

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany
February 1, 2026
Matthew 5:1-12

The world is a little **overwhelming right now**. I both dread and feel compelled to check my news app repeatedly, afraid that I'll miss the latest event affecting our world. I feel like I can't pay attention to it all, dismayed at the pain and suffering in the world I find with every click. Despairing, I hope and pray for the day that all is made right and I can rest in the kingdom of God.

We come to Matthew 5:1-12 amid our current trials and are tempted to sigh a breath of relief. The beatitudes tell a beautiful story of the coming redemption of those who have suffered. Matthew's version of the beatitudes invites us all to rest within their promise, for we are certainly hungering for righteousness, feeling persecuted, and mourning! Good things will come to those who suffer now. We just have to make it through this current hellscape. Hold on and hope for the coming of the perfect kingdom of God.

But Matthew doesn't understand the kingdom of heaven as something we wait for, a place we will ultimately go. Matthew's understanding of the kingdom is much more urgent. For Matthew, the kingdom is **already** here.

Just one chapter earlier, in Matthew 4:17, Jesus begins his ministry by declaring "the kingdom has come near." Jesus broke open the kingdom of heaven! What we were waiting for is now within reach. The kingdom has come.

It's admittedly hard to see at times, covered with the layers of grime, fear, discord, greed, and hatred we place on it. But it's here, waiting to be revealed.

Matthew lists **nine blessings** for those who are struggling. Seven of those blessings promise relief. Those who **mourn** will be comforted. Those who **hunger** and thirst for righteousness will be filled. Those who are **meek/humble** will inherit the earth. But the **first and last** blessings stand apart. Unlike the others, they are spoken **in the present tense**. The poor in spirit and those who are persecuted for righteousness 'sake, theirs is the kingdom of heaven. This is not something that will happen at some point; it is true right now.

Why this difference in tense? Is there a connection between the poor in spirit and those who are persecuted for righteousness 'sake? I think so. **Those who are poor in spirit recognize their need for God**, even when God is hard to find. They know that something has to be done, but they aren't always sure how to help in a world so broken. They seek life in the kingdom of God with all their heart. And those who are being persecuted for righteousness 'sake refuse to accept the brokenness of our world. They live according to the rules of the kingdom of heaven, which, all too often, conflict with our societal structures and norms. Whether you are bravely living in the kingdom or are desperately seeking it, Jesus assures you it is yours now.

What would happen if we doggedly rubbed away at the grime covering the glory of the kingdom of God? Would

those who hunger for righteousness find it? Would those who mourn be comforted? Would the meek rise to positions of leadership if empathy were seen as a strength?

Perhaps Jesus is simply reminding us of what to do when we are overwhelmed with the hurt of the world. If you're feeling a little poor in spirit these days, remember that the kingdom of heaven is here for you. **Don't lose hope**; grab a rag. Get out there and rub away at the grime that covers God's ever-present glory. Love fiercely. Stand for justice. Make peace. Be merciful. Don't let the mess of this world change you.

Good things come when the kingdom is uncovered. And don't despair if the world persecutes you when you live in this decidedly counter-cultural way, because the kingdom of heaven is here and you live in it!

This is a message we need to hear these days. We need to be called to keep hoping and keep working on the mess of the world so that the kingdom Jesus brought near can burst forth everywhere, until eventually what is already here is revealed for all to see.

Questions for reflection on Matthew 5:1-12

1. Where do you see the mourning comforted, the meek uplifted, the hungry filled, the peacemakers at peace with God in the world today?
2. What does the kingdom of heaven look like? If the kingdom came to earth as in heaven, what would this world be like? Would you know that you were in heaven?
3. What causes us to be poor in spirit? How can we encourage each other when we see each other struggling?
4. Why are those who live according to heavenly kingdom values persecuted? What are they doing that is threatening to the kingdoms of this world? Why is it threatening?