

Gospel according to:

### **Matthew 5:1-12**

<sup>1</sup> 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."

The Gospel of Christ

For those who don't know me, my name is Eli Deifeld. I am a pastor from the Lutheran Church of Brazil and now live here in Victoria with my family.

Today we are welcoming new members to our Church. I hope you will feel at home, just as my family and I felt when we arrived here several years ago.

We are glad that you are joining our congregation; together we are stronger. We are happy that you decided to serve God in this congregation.

In our community life, may we all feel supported and find strength to serve within and outside the community. May the Gospel be the light for our path.

Today's gospel tells us that Jesus went up the mountain.

And, sitting at that mountain, the people who listened to him were seeking hope. They lived under the oppression of the Roman Empire. They paid high taxes, leaving little to live on, and were often harshly punished, most times with death, for any attempt at opposing the Empire.

They hoped that the Son of God would come to free them from the yoke of oppression, and many even expected it to happen by means of armed struggle. What Jesus taught them, however, is that the values of that empire, based on exploitation, brutality, violence and power, are not the values that God, the Creator, proposes to humanity. From the prophets of the Old Testament all the way to Jesus Christ, the word of God points to a new path—a new way of living and building society, a path whose followers are called the blessed ones in today's readings.

But who are the blessed ones of God? For Prophet Micah, as we heard in the first reading today, they are those who do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. For the Apostle Paul, they are the ones who find wisdom in the weakness of the cross. And, for Jesus, they are the poor in spirit, the humble, the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those who mourn, and those who hunger for righteousness.

Jesus did not come to repeat a model that was and still is doomed to fail, but to teach us that another way to build our lives and humankind is possible. And not only that, but he also came to say that he is beside those who suffer, with those who mourn, and not in the boots of those who oppress.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

And who are those who mourn today? Beside whom would Jesus be today? Beside the parents who mourn the death of children killed in protests for the end of the dictatorship in Iran? Beside the families who mourn the death of people who tried to protect immigrant neighbours from ICE brutality in Minnesota? Children taken from their homes, ripped from their families? Immigrants who are imprisoned?

The times we are living in are not easy. And it can be difficult to keep hope alive when it seems that everyday brutality keeps escalating. But we cannot allow madness to put our human empathy to sleep.

Hannah Arendt, a Holocaust survivor, once said: "The death of human empathy is one of the earliest and most telling signs of a culture about to fall into barbarism."

Last Tuesday, January 27th, we commemorated the International Day in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust. This annual commemoration marks the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp by the Red Army in 1945. It is necessary to remember the horrors that humanity is capable of committing against its own kind. And remember that authoritarianism, hate speech, and ethnic and religious prejudice were the building blocks of the worst tragedy of the last century. We must remember it so it doesn't happen again, and we must also remember it so it's not denied. Just as the atrocities committed in residential schools in Canada cannot be denied.

We cannot feel another way but to be outraged by the brutality and the horrible things that happened in the past and are happening now.

But, at the same time, we must also see the wonderful things that people are doing for one another.

In Minnesota, for example, the epicenter of the immigration crackdown in the US, people are organizing to drive immigrant children to school, to take immigrants to the doctor, the supermarket or the airport, and to bring food to people's homes, so that those being persecuted are less exposed.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Ordinary people are watching the streets, filming the actions of the police, so that even greater atrocities can be avoided. People are protecting the lives of others with their own bodies.

People on watch, people going out into the streets in freezing temperatures, calling for justice and peace. They are even being arrested because of it.

'Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'

The seeds of mercy are there, and they will not be burned or destroyed by hate and brutality.

Martin Luther King, whose birthday was remembered on January 15th,

dedicated his life to fight for equity and justice. He taught us that even in the face of intimidation and discrimination, we must never stop working towards a better future—a lesson that feels especially relevant today.

Change has never been easy.

It takes persistence and determination, and it requires all of us to speak out and stand up for what we believe in.

Today, we are welcoming new members into our congregation. And, when we do so, we also remember our baptism. In our baptism we are called to be there for one another.

In our baptism, we are called to be the blessed ones of God, the children of God. This is our call; this is our mission.

And in these difficult times, it's essential to remember that we are not alone.

To conclude, let us remember, no evil, no brutality, no madness will last forever, but the word of God will remain. "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." Amen