

*St. John Lutheran Church*

*The Sermon*

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Sermon, January 29, 2023

Micah 6:1-6

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Matthew 2:1-12

It doesn't seem to make a lot of sense, does it?

In the Gospel lesson for today, Jesus goes up on the mountain like Moses went up on the mountain. Moses went up on the mountain and brought back the Ten Commandments, the instruction, the Torah, the Law, the gift, the way of living in community with God and each other and creation. Now, Jesus goes up on the mountain and brings us the fulfillment of the Ten Commandments, the instruction the Torah, the Law, the gift, the way of living in community with God, each other and creation.

That fulfillment of the law is called the Sermon on the Mount, and it includes some of the most uncomfortable things Jesus ever says. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "Love our enemies and pray for those who persecute you." He says, "if someone strikes you on one cheek, turn the other." He says, "Give, without expecting anything in return."

Does this make sense?

Jesus tells us not to make a show of our religion. How can you have a church in the twenty-first century without making a show of your religion? Hmmm.

Jesus says that when you are angry at someone you should treat them like a person, not an object. Jesus gets very angry several times in the Gospel of Matthew. That's

fine. But when you are angry at someone, don't call them names. Don't curse them because when you curse them you are tearing your own soul.

In matters of sex, keep your word, stand by your commitment. But even more than that, treat people as people. Other people are not dolls to be used for your gratification. Even in your own heart, understand them as persons with hopes and dreams, tears and laughter, mystery and wonder. See them as people. Otherwise, again, you will tear your own soul.

And tell the truth. Even if you're not signing your name to it or swearing under oath, tell the truth. Let your "yes" be "yes" and your "no" be "no."

Does this make sense in a world where you can get elected to the US. Congress by lying about your whole life, and nobody calls you on it because the news outlets in your district are more interested in seeing you win than they are in telling the truth?

Sermon on the Mount. The fulfillment of the Law.

Notice, Jesus does not begin the fulfillment of the law with a prohibition: "Thou shalt not." There is a place for prohibitions. "Thou shalt not murder; Thou shalt not steal." But that's not how Jesus starts here.

Jesus does not begin with any warning. He does not say, "Straighten up or else!" Some of the prophets say this. That's not how Jesus begins here.

How does he begin his fulfillment of the Law?

He says, "Blessed."

"Blessed are the poor in spirit." This does not make sense. In this world, you have got to be full of fire. You have got to be aggressively motivated.

But Jesus says you are blessed if the fire in your belly has gone out; if you are not supercharged with the Holy Spirit, if you are so poor you see no way out of your poverty, no hope, if you are so depressed you can barely move.

The Greek word for "Blessed" is Makarioi, which means "happy," "favored by God," "blessed," "Of special interest to God." When you are blessed, then in God's eyes

you are the one stepping out of the stretch limousine onto the red carpet and making your way up to the stage where everyone will listen to you speak.

So if you feel you have nothing left within you and you pray, the angels say, “Wait, shhhh!, they’re about to say something.” And all of heaven stands silent, waiting for your first word.

That’s blessed.

“Blessed are those who mourn,” says Jesus. Nowadays, you’ve got a couple of weeks, maybe a month to mourn. Maybe two or three days off of work. Then we’re back at. We’ve moved on.

Healthy grief takes time. A year. Sometimes decades.

“Blessed are you who grieve.” God listens to you when you grieve.

“Blessed are the meek,” “Let me tell you, kid, you’ve gotta be loud in this world. You’ve got to be aggressive. You’ve got to knock people out of your way if you’re gonna make it.”

Jesus says that God pays special attention to those who are not loud.

Speaking as someone who is somewhat loud himself, does this make sense?

Jesus says, “Blessed are the peacemakers,” those foolishly, sometimes dangerously naïve people who clearly cannot love their country, clearly are insane.

Blessed are the pure in heart. Here, in a world where you lie and lie, and when someone calls you on it, you don’t repent or back down. But rather, you double down, and double down again. Anything to keep up the façade, to maintain the image. That’s the only thing that matters.

Blessed are the merciful. Here in a world that despises mercy.

Blessed are those who suffer harassment and contempt for trying to do the right thing, who are persecuted for what they do to serve Jesus. Blessed are you,

Does this make sense?

Paul says, “For the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, us who have been touched with an aching hope, a shining glimpse that there might be something more in this world than the idolization of wealth, power, image, appearances and safety, to us who have been pierced by joy, the cross is the power of God.

In our Hebrew Scripture for today, the prophet Micah boils down God’s instruction to three simple statements.

“What does the Lord require of you, O mortal, but to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.

Do justice. That is, work for everyone to have enough to eat, a place to live, safe streets, good medical care, good education meaningful work and dignity.

Love kindness: treasure your moments of compassion like emeralds and rubies and sapphires and diamonds woven into the fabric of your life.

Walk humbly with your God: Doesn’t mean walking around hunched over in shame all the time. It means we walk as human beings, who don’t know everything, who can’t do everything, who have to depend on God, and on each other.

That’s it: Micah tells us to do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with our God.

Now, here’s some good news: God walks humbly with us.

God became a human, a limited mortal being, even died as a mortal human being, so that God could be with us. So that, even when we don’t feel God’s blessing, wither we are poor in spirit, mourning, meek, peacemakers, merciful, pure in heart, hungering for righteousness, or persecuted, even if we don’t see God’s action in our lives, God is still there. Jesus still holds us, love still wins.

Thanks be to God.