstrate that seeking the right does not win universal approval.

## Luke 4: 16-30

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

<sup>16</sup> When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, <sup>17</sup> and the scroll of **the prophet Isaiah** was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

<sup>18</sup> "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
<sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

<sup>20</sup> And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. <sup>21</sup> Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." <sup>22</sup> All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?"

<sup>23</sup> He said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' And you will say, 'Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.'" <sup>24</sup>

And he said, "Truly I tell you, no *prophet* is accepted in the prophet's hometown. <sup>25</sup> But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; <sup>26</sup> yet **ELIJAH** was sent to none of them except to **A WIDOW AT ZAREPHATH** in Sidon. <sup>27</sup> There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet **ELISHA**, and none of them was cleansed except **NAAMAN THE SYRIAN.**" <sup>28</sup> When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. <sup>29</sup> They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. <sup>30</sup> But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

### QUESTIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF EXAMEN & CONTEMPLATION

- **What grabs your attention in these readings?**
- **How have you been pursued or persecuted for faith? Was it earned through your ardent allegiance to living out the teachings and imitating the actions of the nonviolent Jesus?**
- **How might you (we) moderate our views of Jesus, making them more "safe" to the culture in which we live, or the people with whom we live, work and learn? ?**

**the prophet Isaiah::** this was regular practice in services to read from the Torah and the Prophets. Here Jesus reads from Isaiah 61:1-4 which continues with a description of how God will redeem the Israelites from their persecution and defeat at the hand of the Gentile nations, giving them victory, recompense and justice.

**ELIJAH & A WIDOW AT ZAREPHATH::** this story is told in 1 Kings 17:8-24. The great prophet helps a poor woman who shows him mercy.

**ELISHA & NAAMAN THE SYRIAN::** this story is 2 Kings 5:1-19 The prophet heals a Gentile leader of the enemy army of Aram of leprosy. Naaman, at first disbelieving and mistrusting, comes to recognize and confess the God of Elisha as true. It's a story of both healing and spiritual renewal (conversion).

All spoke well of him... all in the synagogue were filled with rage:: This is the twist of the story. How is it that an crowd would so quickly turn from adulation to murderous contempt? Could it be that Jesus reads a famous scripture, proclaiming that today is the day of God's salvation and the proceeds to interpret and expand that teaching by referring to the way in which God, through the prophets, heals both Jews (the widow's son) and Gentiles (Naaman); longing for the redemption of all peoples, the inclusion of all nations (even those dastardly Gentiles) in the kingdom of heaven? Jesus is literally pursued (persecuted) for rocking the boat in his struggle for God's righteousness (justice).