

2/1/26  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany  
For Group Meetings from January 25<sup>th</sup> – January 31<sup>st</sup>

**OUR MISSION:** As a missional congregation we *celebrate* Christ's presence, *invite* people into a growing relationship with Jesus, and *equip* them to *serve* in a broken world.

**Prayer of the Day:** Holy God, you confound the world's wisdom in giving your kingdom to the lowly and the pure in heart. Give us such a hunger and thirst for justice, and perseverance in striving for peace, that in our words and deeds the world may see the life of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

### **BIBLICAL EQUIPPING TOGETHER**

**Share:** How did last week's scripture (Matthew 4:12-23) work in your life this week?

#### **Mission:**

- What was most satisfying about your ministry last week?
- Where do you see God at work?
- How did you participate in God's missional activity?
- How did inviting go last Sunday?

**Hear:** Matthew 5:1-12

**Explore Questions:** (Use these or develop your own.)

1. Where is Jesus when he delivers these words? Who is present according to Matthew?
2. What do you notice about the structure of the Beatitudes? What phrases are repeated?
3. How does Jesus describe the people who are "blessed"?

**Connect Questions:** (Use these or develop your own.)

1. Which Beatitude do you find most comforting right now? Which do you find most difficult?
2. Where do you feel the need to stay in control right now?
3. What do you genuinely long for most these days?

**Memorize this verse:** "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (Matthew 5:12) What has caused you to rejoice recently?

### **BIBLICAL EQUIPPING APART:**

**Obey:** During this week follow through on your intentions.

**Meditate:** Meditate on Psalm 15. How does this speak into your life?

**Reflect:** What have I learned in my week of living with this text? What can I share with my group when we next meet?

**Notes for ChristCare leaders:**

Matthew tells the story a little differently. When I read the “Sermon the Mount” I sometimes blend Matthew’s account and Luke’s together, blurring some of the distinctiveness. In Luke, Jesus offers his sermon not on a mountain but on a “level plain.” And in Luke, Jesus preaches to “a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people”. But in Matthew Jesus has just twelve disciples representing the twelve tribes of Israel. The crowds, while also there, feel almost secondary, and are not mentioned again for nearly two chapters. In this account, Jesus withdrawals to a mountain to teach all those who would follow him. And that’s an important characteristic of Jesus in Matthew’s story. He is a teacher, an interpreter of God’s law, meeting with his disciples on the mountain like a new Moses training the twelve disciples/tribes in a new kind of righteousness. And the first thing Jesus teaches them is how to recognize blessedness. Which I think is really interesting. Not how to become blessed, or even to bless each other, but rather to recognize who is already blessed by God. And it’s not who we necessarily think are blessed.

Every community has its own definition of what constitutes blessedness. We may not always use such a pious word, preferring instead to call it “the good life” or “success.” But we all have definitions of what it means to have made it, and usually it’s not those who are poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who are meek or pure in heart or thirst for righteousness and all the rest. In our world, when we think of someone who is blessed, we most often think of someone who is wealthy or powerful or famous or successful or beautiful or enviable. Blessing, at least according to the standards of this world, is most often of the material kind. But Jesus teaches something different. Jesus teaches us to see how God calls blessed those who are down and out, distressed by their circumstances, passionate about promoting righteousness and working for peace, or persecuted for doing the right thing. Read this way, I almost see Matthew’s version of the beatitudes as akin to Luke’s Magnificat, where Mary learns that God favors those in need. So also here in Matthew’s gospel, Jesus urges his disciples to look at those around us differently than the culture does. Rather than measure people by their possessions, we are invited to see their character. Rather than merely take pity on their losses, we are invited to enter into their suffering. Rather than judge their failings, we are invited to forgive and remind them that they are blessed by God and born for more than they’ve settled for. And rather than despise weakness, we are invited to see in it the truest point of meeting between God’s children. For God reveals God’s self to us most clearly and consistently at our places of deepest need.

In short, Jesus points us to recognize that God’s kingdom isn’t a place far away but is found whenever we honor each other as God’s children, bear each other’s burdens, bind each other’s wounds, and meet each other’s needs. To be human is to be inescapably fragile and vulnerable, and it turns out that the surprising character of God isn’t to reject any of these things but rather to gather them all into a divine embrace. Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, the pure in heart, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness and who are persecuted on Christ’s behalf. It’s quite a list. And blessed are those, we might add, who see the blessings of God in their neighbor’s need and give thanks they were privileged to meet them.

**Thanks be to God,**

Pastor Thadd (tbook@desertcross.org)

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*Traditional version:*

Our Father who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
As we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us  
from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power,  
And the glory, forever and ever. Amen

*Contemporary version:*

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,  
your will be done on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those  
Who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial  
And deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the  
power, and the glory are yours,  
Now and forever. Amen