

Getting Back to Jesus of Nazareth

- [Micah 6:1-8](#)
- [Matthew 5:1-12](#)

I have been learning recently about Christian Nationalism. That is when Christianity gets conflated with a form of patriotism which says that America should be a Christian country. Now on the face of it, we might agree, it would be great if everyone were a follower of Jesus. After all, didn't Jesus himself tell us to go and make disciples of all the nations? But the reality is that there are many Americans who follow a different spiritual and religious path, and we would really be restricting the work of God if we said that anyone who wasn't Christian could not know God.

Those who follow the Christian Nationalism ideology believe that we need to reclaim America as a Christian country, and their ideas quickly lead them to thinking that all Christians think like them, and indeed all Christians look like them, and then it's a short half step to ideas about white supremacy and taking up arms to reclaim the country and before you know it, things like the January 6th insurrection are happening.

The reason I'm bringing this up this morning is that our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry, has said that one of the ways we can work against this ideology is to focus on the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. This morning's gospel is one of the most beloved and most perplexing of those teachings. The beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, or the Beatitudes, takes us right back to the person of Jesus.

He was not a revolutionary military leader who tried to free Palestine from the Romans. He wasn't even a Christian himself because Christianity did not exist. We can see him through many different lenses including that of non-violent resistance.

Jesus' non-violent response to those who plotted against him and who finally had him executed has been an inspiration for movements of non-violent resistance which have enabled people oppressed by the ideologies that privilege one, usually white-skinned, group over another to find within themselves a place of love and incredible discipline. This enabled the Indian people to overcome the oppressive occupation of the British, the Civil Rights movement in this country and the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa.

Our first lesson from Micah ended with the encapsulation of what it means to be a person of God, "what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" and that is what we see in Jesus of Nazareth. Not a striving for power, not a jockeying for position, but walking humbly with our God.

Which means loving everyone, regardless of their skin color, regardless of their gender expression or sexual preference, regardless of their preferred ideology.

Bishop Curry also encourages us to find people who are different from us and to work to develop friendships with them. This can be difficult. We tend to find very good reasons not to work on

creating friendships with those to whom we are not naturally drawn. Even within the church congregation I bet there are some who you don't find as attractive as others, or whom you have just never gotten to know. Being peacemakers means having the courage to cross even the small bridges that divide us.

I don't have the words to express the depth and the challenge that Jesus gives us in these few verses today. I hope that during Lent some of you will join me in exploring them more deeply by reading together *a book by Richard Rohr, called "Jesus' Alternative Plan." What we will learn then is that this is not just about behavior but a whole transformation of consciousness as we become more and more Christlike.

But today I am going to let Jesus' words speak for themselves as we re-read the gospel together. Let's say it responsively:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, *for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

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

"Blessed are the meek, *for they will inherit the earth.*

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, *for they will be filled.*

"Blessed are the merciful, *for they will receive mercy.*

"Blessed are the pure in heart, *for they will see God.*

"Blessed are the peacemakers, *for they will be called children of God.*

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

"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, *for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."*