

Surprising Teaching (2/16/2025)

Sixth Sunday after Epiphany

GREEN

Luke 6:17-26

All Johanna ever wanted was a home in the woods with a pond where she could sit and watch the sun glisten on the water as she wrote poetry.

She got the home — and the pond. And poetry of praises for God's blessings in her life flowed from her heart onto paper. Praises for God binding her broken heart after losing her fiancé to cancer. Thanks for God giving her courage in her own cancer diagnosis. Gratitude for God making a way for her, after many starts and stops, to finally finish seminary and be ordained in the Episcopal Church — at the age of 60.

So much in awe of God's blessings in the storms of life, that Johanna lovingly named her pond "Beatitude Pond," after the "beatitudes" Jesus spoke about in what is his longest and most surprising teaching that we know as the Sermon on the Mount.

It is in this sermon that we are not only introduced to the Lord's Prayer, but we hear the teaching of the Beatitudes, which comes from the Latin word *beatus*, meaning "blessed" or "fortunate."

But Jesus' illustrations of what being blessed looked like was not what the crowd gathered that day on the mountainside expected to hear. Rather his disciples, curious onlookers — as well as many downtrodden and beleaguered families and individuals who knew intimately about hardships and struggles — were stunned to hear that those who were hungry, hated, poor and weeping, were among the blessed ones.

Blessed are you because God sees and hears and understands. Blessed are you because God is holding and redeeming you. Blessed are you who know that God is still with you amid life's trials because that very knowledge is what keeps a heart beating with hope.

To this day, the Sermon on the Mountain is considered one of the most important teachings of Jesus because of its emphasis on love, forgiveness and a hope beyond hope.

How are we defining blessedness in our lives? When counting our blessings, do we still find ourselves citing material things or achievements?

Johanna didn't. She knew blessings were not found in rainbows after a storm, but in the storm clouds themselves. And on a February day, with the strengthening sun melting the ice on her beloved Beatitude Pond, Johanna's blessedness was made complete.

Her ashes were sprinkled in the very spot where she wrote her poetry of praise to a God who always whispered to her amid the trials in her life, "Blessed are you."

Compassionate God, we praise You for always guiding, strengthening and protecting us. Help us to redefine what blessedness means in our lives. May the blessings we count be the very ones in which we finally recognize Your love and grace among us. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.