**All Church Worship Brainstorming Summary**

**“The Beatitudes”**

Monday, April 15, 2024 at Erbes’ home

May 12-July 7, 2024 (9 weeks)

**Members present:** Ed Baranowski, Kathy Luckett, Ken Luckett, Sue Baranowski, Vicki Zuker, Mark Erbes, Betty Kinney, Pastor Mary Ivanov, Dave Booth, Marie Kordecki, Karen Booth; Jean Kelly and Ken Luckett via email

*“The worship we hope to develop will be rooted in Scripture, centered on Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. It will be relevant to local and emerging culture, while addressing the needs of believers and unbelievers alike. Above all, it will intentionally engage people physically, emotionally, intellectually, and soulfully.”*

**Felt needs:** What physical, emotional, intellectual, or spiritual need are we addressing in this service so that worship is engaging and a means of making disciples? What question needs to be posed/answered so that we are making disciples?

**Series synopsis:** Jesus’ description of the Kingdom of God and what it means to be “blessed” turns our world upside-down. Consider the words of our theme song, “The Jesus Way” by Phil Wickham:

*If you curse me, then I will bless you*

*If you hurt me, I will forgive*

*And if you hate me, then I will love you*

*I choose the Jesus way*

**2024 theme connection:** Studying the Beatitudes helps us follow Jesus’ counter-cultural way of living and loving others.

**2024 Theme:**  Following the Jesus Way

**Inspiration:** [*The Jesus Way*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ARSGgC9iQb0) by Phil Wickham

**Related songs:** *I Have Decided to Follow Jesus*

**Key verse:** John 13: 34 – A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

**Social Justice Issue for May 2024:** Suicide (connection to gun violence)

**Social Justice Issue for June 2024:** Hate and Division among people

**Social Justice Issue for July 2024:** Care for those incarcerated

**Noisy offering for May 2024:** Camp scholarships (Education designated fund)

**Noisy offering for June 2024:** MAP Medical Fund

**Noisy offering for July 2024:** TBD

### **Focus Scripture:** Matthew 5: 1-12 (NIV) –

### **Introduction to the Sermon on the Mount**

5 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2and he began to teach them.

### **The Beatitudes**

### The NIV is a well-known translation. See one translations/paraphrases below and another at the **Scripture:** Matthew 5: 1-12 (MSG).

He said:

3“Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
    for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
4Blessed are those who mourn,  
    for they will be comforted.  
5Blessed are the meek,  
    for they will inherit the earth.  
6Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
    for they will be filled.  
7Blessed are the merciful,  
    for they will be shown mercy.  
8Blessed are the pure in heart,  
    for they will see God.  
9Blessed are the peacemakers,  
    for they will be called children of God.  
10Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,  
    for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The Beatitudes is one of those familiar passages which adults often think children ought to learn, but which children have little chance of understanding without significant adult help. First, they must explore the meaning of blessed. **If "blessed" is paraphrased as "happy," that happiness must be defined and differentiated from short-term, shallow satisfaction.** Then they need help wading through each verse, many of which are abstract descriptions of human activity followed by somewhat vague promises.

Here is one paraphrase suitable for children:

*Happy are those who are gentle, for they are in charge in God's kingdom.*

*Happy are those who grieve, for God will comfort them.*

*Happy are those who obey God, for God will make them leaders.*

*Happy are those who wish for fairness for everyone, for their wish will come true.*

*Happy are those who forgive others, for they shall be forgiven.*

*Happy are those who put being a disciple first in their lives, for they will know God personally.*

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

*Happy are those who are mistreated when they do what God wants, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.*

*You will find happiness and peace deep within you when you are teased or mistreated,  
or when others tell lies about you, because you are my disciples.*

*You will be happy because you will know that you are one of God's people, and God's people have often suffered.*

**Points to consider and related discussion:**

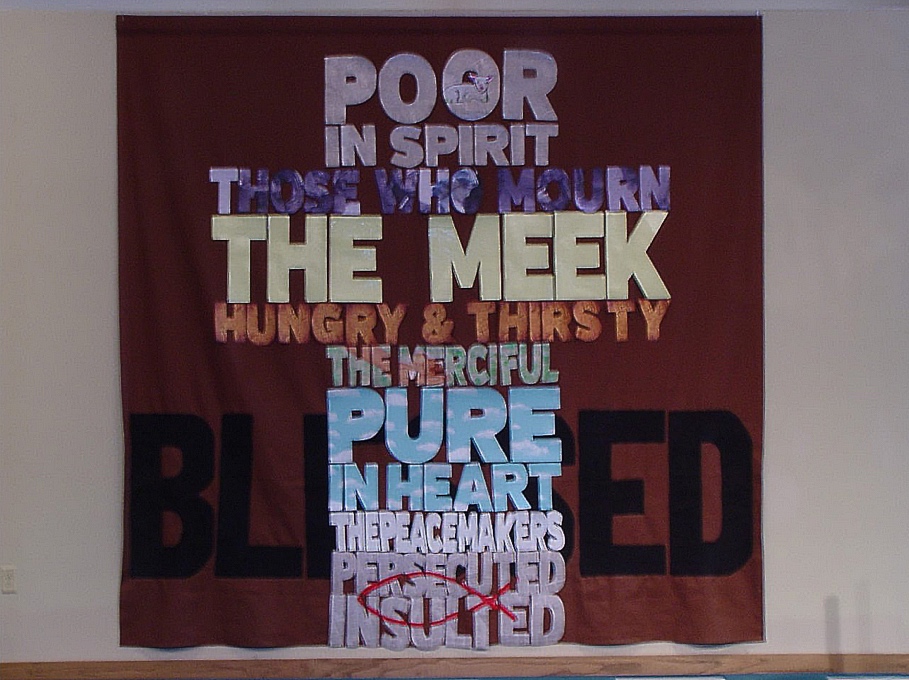
* The Beatitudes are the principles of sacred attitude (Matt. 5:1-12). Truth, righteousness, and holiness become our watchword and song in life—all of which point to moral responsibility. **Discussion***:* They are not about personal feelings, but about who we are called to be.
* The Hebrew, *ashre*, is echoed in Jesus’ Beatitudes, which aren’t directives on how to be happy or blessed. Jesus looks at those who are poor in spirit or merciful, and he blesses them.
* “Jesus’s beatitudes are prophetic declarations,” means they are simply true.
* Think about the word “blessed.” It does not mean “God gives us stuff.” It means “to be drawn near to God.” **Discussion:** 1) “Prosperity gospel” is a term used mostly by critics to describe a theology and movement based on the belief that **God wants to reward believers with health and wealth**. In western cultures, like the United States, we tend to use the word “blessed” as if we believe the prosperity gospel, rather than in the gospel Jesus taught. 2) Blessed: Thankful. Blessed and grateful (Jan Justus). Gratefully blessed.
* [From 2014 notes:](https://lakeharborumc.org/2014/01/worship-brainstorming-for-the-beatitudes/) An overview of the Beatitudes reminds us that they are not prescribed behaviors that we are to have in order to be blessed, but that through grace, God blessed us at those times when we feel anything but blessed!
* There’s been a call to post the Ten Commandments in public places. What about the Beatitudes posted in public places? **Discussion:** No one seems to be asking for that. When Rabbi Alpert was here to talk about the Ten Commandments, he commented that he though Jesus went a bit too far in the Beatitudes.
* What if Jesus began his teaching ministry with a word of encouragement instead of an impossible standard to attain? What if the Beatitudes were a snapshot of the community of faith instead of a measuring rod?

**Resources:**

* [*Forgiveness, the Passionate Journey*](https://store.upperroom.org/product/forgiveness-the-passionate-journey) by Flora Slosson Wuellner
* [*The Eight Blessings: Rediscovering the Beatitudes*](https://www.amazon.com/Eight-Blessings-Rediscovering-Beatitudes/dp/0687642248) by Shane Stanford
* [*The Beatitudes for Today*](https://www.amazon.com/Beatitudes-Today-James-C-Howell/dp/0664229328) by James C. Howell
* “The Beatitudes in Matthew 5: Meaning and Significance for Today” <https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/beatitudes>
* [“A Christian Vocabulary for an Exhausted Age”](https://lakeharborumc.org/2024/04/march-15-2024-worship-brainstorming-the-beatitudes/) by Russell Moore | Christianity Today, August 25, 2023 (on our website)

**UM website:**

* <https://www.umc.org/en/content/who-is-really-blessed>
* <https://um-insight.net/topics/beatitudes/>



**Visuals:**

* Use the brown “BLESSED” banner from 2014. The images and lettering were inspired by a Beatitudes video produce by Quaddot.
* *Blessed Station:* Create a station where individuals can reflect on the Beatitude including relevant scriptures, reflections, and prayer prompts, similar to the tables during the Holy Week prayer vigil.
* *Artistic expressions:* Artwork, poetry, or other expressions inspired by the Beatitudes. Display these creations around the church as a visual representation of the teachings.
* *Potential symbols:*
  + ***Keys:*** The Beatitudes unlock the kingdom of heaven
  + ***Train:*** Jesus is the engine, we are the caboose, and all the cars in between are the Beatitudes.
  + ***Tree:*** Limbs are the Beatitudes
  + ***Recipe:*** The Beatitudes are a recipe for our reward in heaven
  + ***Travel Guide:*** Beatitudes are blessings for a joyful journey
  + ***Arch:*** “Keystone” center stone on top that holds the arch in place represents the beatitudes. Without it the arch would not be sustainable.

**Hands-on items:**

* Beatitudes bookmark
* Seeds – The Beatitudes are like seeds that will grow and bloom

**Activities:** Blessed station, above in visuals

**Media:** Plan on showing a video every three weeks. We like to see the text and hear narration from the video or Pastor Mary. Our favorites are shown in red.

* [“Blessed”](https://www.playbackmedia.com/mini-movies/39852/blessed) (Centerline Media). Length: 1:44. Cost: Free. Web license: Yes. The world tells us one thing about being blessed, yet the Word tells us something very different. Based on the Beatitudes from Christ's Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5. **Comments:** The music overwhelmed the narration to some extent.
* [“The Beatitudes”](https://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/98111/the-beatitudes) (Rype.tv). Length: 0:58. Cost: We own it. Last used: 4/2021. Web license: Yes. Visual liturgy. **Comments:** Use it.
* [“Blessed Are”](https://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/120031/blessed-are) (Church Fuel). Length: 1:32. Cost: $20. Web license: Yes. Visual liturgy. **Comments:** Like the images and the ending (sunset with six people jumping).
* [“The Be Atitudes”](https://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/48148/the-beatitudes) (Clements Media). Length: 2:17. Cost: We own it. Last used: 1/2011. Web license: No. Visual liturgy. **Comments:** The moving text is distracting.
* [“Blessed”](https://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/27100/blessed) (Stewart Redwine). Length: 1:25. Cost: $12. Web license: No.
* [“The Beatitudes”](https://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/18180/the-beatitudes) (Fervent). Length: 1:36. Cost: $15. Web license: No. This video highlights the Beatitudes in a contemporary interpretation using audio from one of the greatest evangelists of all time - Dwight L. Moody. This reading and only known recording of Moody’s voice was captured in 1898. His voice still echoes the promises of Christ even today.
* [“LUMO Project: Matthew 5: 1-12.”](https://www.jesusfilm.org/watch/lumo-the-gospel-of-matthew.html/lumo-matthew-5-1-48/english.html) Length: 1:31. Cost: Free. Web license: Yes. **Comments:** This is from the same series we used during Lent. Very well done.
* [“The Chosen: The Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-12).”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JiOSHE9Jzhw) Length: 2:09. Cost: Free. Web license: No. **Comments:** We didn’t watch this as a group, but people do like it, but not having to go to a “be right back” screen during the livestream.
* [“Sermon on the Mount” graphics](https://www.ignitermedia.com/collections/51172-sermon-on-the-mount)
* [“The Beatitudes” graphics](https://www.ignitermedia.com/products/19196-the-beatitudes)

**Music:**

* All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name (UMH #154-155)
* All Who Love and Serve Your City (UMH #433)
* By Gracious Powers (UMH #517)
* God of Grace and God of Glory (UMH #577)
* Master Let Me Walk With Thee (UMH #430)
* When the Poor Ones (UMH #434)
* Be Thou My Vision (UMH #451)
* Jesu, Jesu (UMH #432)
* Let There Be Peace on Earth (UMH #431)
* And All the People Said Amen
* Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing*-* Tune: [NEW EBENEZER (Burton-Edwards)](https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/come-thou-fount-of-every-blessing-twbe)

*You have shown us what you’re blessing,.  
filled us with your truth this hour.  
Send us forth, your love confessing,  
Source of mercy, grace, and power!  
  
Make our hearts to long for justice.  
Cleanse our lives, that we may see  
all the joys your Spirit’s bringing,  
and the peace that sets us free!  
  
Send us, fount of every blessing,  
tuned now by your grace to be  
streams of mercy, never-ceasing,  
in your name, blessed Trinity!  
  
Send us forth to love each other,  
love to friend and enemy;  
lives restored and friendships thriving,  
in your kingdom’s harmony.*

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**May 12, 2024:** “Lord, It’s Hard to be Humble”

7th Sunday of Easter, Mother’s Day

**Focus verse:** “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

**Scripture:**II Corinthians 6: 1-10 (NIV)

6As God’s co-workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain. 2For he says,

“In the time of my favor I heard you,  
    and in the day of salvation I helped you.”

I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.

### **Paul’s Hardships**

3We put no stumbling block in anyone’s path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. 4Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; 5in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; 6in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; 7in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; 8through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; 9known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; 10sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; **having nothing, and yet possessing everything.**

**Synopsis:** Jesus begins with a call to humility - a sense of how we’re called to understand ourselves and others in light of God’s grace. “Poor in spirit” is a challenge to all of us as we fight the power of our ego and recognize our need for God.

**Felt need:** To understand our need for Jesus and our poverty of spirit

**Visuals:**

**Hands-on item:**

**Activity:** Special prayers for all experiences of mothering/being mothered.

**Media possibilities:**

**Music:** #700 “Abide with Me”; #430 “Master, Let Me Walk with Thee”

**Children’s Time:** Connect to Mother’s Day by talking about caring for kids and pet. Gentleness.

**Social media:**

**Related articles:** “[Poor in Spirit](https://lakeharborumc.org/2024/04/march-15-2024-worship-brainstorming-the-beatitudes/)” compiled by Richard A Kauffman, Christianity Today, June 26, 2007 (on our website)

**Discussion points:**

* Jesus calls us to be humble and teachable.
* “Poor is spirit” does not mean material poverty or sadness. From Christianity Today (article above): Now, the phrase 'poor in spirit' speaks to an even deeper reality … beyond physical poverty … but to true spiritual poverty. To be poor in spirit means **to acknowledge our deepest human need for God and to grow in that longing and that dependence on a daily basis**.
* Luke 6: 20: “Blessed are you who are poor, for your is the kingdom of God.” (NIV). It is easier to see how we can believe this refers to material poverty reading this.
* From Jean Kelly: As I went through the list of Beatitudes and the 1st week on humility, I thought about the similarities and contrasts with resumes that I’ve needed to create during my life. Beatitudes would be a resume of my faith life while resumes need in one’s secular life rely on ego to be noticed enough to secure a good job, get into college, be accepted into some social groups. How does one balance ego in these situations? **Discussion:** How true. Resumes list strengths. Some include “goals/areas for growth”, an acknowledgement that we are teachable and need to grow.
* On a lighter note: “Lord, It’s Hard to Be Humble” by Mac Davis, 1980. Also sung by Kenny Rogers and Willie Nelson. Very, very loosely related: Willie’s Roadhouse is an old time country station on Sirius.

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**May 19, 2024:** “Holy Spirit: Our Comfort Keeper”

Pentecost Sunday, Graduation Sunday

**Focus verse:** Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

**Scripture:**John 14: 15-21 (NIV)

### **Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit**

15“If you love me, keep my commands. 16And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— 17the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. 18I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 19Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. 20On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. 21Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.”

**Scripture:** Romans 8: 26-27 (NIV)

26In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. 27And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.

**Synopsis:** With life and love comes pain and grief. If we seek to avoid vulnerability and the risk needed for deeper relationships, we miss out on the blessing of community. The Holy Spirit is sometimes referred to as our Comforter, and Jesus’ promise of the Holy Spirit reminds us of the promise of comfort.

**Felt need:** To rely on the Holy Spirit to offer comfort

**Visuals:** Invite the congregation to dress in red, orange, and yellow

**Hands-on item:**

**Activity:** Celebration of graduates

**Media possibilities:**

**Music:** #333 “I’m Goin’ a Sing When the Spirit Says Sing”; #393 “Spirit of the Living God”; “Worn” by Tenth Avenue North; [“Spirit in the Sky”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W2msh0jut2Y) by Norman Greenbaum, 1970

**Children’s Time:** representations of the Holy Spirit – wind sock, bubble parade, hot air popper (related treat – popcorn), pinwheel

**Social media:**

**Related articles:**

* “[The Last Gift My Father Gave Me](https://lakeharborumc.org/2024/04/march-15-2024-worship-brainstorming-the-beatitudes/)” by Michael Cosper | Christianity Today, June 17, 2022 (on our website). A surprising encounter with my day, Jesus, and Jerry Seinfeld opened a door to long-awaited healing. In addition to including this story about sitting in the barbershop, seeing a jar of blue disinfectant, remembering a Jerry Seinfeld episode, and openly crying for the first time after his dad’s death. It references the following article from Pennington.
* [*The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/review/the-sermon-on-the-mount-and-human-flourishing-a-theological-commentary/) by Jonathan Pennington. Excerpts from a book review:

Inclusion of Human Flourishing in the book’s title connects the Sermon on the Mount with a concept and expression that are commonplace in contemporary culture, perhaps more so among theologians…

The author avoids English translation predispositions by coining various terms to help readers retain the various distinctions for which he argues: aretegenic (from ἀρετή), asheristic (from אַשְׁרֵי), makarios-ness and macarism (from μακάριος), teleios-ity (from τέλειος), etc. Crucial is his effort to render μακάριος in English as “flourishing” rather than “blessed” because the latter, the characteristic English translation, “indicates active, divine favor” while “flourishing” “is a macarism, a declared observation about a way of being in the world,” a distinction Pennington makes that seems to lack a sharp difference (p. 43).

**Discussion points:**

* The promise of comfort is huge when we face death. The promise does not mean our life will be easy.
* The practice mourning has changed. It is barely discussed in today’s western culture. GriefShare offers a time and place devoted to the work of grieving.
* Images of comfort: quilts, afghans, and slippers made by loved ones; muffins and other comfort food; hugs; the presence of others; texts – even just a heart emoji; being able to talk about loved ones and not acting liked that person never lived

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**May 26, 2024:** “Meek Is Not Weak”

Trinity Sunday, Memorial Day weekend, **10:00 a.m. service**

**Focus verse:** Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

**Scripture:**James 3: 13-18 (NIV) Pastor Mary may use only one reading

### **Two Kinds of Wisdom**

13Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. 14But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

17But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. 18Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

**Scripture:** Colossians 3: 1-14 (NIV)

### **Living as Those Made Alive in Christ**

3Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

5Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. 7You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. 8But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. 9Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. 11Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

12Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

**Synopsis:** Meekness isn’t weakness or passiveness, but is intimately connected to strength and power under control. It’s described as “gentle-force” and changes our understanding of what makes for a life of significance and value.

**Felt need:** To recognize the power of meekness in offering balance to our lives

**Visuals:** Word cloud – compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, love, meekness

**Hands-on item:**

**Activity:** Consecration of Memorial Gifts, opening on Memorial Garden?

**Media possibilities:**

**Music:** #400 “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing”

**Children’s Time:**

**Social media:**

**Related articles:**

**Discussion points:**

* The scripture readings are largely from New Testament letter and gave early Christians guidance on how to live out these blessings.
* Meek is not the same a weak. It is related to gentleness, a fruit of the spirit.
* Meek people may not say a lot, but when they do, people tend to listen. They might now be physically imposing. Ken’s karate instructor is a good example. He could hurt others, but keeps his strength and physical prowess under control
* Meekness may be the hardest concept to grasp.
* Do we tie meekness to gender descriptions?
* What do we think of when we hear the term “meekness”? Wishy-washy, pushover, Mr. Milk Toast, too timid, doormat, no self-confidence
* Gentle has more positive connotations than meekness.

**NOTE:** Peace with Justice Sunday - special offering

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**June 2, 2024:** “Controlling Our Cravings”

2nd Sunday after Pentecost

**NOTE:** Pastor Mary is at Annual Conference. She will invite 4 people to offer a short reflection (in-person or recorded) on this beatitude.

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

**Scripture:**Micah 6: 6-8 (NIV)

6With what shall I come before the Lord  
    and bow down before the exalted God?  
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,  
    with calves a year old?  
7Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,  
    with ten thousand rivers of olive oil?  
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,  
    the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?  
8He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.  
    And what does the Lord require of you?  
To act justly and to love mercy  
    and to walk humbly with your God.

**Scripture:** Matthew 6: 28-34 (NIV)

28“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? 31So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

**Synopsis:** What are we hungry for? We ask this on a daily basis and have a lot of choices for what sustains our physical bodies. But, if we ask ourselves what we really crave, we get into the spiritual realm.

**Felt need:** To claim our desire for right relationship with God and to live God’s way

**Visuals:** target or bullseye (righteousness is right aim) – Micah 6:8

**Hands-on item:**

**Activity:** Holy Communion? It would have to be served by retired clergy.

**Media possibilities:**

**Music:** [“You Say”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIaT8Jl2zpI) by Lauren Daigle; #2174 “What Does the Lord Require of You”; #405 “Seek Ye First”

**Children’s Time:**

**Social media:**

**Related articles:**

**Discussion points:**

* From Jean Kelly: The June 2nd synopsis that asks the questions “What are we hungry for?” brought to mind the son “You Say” by Lauren Daigle. I think love, belonging, being strong in faith, am I doing the “right” things are aspirations. How do I know if I am doing enough of fulfilling my Beatitudes’ resume to a satisfactory evaluation? What are my blind spots?
* Striving for righteousness in society means seeking an end to poverty, racism, or other issues that don’t allow people to live as god intended. It is Kingdom work that leads to heaven on earth.
* Seeking righteousness is personal and communal.
* How different politics would be if politicians were humble and made an effort to seek righteousness.
* “Kin-dom” means bringing God’s kingdom through healthy relationship.

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**June 9, 2024:** “Mercy Me - and You”

3rd Sunday after Pentecost

**Focus verse:** Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

**Scripture:**Ephesians 2: 1-10 (NIV)

2As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. 4But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. 6And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9not by works, so that no one can boast. 10For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

**Synopsis:** Mercy means not receiving something we deserve. God is merciful and calls us to be merciful to others - not as a transaction, but as a path to deeper relationship with God and others.

**Felt need:** To follow God’s lead (as God comes to be with us in Jesus) in seeking to know one another and extending mercy

**Visuals:** Outstretched hands – hand shake; reaching out to others (especially powerful when they opponents); being God’s hands for others; extending God’s hand to someone else

**Hands-on item:** hand stickers (Annette)

**Activity:** Holy Communion if not offered on June 2

**Media possibilities:**

**Music:** [“Alive”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aiuw2QX4RpI) by Big Daddy Weave *(But God, rich in mercy, you came to save me. Now I’m alive….)*

**Children’s time:**

**Social media:**

**Related articles:**

**Discussion points:**

* Almost all the images of mercy in videos portray people helping each other.
* Mercy rule: 1) Calling the game when the two teams’ scores are very far apart. 2) Arm wrestling.
* It is not easy to extend mercy to everyone.
* Betty finds many bad examples at high school athletic games, especially as parents talk badly to the coachers, refs, and players (including their own kids). Winning at any cost has a high price. Manners and self-control are gone.
* People haven’t changed. The Beatitudes are a kind of “Jesus therapy session.”

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**June 16, 2024:** “Believing Is Seeing”

4th Sunday after Pentecost, Father’s Day

**Focus verse:** Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

**Scripture:**I John 3: 1-3 (4-10) (NIV) Verses 1-3 are often read at funerals.

3 1See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. 3And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

[4Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. 5You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. 6No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him. 7Little children, let no one deceive you. Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. 8Everyone who commits sin is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The Son of God was revealed for this purpose: to destroy the works of the devil. 9Those who have been born of God do not sin because God’s seed abides in them; they cannot sin because they have been born of God. 10The children of God and the children of the devil are revealed in this way: all who do not do what is right are not from God, nor are those who do not love a brother or sister.]

**Synopsis:** A pure heart seeks God and makes room for God. We experience blessing now - not sometime far off - as we seek to draw nearer to God and reflect God’s love to others.

**Felt need:** To examine our motivations and intentions

**Visuals:**

**Hands-on item:** Glasses

**Activity:** Special prayers for all experiences of fathering/being fathered

**Media possibilities:**

**Music:** #451 “Be Thou My Vision”; #349 “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus”

**Children’s time:** Images related to seeing (glasses, mirrors, or sunglasses) or seeking. Hide and Seek. Sardines (youth group game) – youth hide and as they find each other, they stay together, until they are all packed together like sardines – a reverse version of hide and seek.

**Social media:**

**Related articles:**

**Discussion points:**

* In one episode of “Young Sheldon,” Sheldon tells his mom that impure thoughts don’t begin until puberty.
* Almost all of the images in the videos portraying pure in heart are of young children.
* Purity of heart is about motivation and intention and can be present in anyone who seeks and makes room for God. We see this in those who are good, gentle (a fruit of the spirit) and selfless.

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**June 23, 2024:** “Peace Is More than a Sign”

5th Sunday after Pentecost

**NOTE: Pastor Mary is on vacation.** Rev. Georgia Hale will preach.

**Focus verse:** Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

**Scripture:**Romans 12: 9-21 (NIV)

### **Marks of the True Christian**

9Let love be genuine; hate what is evil; hold fast to what is good; 10love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. 11Do not lag in zeal; be ardent in spirit; serve the Lord. 12Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; persevere in prayer. 13Contribute to the needs of the saints; pursue hospitality to strangers.

14Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. 16Live in harmony with one another; do not be arrogant, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. 17Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. 18If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord.” 20Instead, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink, for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.” 21Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

**Scripture:** James 3: 13-18 (NIV)

### **Two Kinds of Wisdom**

13Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. 14But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

17But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. 18Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

**Synopsis:** We can pray for peace, and we should, but Jesus calls us to make peace (not simply love peace or keep peace). How are peacemaking and justice-seeking linked?

**Felt need:** To see the link between peace and justice - and how that connection nurtures healthy relationships

**Visuals:**

**Hands-on item:**

**Activity:**

**Media possibilities:**

**Music:** #431 “Let There Be Peace on Earth”

**Children’s time:** VBS Kick-off

**Social media:**

**Related articles:**

**Discussion points:**

* Ivan came home from his Taekwondo class at Anchor Point Bible Church with a t-shirt that said, “Blessed are the peacekeepers,” a corruption of Matthew 5:9.
* Peace and justice are always connected in scripture.
* Peacekeeping has connotations to the military, keeping control by force.
* Peacemaking takes initiative and works best when it is paired with gentleness, a skill Ron got to practice at the hospital. His roommate held very strong political opinions, the opposite of Ron’s. Ron needed to stay positive to change the situation in his room.
* Focus on what we have in common. Assume that the other side wants peace too. Find peace within ourselves first. Teach others how to deal with conflict and obtain inner peace. Start with our closest relationships.
* Cultural and generational differences can make peacemaking difficult. There has been more than 2000 years of conflict in the Middle East with no signs of peace in sight. No one can make others want peace, especially if each side has a different definition of what peace looks like.
* [Confusing peacemaker with peacekeeper:](https://kaitlingarrison.com/2018/04/28/peacemakers-vs-peacekeepers/) We cannot be true “peacemakers” by avoiding conflict, honesty and tense situations. 1) Honesty breeds harmony. 2) Disagreement doesn’t have to equal disrespect. 3) Peacekeeping is passive. Peacemaking is proactive.

Paul’s words confirm it IS a worthy desire to promote peace and strive to reach it in our relationships. The key is–we must remember to go about reaching peace the right way.   
As recovering peacekeepers, let’s remember these three things:

1. Your voice, opinions, convictions and beliefs matter.
2. You are capable of speaking the truth and even disagreeing in love
3. Listen to the Holy Spirit in those moments when it’s time to speak up

May we aim to live our lives actively making peace, instead of just trying to keep it.

* Find ways to gather and connect in spite of differences.
* Acknowledge differences, noting that they are not everything.
* Where do we find truth?
* Jesus knows that dame that is done when we don’t seek peace.

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**June 30, 2024:** “For God’s Sake”

6th Sunday after Pentecost

**NOTE: Pastor Mary is on vacation.** She will secure a preacher.

**Focus verse:** Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

**Scripture:**II Corinthians 4: 7-18 (NIV)

7But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. 8We are afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not driven to despair, 9persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed, 10always carrying around in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. 11For we who are living are always being handed over to death for Jesus’s sake, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our mortal flesh. 12So death is at work in us but life in you.

13But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—“I believed, and so I spoke”—we also believe, and therefore we also speak, 14because we know that the one who raised Jesus will also raise us with Jesus and will present us with you in his presence. 15Indeed, everything is for your sake, so that grace, when it has extended to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

### **Living by Faith**

16So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. 17For our slight, momentary affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, 18because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen, for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

**Synopsis:** In some instances, it’s one person who makes one choice that changes the atmosphere, especially taking a stand for what is just and right. Our passion for and faith in Jesus Christ haven’t been tested by severe persecution, so the challenge is to guard against apathy - moving beyond the easy and comfortable and recognizing the cost of discipleship.

**Felt need:** To admit our apathy and seek to commit to following God more faithfully. **Note:** Our July worship series is about overcoming apathy.

**Visuals:** jars of clay

**Hands-on item:**

**Activity:**

**Media possibilities:**

**Music:** #577 “God of Grace and God of Glory”

**Children’s time:** VBS Wrap-up

**Social media:**

**Related articles:**

**Discussion points:**

* We spent a good deal of energy on the true meaning of persecution. Here is a dictionary definition:

1. [hostility](https://www.google.com/search?newwindow=1&sca_esv=9cf860e71ffe870b&sca_upv=1&q=hostility&si=AKbGX_onJk-q0LQUYzV7-GRhpJ5D9MmBK8kJBZ1I0clX4FCfT7vs1bPi-skZa2HQhyAfq3uRPz_y6-bOKCcAe_KJR3DWYrlnhZNndr0-CCLZ1vkuXAIOYjg%3D&expnd=1&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiN_vSjksqFAxXvk4kEHad-D9UQyecJegQIHxAO) and [ill-treatment](https://www.google.com/search?newwindow=1&sca_esv=9cf860e71ffe870b&sca_upv=1&q=ill-treatment&si=AKbGX_o31t0LiMsEloM2rO5Vmah9L1c2WXD4IH629XEm87PvjfLt2tJloth_avPdIbXvh-2nt41WBjs79vvKWBX3c1ebZO3DP4weXp__5dXGnG92y7THzb8%3D&expnd=1&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiN_vSjksqFAxXvk4kEHad-D9UQyecJegQIHxAP), especially on the basis of ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation or political beliefs. Example: "her family fled religious persecution"

Similar: oppression, victimization, maltreatment, ill treatment, mistreatment, abuse, ill-usage, discrimination, tyranny, tyrannization, punishment, torment, torture, pogrom, witch hunt, red-baiting, harassment, hounding, harrying, badgering, teasing, bullying, molestation

1. persistent [annoyance](https://www.google.com/search?newwindow=1&sca_esv=9cf860e71ffe870b&sca_upv=1&q=annoyance&si=AKbGX_onJk-q0LQUYzV7-GRhpJ5DGcwY8VjsuQqQIo65EjtvxOFI-l8-j0pzYeEcbFoZm8FxXWRjHVCBdV0Ra7CsG0_twow87fadh57GVU7jnzy31xsmV8s%3D&expnd=1&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiN_vSjksqFAxXvk4kEHad-D9UQyecJegQIHxA-) or harassment. Example: "his persecution at the hands of other students"

* The definition of religious persecution is **mistreatment or ridicule of a person or group of people based on their religious beliefs or lack of religious beliefs**.
* Religious persecution and the extent to which believers suffer depends on where they live. Serious forms of persecution such as assassination, torture, violence, arbitrary arrest, or false imprisonment are uncommon in the United States, but not so in China, Ukraine, Russia, and other places. American Christians may experience “jabs” from others like name calling (Jesus freaks), comments about not being available Sunday morning, and even loss of some relationships. The church has lost its place in our society, a decline that started approximately sixty years ago. As Christians become a religious minority, they lose power.
* In Jesus’ time, his followers were up against the Roman Empire. Paul writes to the Corinthians with a sense of urgency: Jesus is coming back soon. He ultimately was jailed for his beliefs.
* The Columbine school shooter asked one girl if she was a Christian. She replied, “yes,” and was shot. The 2015 Charleston, South Carolina shooting during a Bible study at the Emanuel AME Church is another case of persecution.
* The presence of apathy is great when we are comfortable. Our next worship series is “Overcoming Apathy.”
* Jesus was clear when he said there is a cost to discipleship. Persecution is a given.
* Christian Nationalists have said people are out to get them.
* How can people speak about God in public schools?
* Do we bring persecution on ourselves when we don’t “act” like a Christian?
* Mark will never forget what someone told in seminary: The sign of a good preacher is the ability to preach a good sermon right after having a fight with your own family.
* Flipping things around: Does Jesus mean that we won’t get to heaven unless we are persecuted?
* It has been said that one of the worst things that happened to Christianity was when Emperor Constantine converted. He did it for political expediency. Life got easier for believers and apathy soared.
* The “blessed are” statements are all in the present tense. They are prophetic declarations. Are they prescriptions for suffering?

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**July 7, 2024 at 10:00 a.m.:** “Are We Blessed?”

7th Sunday after Pentecost

**Focus verse:** “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.  Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

**Scripture:** I Peter 4: 7-16 (NIV)

7The end of all things is near; therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers. 8Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. 9Be hospitable to one another without complaining. 10Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. 11Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

### **Suffering as a Christian**

12Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ’s sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. 14If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you. 15But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief maker. 16Yet if any of you suffers as a Christian, do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because you bear this name.

**Synopsis:** No one wants to suffer. We avoid discomfort and conflict at all costs, but the reality of living our faith is that we will encounter hardship and struggle because following Jesus goes against the expectations of the world. Even so, Jesus pronounces blessing and calls us to be joyful.

**Felt need:** To understand that our suffering and struggle to be faithful brings us into closer communion with Jesus

**Visuals:**

**Hands-on item:**

**Activity:** Holy Communion

**Media possibilities:**

**Music:** #369 “Blessed Assurance”; #89 “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee”; #384 “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling”; [“I’m So Blessed”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q4exKwB0WRk) by Cain

**Children’s time:** Hearts (love) and stethoscope – like our hearts, which are always beating whether we realize it or not, Christ is always with us even when we are not thinking about him. Use in conjunction with “I’m So Blessed.”

**Social media:**

**Related articles:**

**Discussion points:**

* Everything Jesus says to do, is contrary to the way the world and people work. He warns us in Matthew 5: 11-2 that we will suffer because of our relationship with him.
* We avoid discomfort by taking meds or pain pills, avoiding conflict, etc.
* What do we gain when we are “blessed” by Jesus (suffer for his sake)? Wisdom. A closer relationship with Christs.
* How does Matthew 5:11-12 different from Matthew 5: 10, last week’s key verse? Most of us have more experience with people making jokes about our faith (v. 11-12) than with harsher forms of persecution.
* Betty’s Gary came home from flying for three or four days, hung up his uniform, and said the pilot he had been flying with was sure Gary was going to hell for his beliefs. When has needling someone ever changed anyone’s mind? We are called to love one another, not badger or judge them. Are we judgmental Christians?
* Jesus’ call to “rejoice and be glad”:
  + Keep your eye on the prize.
  + You aren’t the first or last to suffer. The church has been there in the midst of trials. Example: The church’s role in the civil rights movement.
* The world and the church’s place in it have changed in the past 20+ years. We know more about what is happening globally. The church is no longer the center of most communities. The church probably feels more like it did in the early church.

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### **Scripture:** Matthew 5: 1-12 (MSG)

### **You’re Blessed**

5 1-2When Jesus saw his ministry drawing huge crowds, he climbed a hillside. Those who were apprenticed to him, the committed, climbed with him. Arriving at a quiet place, he sat down and taught his climbing companions. This is what he said:

3“You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

4“You’re blessed when you feel you’ve lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

5“You’re blessed when you’re content with just who you are—no more, no less. That’s the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can’t be bought.

6“You’re blessed when you’ve worked up a good appetite for God. He’s food and drink in the best meal you’ll ever eat.

7“You’re blessed when you care. At the moment of being ‘care-full,’ you find yourselves cared for.

8“You’re blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.

9“You’re blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That’s when you discover who you really are, and your place in God’s family.

10“You’re blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God’s kingdom.

11-12“Not only that—count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens—give a cheer, even!—for though they don’t like it, *I* do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble.