I speak to you in the name of our Creator, Christ the light of the world and the Holy Spirit, the one who heals, restores, and transforms us. Amen.

It's always a rich pleasure to preach on a Sunday where a strong common thread is woven through all the readings. Today's readings place us on holy ground where God speaks plainly—and yet not simply—about what truly matters. Micah stands in a courtroom of creation. Psalm 15 asks who may dwell with God. Paul speaks of foolishness that is wiser than wisdom. And Matthew brings us up a mountain where Jesus opens his mouth and blesses the unlikely.

This is Epiphany work. Epiphany is not only about light appearing; it is about seeing differently. It is about the slow, unsettling, grace-filled reordering of our vision—what we think strength looks like, what we imagine holiness requires, what kind of life we believe God actually blesses.

Micah begins with a summons. The mountains are called as witnesses. The hills lean in. God is not whispering here; God is pleading. "O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer Me!" (Micah 6:3) It is one of the most tender and aching questions in Scripture. God is not angry so much as grieved. This is the voice of a God who remembers relationship—liberation from Egypt, guidance through wilderness, the quiet faithfulness of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam walking with a fragile people.

And then comes the human response, anxious and frantic in verses 6 to 7 "What do you want from us? Burnt offerings? Calves? Rivers of oil? Our firstborn?" We can almost hear the rising panic. Surely, God, there must be something impressive enough, costly enough, religious enough to fix this.

And God replies, "He has told you, O mortal, what is good." Not performative religion. Not spiritual excess. But to do justice. To love kindness. To walk humbly with our God. This isn't a checklist. It is a way of being in the world. Justice that shapes how we treat the vulnerable. Kindness, that is loyal, active, covenantal love, which by the way is that Hebrew word *hesed*, most often used for God's steadfast love. Humility that knows we walk, not run, with God. This is relational faithfulness.

Psalm 15 echoes this vision, asking, "O LORD, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill?" (Ps 15:1) In Israel's imagination, the temple was not merely a building; it was dangerously alive with the presence of God. To step toward that presence was both life-giving and risky. Leviticus had already taught the people that holiness is not something to approach lightly. And so Psalm 15 insists: preparation matters. But notice what the psalm does not say. The priest does not answer with ritual requirements. Just like in Micah, there is no mention of sacrifices, purity laws, lineage, or correct liturgical technique. Instead, the response comes as ethical instruction—what Walter Brueggemann of blessed memory calls a priestly torah, a teaching that shapes a life rather than a moment. Worship, the psalm insists, is not something one performs and then leaves behind. Worship is something one arrives carrying in one's body, speech, and relationships.

Robert Alter notes the subtle movement in its language. The psalm begins with sojourning—temporary residence in a tent—and then moves to dwelling on the holy mountain. The verbs shift from provisional to settled, from passing

through to abiding. The question, then, is not only who may visit God, but who may make a home in God's presence—who can live there without being undone.

The answer unfolds as a plainspoken catalogue of moral life. Alter notes that Psalm 15 contains no imagery at all. It is spare, direct, almost blunt. This is deliberate. The psalm wants to be unmistakably clear: holiness is lived out between people. "Those who walk blamelessly," the psalm says—not perfectly, but with integrity. The Hebrew suggests a wholeness, a life whose parts fit together. Speech aligns with action. Private conviction aligns with public behavior. "Doing what is right" here is not about isolated good deeds, but about being what the psalms elsewhere call a doer of righteousness—someone whose way of being consistently bends toward justice rather than exploitation. Again and again, the psalm returns to speech. No slander. No shame-heaping. No manipulation through words. Worship begins with the tongue because words create worlds. The faithful person understands that harm inflicted through speech fractures community and makes the holy place unsafe.

Verses 4 and 5 move into economic and social power. The worshiper who may dwell with God refuses profit that preys on vulnerability. No usury, that means charging interest. No bribes. No leveraging influence against the innocent. In an ancient economy where lending could easily become predatory, the psalm insists that holiness shows up in how power is restrained for the sake of mercy.

Then Paul comes along and unsettles us further. "The message of the cross is foolishness." Paul is not merely making a rhetorical point; he is drawing a sharp line between the way God acts in the world and the way power usually works. God does not save through dominance or spectacle or moral superiority. God does not

conquer by force, intimidate by fear, or compel allegiance through coercion. God saves through weakness, through self-giving love, through a crucified Messiah whose power is revealed not in control, but in surrender. Paul insists that God consistently chooses what the world dismisses—what is low, despised, overlooked—to reveal divine wisdom. The cross exposes how easily human beings confuse God with power as we understand it: winning, controlling, prevailing, being on top. But the wisdom of God moves in the opposite direction. It bends downward. It listens. It bears wounds rather than inflicting them.

That is a word of quiet reassurance for us in a time when Christian language is sometimes wrapped around projects of fear, exclusion, or domination. When faith is pressed into the service of national power, cultural supremacy, or anxious boundary-keeping, Paul gently but firmly reminds us: that is not how God saves. The cross stands as God's enduring refusal to be weaponized. It tells us that whenever Christianity is used to grasp for control, to silence the vulnerable, or to claim moral superiority over others, it has already drifted away from the wisdom it proclaims.

And here is the encouragement Paul offers: we do not need to mirror that anxiety or match that volume. The gospel does not depend on being defended by force or secured by influence. It is already held in the faithful, self-giving love of God. Our calling is not to win culture wars, but to bear witness, to stand up for the vulnerable, to live lives shaped by mercy, humility, and courage, trusting that God's strength is made known precisely where the world expects it least. In a noisy moment, Paul invites us back to a quieter confidence: Christ crucified remains the power of God. Not fragile, not defeated, not obsolete—but steadfast, liberating, and

still at work among those who choose love over fear, faithfulness over control, and grace over grasping.

This is important as we turn toward the mountain in Matthew's Gospel. Jesus sits, as teachers do, and begins to speak. And what he says is not advice for the spiritually elite. It is not a roadmap to success. It is a blessing spoken over people who are poor in spirit, grieving, meek, hungry, merciful, pure-hearted, peace-seeking, and often wounded for their faithfulness. The Beatitudes are not prescriptions. They are descriptions. Jesus is not telling people how to suffer better. He is naming where God already is among the suffering.

You have often heard me refer to Richard Rohr before. He is one of my favourite people. I love his Franciscan view of God and the world. His organization, the Centre for Action and Contemplation sends out what they call Daily Meditations emails which weave together wisdom from a collection of writers and one week last year they dedicated the whole week to the Beatitudes which I found very helpful. The Beatitudes are not spiritualized virtues; they are relational truths. They describe a way of being aligned with the flow of God's reign already unfolding among us. Jesus blesses those who know their need, not because need is good, but because it opens space for grace. He blesses those who mourn, because grief opens us to the nearness of God, who comes close to the broken-hearted.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit." This is about releasing the illusion of self-sufficiency. It is about recognizing that everything—breath, forgiveness, tomorrow—is gift. The kingdom of heaven belongs not to those who have climbed high, but to those who have stopped pretending they can save themselves.

"Blessed are those who mourn." In a culture that rushes past grief, Jesus stops and calls it sacred ground. Mourning holds both personal loss and sorrow for a wounded world. It is the ache of loving deeply. And Jesus promises comfort—not explanation, not erasure—but presence. God-with-us in the valley.

"Blessed are the meek." Meekness is not passivity. It is strength that refuses domination. Meek does not mean "weak," but rather patient, humble, teachable, trusting God, and showing gentleness in actions. The meek inherit the earth not by conquest, but by care. They know how to tend what they receive.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." This is a longing for things to be made right—for justice to roll down, for dignity to be restored, for systems to reflect God's mercy. And Jesus promises that this hunger will not be mocked forever. It will be filled.

"Blessed are the merciful." Mercy carries real weight. It bears the cost of love. It opens space where cycles of harm can give way to repentance, healing and restoration. Mercy reflects the heart of God, who continually draws near with compassion and grace.

"Blessed are the pure in heart." Purity here is not about moral perfection. Purity of heart is a single-hearted devotion, an undivided life, a clarity of love. It is a way of living oriented wholly toward God. From that centeredness, people begin to recognize God's presence everywhere.

"Blessed are the peacemakers." Not peacekeepers. Peacemakers. Those who do the hard work of reconciliation. Who refuse easy binaries and extreme polarities.

Who step into conflict with courage and compassion. They will be called children of God because they resemble the one who created them.

And finally, "Blessed are those who are persecuted." Jesus is honest. This way of life will not always be celebrated. Love that challenges injustice will provoke resistance. Faithfulness may cost reputation, comfort, even safety. And still, Jesus says, rejoice. Not because suffering is good, but because you stand in the long line of prophets who trusted God more than applause.

The CAC reflections remind us that the Beatitudes are not future rewards dangled at the end of endurance. They are present-tense declarations of God's nearness. "Theirs is the kingdom." "They will be comforted." "They will see God." This is deep realism grounded in hope.

Taken together, Micah, the Psalm, Paul, and Jesus are telling the same story. God is not impressed by spectacle. God is drawn to faithfulness. God does not require religious excess but relational integrity. God's wisdom looks like foolishness because it refuses the logic of domination. God's blessing rests where the world least expects it.

And here is the gentle, unsettling invitation of Epiphany: to let our vision be healed. To notice where we have confused success with faithfulness, noise with depth, certainty with trust. To ask not, "What must I do to earn God's favor?" but, "Where is God already at work, and how might I walk there too?" This is a call to attentiveness. To justice practiced in ordinary decisions. To kindness that stays when it would be easier to leave. To humility that knows we walk together, step by step, with a God who has already gone ahead of us.

And perhaps that is why Paul insists that our only boasting is in the Lord. Not in our clarity. Not in our righteousness. But in a God who chooses us—not because we are strong, but because love delights in making all things new.

So may we hear the blessing spoken over us today. May we trust that God is at work in our longing, our grief, our hunger for what is right. And may we walk humbly, faithfully, courageously, into the unfolding light of God's kingdom—already among us, still coming, and always held in love.