

**The Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
January 31 & February 1, 2026
Rev. Lisa Hackler
American Lutheran Church**

Micah 6:1-8

I Corinthians 1:18-31

Matthew 5:1-12

I have a good friend who lives in Alaska. We'll call her Ann. Over the course of her life, Ann has had to bury two children and a husband. She lives with a physical disability. And for many years, she struggled with severe alcoholism. She would be the first to tell you that her life has not been easy.

She would also tell you that she lives under no illusion that she can survive this world on her own strength. She once said to me, "The day God finally got through to me that I could depend on God's power rather than my own—that was the day I was truly blessed." Not because her circumstances suddenly changed. Not because the pain went away. But because she stopped pretending she could carry it all alone.

By most standards, Ann would be considered marginal—poor, sick, and unfortunate. But she will tell you, without hesitation, that she is blessed. And when Jesus goes up the mountain, sits down, and begins to speak, it sounds like he is talking about someone exactly like her.

We read in the gospel, that Jesus goes up the mountain and sits down. In Scripture, mountains are places where God speaks decisively. Moses went up the mountain to receive the law. Jesus goes up the mountain to announce the kingdom.

And what Jesus announces first is not a command. It is not advice. It is a blessing.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit."

"Blessed are those who mourn."

"Blessed are the meek."

These are not instructions for how to become blessed. They are announcements about where God already is. And from the very beginning, they sound upside down.

Jesus does not bless the strong, the successful, the confident, or the admired. He blesses people who look like they are losing. Which tells us something essential: Jesus is not redefining success. He is revealing the kingdom.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit.”

The poor in spirit are not people who put themselves down or people pretending to be humble. The poor in spirit are those who know they have nothing to bargain with before God. No résumé. No leverage. No illusion of control. Martin Luther would say these are the people who have stopped trying to justify themselves. They have given up on managing their own righteousness. They know they cannot survive by willpower alone. And Jesus says: the kingdom of heaven belongs to them. Not someday....now.

Ann would recognize that blessing immediately. She will tell you that the day she stopped pretending she could survive on her own power—that was the day grace finally had room to work.

“Blessed are those who mourn.” This is not only private grief, though it surely includes it. This is the mourning of people who look at the world and say, this is not how it’s supposed to be. It is grief over violence that keeps repeating itself. Over systems that crush the vulnerable. Over a world that trusts brute force more than God.

New Testament scholar N. T. Wright reminds us that Jesus is speaking to people still waiting for God to set things right. These are the ones who refuse to numb themselves to suffering. Jesus does not tell them to cheer up. He blesses them. Because mourning, in Scripture, is not weakness. It is love that has not gone numb.

“They shall be comforted”—not with denial, but with restoration. Not with distraction, but with God’s future.

Ann mourns this world deeply—not because she has given up, but because she knows how far we are from trusting God to secure our future.

“Blessed are the meek.” Not the passive. Not the silent. Not the doormats. The meek are those who refuse to seize power to protect themselves. This is Luther’s theology of the cross: God does not save the world through domination or force. God saves through trust and faithfulness. God saves through the cross. Jesus says the meek will inherit the earth—not because they take it by force, but because God gives it. The Kingdom of God does not belong to those who grab it.

Ann speaks up for people who are afraid to speak—not so she can win, not so she can dominate, but because she knows what it is to be powerless and yet held by God. She knows there is nothing that the world can take from her that God cannot restore.

Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.” Not people who think they are righteous or deserving or better than others. But people who ache for the world to be put right. They hunger and thirst. This is the refusal to say, “This is just how things are.”

Jesus promises satisfaction—not because **we** will fix the world, but because God will. And then Jesus tells the truth plainly: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake.” Faithfulness has a cost. This way of life is not always admired. But the way of the cross is not God’s defeat. It is God’s way of winning without violence. As Paul says, “The foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom.” God hides glory under weakness. Life under death. Blessing under the cross.

So what are the Beatitudes? They are not a ladder we climb. They are not ideals we master.

They are announcements that God has come down. They tell us where God’s blessing rests—often in places the world calls failure. That is why we sing the beatitudes.

“Blest are they, the poor in spirit...”

Because singing lets the truth reach our hearts before we can argue with it.

When I think again about Ann, I don’t think of her as tragic. I think about how she lives now.

She does not drink—she relies on God’s power, not her own strength. She mourns the state of this world because she loves it enough to grieve it. She speaks for those who are afraid to speak. And she rejoices—not because life is easy, but because she trusts that Jesus will one day put things right.

Most people would look at her life and see only what has been lost. She looks at her life and sees what God has done. She will tell you that God has healed her—not by erasing her scars, but by forgiving her, holding her, and giving her eyes to see what many never grasp.

She is poor in spirit—and she knows it. She mourns—and she refuses to turn away. And she trusts God more than her own strength.

And Jesus says: Blessed are *they*. Not because *they* are strong. Not because *they* are winning. But because the kingdom of heaven is already near. God is with them. It is easy to feel blessed when everything is going well. But in those moments when you feel like in the eyes of the world you are losing, be reassured, God is with you and you are blessed.

Amen.