

## Grace That Meets Us in Our Weakness

Bible reference for sermon 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 & Matthew 5:1-12

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. <sup>2</sup> And he 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 the sake of righteousness, 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. Matthew 5:1-12*

There is a particular kind of foolishness that the world laughs at. It is the foolishness of not fighting back when you could. The foolishness of listening before speaking. The foolishness of mercy in a culture addicted to punishment. The foolishness of blessing those whom society has already written off.

And then there is another kind of foolishness—far more dangerous to the world's way of thinking—the foolishness of the cross.

On this Fourth Sunday of Epiphany, we stand with Jesus on the mountain. He sits down, as teachers do, and opens his mouth. What comes out is not advice on how to succeed, or strategies for climbing the ladder, or spiritual techniques for self-improvement. What comes out is blessing—spoken over people the world calls weak, failed, invisible, or foolish.



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"Blessed are the poor in spirit."

"Blessed are those who mourn."

"Blessed are the meek."

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness."

These are not instructions. Jesus is not saying, “Try harder to be poor,” or “Go and manufacture grief.” These are not entrance requirements for God’s reign. They are announcements. They are gospel.

Jesus looks out at a crowd shaped by Roman occupation, economic insecurity, sickness, and social shame, and he says:

*God is already on your side. God’s reign is already breaking in for you.*

That is foolishness, according to the world. Because the world is organised around strength, success, dominance, and control. The world blesses the winners, the powerful, the loudest voices, the most certain opinions. The world assumes that blessing is earned.

But Jesus begins his ministry by renaming reality. He blesses those who have been told—explicitly or subtly—that their lives do not count for much.

And this is where we see the other side of the Epiphany season. Because Epiphany is not only about revelation; it is about *reversal*. God is revealed not where we expect, but where we least expect.



“The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing.”

Paul puts it bluntly in his letter to the Corinthians: “The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing.” Crucifixion was not noble. It was not heroic. It was a state-sponsored spectacle of shame. No one looked at a crucified man and thought,

*Ah yes, the wisdom of God.*

And yet Paul insists: *this is where God is most fully revealed.*

Not in eloquence.

Not in power.

Not in certainty.

But in a broken body, a public execution, and a dying man who refuses to save himself.

Here is the scandal of our faith: God does not defeat suffering by avoiding it. God enters it. God does not overcome weakness by overpowering it. God inhabits it.

Christ crucified is not God’s Plan B. It is not an unfortunate accident on the way to resurrection. The cross is the heart of who God is *for us*.

On the cross, Christ does not stand above human pain, offering commentary. He stands *within* it. He takes into himself the weight of shame, rejection, violence, and abandonment. He carries what we cannot carry alone.

This is what Christ does for us.

When we are poor in spirit—worn down, exhausted, running on empty—  
Christ does not tell us to be stronger.  
He gives us the kingdom. Not later, not once we've improved, but now.  
He gives us belonging when we feel we have nothing left to offer.



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When we mourn—not only personal losses, but the grief of a world scarred by injustice—Christ does not rush us to closure. He advocates for us. He stands alongside us, naming what is wrong, refusing to pretend that suffering is normal or acceptable. He promises comfort that is not sentimental, but transformative.

When we are meek—not because we are virtuous, but because we have been pushed to the edges—Christ does not shame us for our lack of power. He promises inheritance. A future where land, dignity, and life itself are no longer hoarded by the few.

This is blessing as reassurance and resistance.

And blessing comes first. Jesus speaks these blessings *before* his disciples have done anything impressive. Before they understand him. Before they get it right. Before they fail him spectacularly.



Grace precedes everything.  
God acts before we respond.  
What a gift!  
And this is where the foolishness becomes liberating.  
Because if blessing is not earned, then neither is our worth.

If God chooses what is weak, then we do not need to pretend to be strong.

If God works through what is despised, then our failures are not the end of the story. The Corinthian Christians struggled with status and division. They lined up behind impressive leaders. They compared spiritual credentials. They competed. Paul does not fix this with better management techniques. He points them back to the cross.

At the cross, no one gets to boast.  
At the cross, all hierarchies collapse.  
At the cross, we discover that our life together is not built on who is right, clever, or successful, but on who has been loved into being.  
Christ crucified exposes the lie that we must justify ourselves.  
And that lie is everywhere.

We see it in our productivity culture, where rest feels like failure.  
We see it in political discourse, where listening is treated as weakness.  
We see it in churches, where confidence can masquerade as faith.  
But the cross tells the truth about us—and then tells a deeper truth about God.  
The truth about us is that we are finite, fragile, and dependent.  
The truth about God is that God is faithful anyway.

Paul says that Christ has become for us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

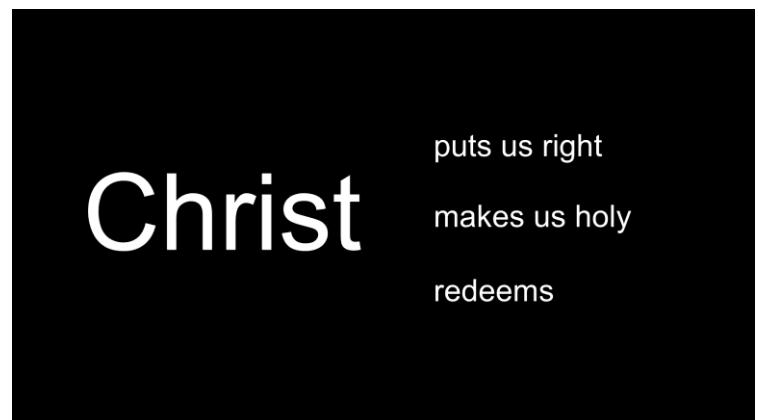
Notice: *for us*. This is not a self-help program. This is gift.

Christ puts us right with God when we cannot fix ourselves.

Christ makes us holy not by our performance, but by our belonging.

Christ redeems what we thought was wasted, broken, or beyond repair.

That is why boasting is ruled out. The only thing left to say is thank you. And from that thankfulness, something begins to grow.



The Beatitudes do not command us to change the world by sheer moral effort. But they do shape a community that lives differently because it has been loved differently.

Those who know they are blessed in their poverty of spirit are freer to show mercy.

Those who have been comforted can sit with others in grief.

Those who no longer need to prove their worth can make peace instead of winning arguments.

This is not heroism. It is participation.

The passive verbs in the Beatitudes matter: “they will be comforted,” “they will be filled,” “they will be shown mercy.” God is the primary actor. And yet, God’s action spills over into human hands.

The question is not, “Where is God when people suffer?”

The question becomes, “Where is God’s community—and what is it doing?”

But even here, the gospel guards us from despair. Because the work does not depend on our strength. It depends on God’s faithfulness.

The foolishness of the cross frees us from cynicism. It tells us that even when change seems impossible, God is already at work in ways we cannot measure.

And so Epiphany leads us, not away from the cross, but toward it.

The light we see in Christ is not a spotlight of success. It is the steady, defiant light of love that refuses to go out, even in the darkest places.

Christ is revealed as the one who blesses the unblessed.  
Christ is revealed as the one who stands with the weak.  
Christ is revealed as the one who gives himself away for the life of the world.

This is foolishness worth trusting.

Because in a world obsessed with being right, the cross teaches us how to be loving.

In a world chasing strength, the cross teaches us how to be honest.

In a world desperate for certainty, the cross teaches us how to hope.

And in all of this, Christ does not point us to a path we must walk alone. He goes ahead of us. He carries us. He holds us.

Thanks be to God for Christ crucified—

the wisdom of God,  
the power of God,  
and the blessing that cannot be taken away.  
Amen.

*Video of the service including the above address can be found on the St Paul's Lutheran Church Youtube page <https://www.youtube.com/@stpaulslutheranchurchboxhi1133>*