

An Order for Worship at Home

Sunday, February 1, 2026

Prepare

As you prepare to worship at home this morning, light a candle if you are able – welcome the Holy Spirit into your home and heart as you worship. You might also consider having in front of (or near) you, a bible, some paper, and something to write with. Silence your phones, place them in a different room, and allow yourself to be fully present with the Lord on this day.

Opening/Centering Prayer

As you and your family begin a time of worship consider praying the following prayer, or one of your own extemporaneously.

Heavenly Father, once again we find ourselves unable to worship in person. And while we desire to be together – we welcome your presence into this space now. Fill our homes with your Spirit. Fill our hearts with your peace. As we open the scriptures this day – speak to us. As we consider their impact on our lives – give us the courage to wrestle with them and our present reality. By your great love, fill us with grace that will sustain us in the week ahead. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Turning to the Scriptures

As you turn to the scriptures this morning, you might consider reading them aloud in your home. You might also consider reading one, or all of them, twice – follow the prompting of the Holy Spirit as you worship. As you read through these scriptures – and if you're using a study bible – you might want to notice what the accompanying commentary says. Below are some notes and thoughts about these scriptures that are taken from the Westminster Study Bible's commentary.

- Psalm 15
 - V. 1 raises the question of who may abide in the Lord's tent and dwell upon the Lord's holy hill – this is ultimately a question of who has access to the temple and divine presence. What follows in v. 2-5 are the requirements for access. The requirements include: blamelessness, speaking the truth, a disdain for the wicked, integrity in oath-taking, and respectable lending practices.
 - Concerning v. 5 you might cross-reference the prohibition of interest by turning to Ex. 22:25 and Lev. 25: 35-37
 - As you consider this Psalm, and particularly the requirements of those who are able to access the temple and divine presence, consider: do you meet these requirements?

- Micah 6: 1-8
- Though this passage is only 8 verses, we could break it down into 3 sections. V. 1-2 are an invitation to hear YHWH (The Lord's) case against Israel – notice how hills, mountains, and the earths foundations are called to hear the case. V. 3-5 is a brief account of the Lord's work on behalf of the people of Israel. There are references to many instances of the Lord's saving work. Deliverance from Egypt, and the work of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam are among the first examples of God's work. Continuing, we find references to Balaam in v. 5 – you can find that story in Num. 22-24. Balaam is originally hired to curse Israel, yet the Lord has Balaam bless Israel instead. V. 6-8 are a reminder of what the Lord requires. It also serves as a minor critique of the sacrificial system and a reminder of the reciprocal relationship between the Lord and the people of Israel. For the people of Israel – things are required to maintain the relationship.
- In v. 8 we find that three things are required: “to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.” The word kindness in Hebrew is: *khesed* which means “covenant loyalty.” Other translations might use different words instead of kindness – Mercy (NIV, KJV), “be compassionate and loyal in your love,” (The Message), “Love being kind to others,” (Inter. Children’s Bible). What does your bible say and how might that impact your understanding of this scripture?
- This passage reminds the people of Israel of what the Lord desires. We see that it is: doing justice, loving kindness (or loyalty to their covenant relationship with the Lord), and walking humbly with God are what is required.
- While we know that these scriptures were originally intended for the people of Israel, as Christians, we recognize a correlation between these requirements and the words of Jesus when he speaks about the Kingdom of God. In fact, as you read the gospel lesson for this morning – consider how Jesus’ Jewish faith, and his upbringing, might have informed his teachings.
- Doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God are what the Lord requires. In your experience – has the Church (or, perhaps, have Christians) done a good job at articulating these things as requirements? Have other “requirements” been conveyed to you? What are/were they – and, are they truly requirements or simply preferences?

- Matthew 5: 1-12
- Matthew 5 begins Jesus' sermon on the mount, which is arguably one of the most recognized of Jesus' teachings. My study bible highlights the following: "So highly regarded was the Sermon on the Mount that Thomas Jefferson cited it as containing moral principles upon which the United States of America should be founded."¹
- Consider for a moment the realities we are facing and consider the Beatitudes that you have read this morning. Do you believe our nation is living up to these teachings? Consider making two columns on a piece of paper. On one side cite examples of where these teachings are being upheld. In another column, jot down examples of how these teachings are being ignored. Which column is larger?
- Certain translations, such as the Common English Bible, translate "blessed" as Happy. Happy are the poor in Spirit (hopeless – CEB), Happy are those who mourn (grieve – CEB), etc. (If you're able, you might consider reading the CEB translation for reference.) The inclusion of the word thus renders Jesus' teaching as a way of finding happiness – living this way leads to a happy life. As you consider both words, "blessed" and "happy" which might you prefer? Is it possible to feel blessed but not happy – OR – if we recognized our blessed-ness, is there any response but to be happy?
- In this moment/season: would you consider yourself blessed, happy, or both? As you consider the Beatitudes – which one do you resonate with the most?

Sermon

Attached to this order is a copy of this morning's sermon. You're invited to read it and use it as you wish for further reflection.

Prayers of the People

As you continue to worship, what joys have you experienced since you last worshipped? Are there concerns that weigh heavy on your heart? Consider writing those down or sharing them aloud with your family.

Go before God in prayer – giving thanks, asking for your needs, and lifting up the needs of those around you.

¹ Westminster Study Bible, Powery, Davis, Foskett, Strawn. c. 2024. Pg. 1729

Closing Hymn

Had we met in person this morning, the choir's anthem would have been Let There Be Peace on Earth. Below is a copy of the words of that hymn – if you're familiar with the tune, consider singing it aloud if the Spirit prompts you. You might also read the stanzas as a prayer, reflecting on God's call upon your life.

Let There Be Peace on Earth

Words: Sy Miller and Jill Jackson

Music: Sy Miller and Jill Jackson; harm. By Charles H. Webb, 1987

Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me;
Let there be peace on earth, the peace that was meant to be.
With God our creator, children all are we.
Let us walk with each other in perfect harmony.*

Let peace begin with me; Let this be the moment now.
With every step I take, let this be my solemn vow:
To take each moment and live each moment in peace eternally.
Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.

*original words: "With God as our Father, brothers all are we. Let me walk with my brother in perfect harmony."

Closing Prayer

Almighty God, fill us with your peace, guide us by your peace, and carry us into whatever lies ahead as makers of peace. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Sermon

Rev. Ben Van Staalduin

2/1/2026

“Beatitudes”

I love this passage of scripture. I love the beatitudes, because they really highlight Jesus' philosophy, and the teachings of his ministry. They begin what is known as the Sermon on the Mount, and in Matthew's Gospel, this is some of Jesus' earliest teaching. We're only 5 chapters in the book right now. As we read this passage, what happens is that Jesus lays out his view for things. And today we look at verses 1-12, and we'll continue in this chapter for the next 2 weeks. (In person – Lord willing.)

I like this passage of scripture, because on the head, it seems very counter-cultural. And I'm sure that the argument could be made, that even for Jesus' time on earth, these things would have been counter to the general position of culture. We know that historically, Jesus was living in incredibly tenuous times politically. The roman empire was doing their best to take over the world. People tried to avoid that—and violence ensued. We know that about 40 or so years after Jesus died and was resurrected, the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. This is the place that God lived. So—for the people of Israel, this was like watching God be destroyed. I've heard people compare it to 9/11. That's only true if we're willing to concede that money is our god. And, unfortunately, that case would be easier to make than it should be.

Now, I highlight this to show that Jesus' time is probably not drastically different than our own politically, and culturally. We are, whether we call it that or not, living in an empire that has desires to be known as the central world power. We have a present administration that has toyed around with aiming to acquire another country – perhaps by means of force – if for no other reason, then we don't want somebody else to do it first. We want to be the top world-power. And we have been. And we've maintained this status by increasingly using violence. It's not necessarily a fun thing to reckon with – but it's ultimately the truth. With that being said – our culture and the culture Jesus was living in may share some similarities.

As I was preparing this week, I did some reading about this passage, and one of the common themes is that the beatitudes lay out Jesus' teaching. And it absolutely does—I think that's the main draw of the Sermon on the Mount as a whole. But what caused me to pause this week, is that several different folks that I read from kept using the same word to describe what Jesus was doing. They called Jesus, and these teachings, radical. Now, I see where they're coming from. I get it—and I even agree on a certain level. But—and I think this is an important time to be saying this: what does it mean for us, our salvation, our families, and our world, if these things are considered radical?

When we call the beatitudes radical, we're essentially saying that it's radical to be meek and humble, that it's radical to desire peace, that it's radical to show mercy.

I don't think those things are that radical. And when we call them radical, it elevates the opposite of those things as normal. When that's the case it becomes normal to be vengeful, it becomes normal to be at war or to fight, it becomes normal to be haughty and braggadocios—which is just a pretentious way of calling someone a jerk.

What I fear is that when we say the beatitudes are radical, we're cementing and ultimately normalizing their opposite as the reality for how the world works. And that, folks, is a problem. I think that's the opposite of what Jesus is aiming for here.

Jesus gives the most powerful teaching of his public ministry and begins by saying: Blessed are the poor in spirit (or Hopeless, as the CEB puts it). Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are those who hunger for righteousness. Blessed are the merciful, and peacemakers, and the pure in heart.. and on and on. These are blessings. I think that Jesus is highlighting for his followers that in God's kingdom, which Jesus has proclaimed to be at hand – these things are the norm. These are normal.

And, truth be told, who wants to live in a world where these things are radical? A world where if you mess up that you automatically expect no mercy. A world where people are continuously elevating themselves day in and day out. A world where there is constant and never-ending war and fighting. A world where people show little to no concern for righteousness and justice. A world where the hearts of people are clouded or even darkened. And if it sounds like I've just described something eerily similar to what we see around us, perhaps the time has come to ask of ourselves as the church: have we simply given way to the world and accepted these things as normal. Have we made these blessings from Jesus something that is radical?

The challenge we have today, is like most of Jesus' teachings, an invitation. Last week we saw that Jesus calls his disciples, and he urges them to follow. This morning, Jesus proclaims these blessings, and ultimately invites us to live in this kingdom where these things are the norm. Where it's normal to desire peace instead of war. Where it's normal to show mercy. Where it's normal to grieve when we need to. Where it's normal to hunger and thirst after righteousness.

So much of scripture prods us to ask the question: what if we actually did it? And, I think that's been the suggestion from lots of people throughout history. Perhaps directly, or in round-about ways, they've said, "what if we actually lived like these beatitudes... accepted these things, these patterns, and positions, as the norm?" And—those people often end up dead.

Martin Luther King Jr. is one that comes immediately to my mind. A man who fought for racial equality, and near the end of his life began working on a poor-people's campaign. He desired to unite poor blacks and poor whites to stand together and demand a level playing field. And, as you'd suspect, those in power were not happy with that. This is a man who was vehemently opposed to the war in Vietnam. A man who said over and over that we ought to live more like Jesus. And he was killed for it.

And there are other examples. Pretty much all of Jesus' disciples. Many other biblical figures and early saints of the church. But there are modern examples as well: Dietrich Bonhoeffer- killed by the Nazi's. Oscar Romero- killed during the civil war in El Salvador. We see it right now, playing out on the streets of our own country. Groups of people gather in opposition to their neighborhoods being terrorized, and they're being gunned down.

Church – don't let them tell you that you didn't see what you saw last Saturday. A man, Alex Petti, within his constitutional rights was seen shielding a woman who was pushed to the ground. He was disarmed and murdered at point-blank range. We can have conversations about whether he should've been armed, we can talk about best practices for protesting, or any number of things – we can have those conversations. But we can't ignore that a man was murdered by our government.

And so, I guess, and this probably kills the argument that I started with – perhaps to the world, or to those who reject the good news of Jesus, these things are radical. To those opposed to Jesus' teachings, maybe the beatitudes are radical. To those who make money from war—peace is an abomination. To those who benefit from the prison industrial complex—mercy is a joke. To those who gain attention from their own vanity—meekness is terrifying. To those who create the modern-day idols that we all at time fall prey to—hungering and thirsting for true righteousness is a fatal casualty. The invitation remains the same however: Jesus invites us to this way of living. And in his kingdom – these things are not radical. They are the norm.

Truth be told, this teaching from Jesus is deeply rooted in his lived experience as a Jewish person. With, perhaps a more modern take, Jesus borrows from the prophets that came before him and proclaims these blessings.

We even see the similarities in the passage that we read from Micah. In asking what is required, we learn this it isn't rivers of oil, it's not fatted calves, it's not the life of our firstborn – it's something entirely different. It is to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God. Jesus expounds upon this—but the sentiment remains eerily similar. Our relationship with God, our work in the kingdom, these blessings that Jesus pronounces – they're blessings that stem from doing justice, loving kindness (mercy), and walking humbly with God.

What we hear from Jesus this morning is ultimately this: To the world, these things are radical. But you don't belong to the world—you belong to the kingdom. That means these things are normal. And if you live this way: if you act mercifully, if you search for righteousness, if you desire peace, if you do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God – you will be happy. And who doesn't want to be happy?

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
AMEN.