

Wednesday Reflection

Title: Hearing the Beatitudes Anew.

Date: February 1, 2026

ID: 4th Sunday of the Year (A cycle)

Scripture: Matthew 5: 1-12a

Text: The Beatitudes addressed those with wounded, perhaps, broken spirits. Oppressive Rome inflicted terrible suffering on Israel. Religion added restrictive burdens (see Chapter 23). Jesus desired to change the situation (11:28-30). His intentions became obvious from the beginning of his new ministry (4:23-25). Matthew summarized the Lord's starting point as "proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and curing every disease and illness among the people" (4:23). Before any new dogma or law, Jesus healed. To those with a wounded spirit, his Word brought hope to mend the spirit.

Translators render the Greek word *Makarios* as *blessed*. But *blessed* may not capture the benefit Jesus intended. *Blessed* has theological and otherworldly overtones. Some translate the word as *happy*. But *happy* is too congratulatory and psychological. If we remove all connotations of luck, we could use *fortunate* (French p. 161). I suggest *contented* or *satisfied*. St. Paul's assessment of his life and ministry communicate satisfaction or contentment (see 2 Timothy 4:7). One feels satisfaction for running the race and contentment for remaining in the struggle. But neither word connotes victory. The promises in the Beatitudes (except for verses 3 and 10) are future tense. God completes the kingdom in God's time much like God began liberating (Exodus 2:23-25).

Matthew's first chapters have reminders of liberation, of Moses (2:13/14; 2:16-18; 2:19-21), Passover (2:16-18), and Exodus (2:19-21; 4:1/2). The mountain in chapter 5 verse 1 might remind us of Mount Sinai and the Law of Moses. This may not be correct, however. That interpretation could turn the Lord's teaching into a new law, something Matthew did not intend (5:17-21). Moses went up the mountain alone. He brought down tablets with the law. Jesus took his disciples up the mountain to teach them, inviting them into God's kingdom. The Beatitudes are not imperatives; they are evocations. They are healing words for the navigation of this world. The broken spirits of an oppressed people may experience liberation, like Israel when freed from Egypt. But the kingdom of heaven is an escalation of God's liberation, not a repetition. Jesus did not bring a new law, but the fulfillment of the law and prophets (5:17).

Because the fulfillment happens in the future, theologians describe the Beatitudes as eschatological; they tell us of the last things when God sets everything right. This should not make disciples passive. When Jesus called his first disciples, he made them missionaries, fishers of men (4:19). Next week, the Gospel calls disciples salt and light (5:13-16). We must be the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the peacemakers to make God's kingdom visible to the world for its transformation. Most of all, we must use the methods of the peacemakers, the righteous, the merciful, the poor in spirit. In short, we need to live in Jesus Christ. If we conform to him, ours will be the kingdom of heaven.