

Epiphany 4A
Matthew 5:1-12
Treasure for Fools

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

We don't often know what to do with these blessings from Jesus,
These gifts of God that tell of the happiness that is ours in God's kingdom,
Simply because we have a God and that God loves.

What do we do with a word that declares blessed, good and happy
Things which clearly are not blessed ...
Poverty of spirit, a state of mourning, meekness, purity of heart,
A passion for justice, doing the work of peacemaker.

Jesus is not describing a group of people which by any stretch of the
imagination

We would call winners, successful, or even happy.

So, we don't know what to do with these words of blessing. They stop us short.
If they weren't so beautifully poetic, we would dismiss them as foolishness.
But these words are beautiful, poetic.
So, I suppose we think that Jesus is a dreamer and these words are vision,
Of what could be, what might be,
But given things as they are right now – will never be.

Over the next few weeks, we will listen to the words of Jesus' great sermon.
We will hear and speak and reflect on the Master's teaching.
But beautiful as these words are,
These will also challenge everything we know about the world and its values.
And it will be easy to dismiss it as an ideal, a set of laws, poetically
rendered.

But this great sermon – Jesus', not mine -- begins with these blessings in Matthew
5

And runs to through the end of Matthew 7
Could be better understood for us as a constitution for the people God is calling,
Gathering and forming into his own people, his family.

These words – we have today are the preamble.
They tell us where God's kingdom has come, to whom it has come
And what God and God's people are all about.
But more than that, these words make us who we are.

Jesus begins with good news, blessing –
the gifts, the treasure, God has brought to us.
The one who speaks these words – so contrary to reality –
We have come to understand this Jesus is no other than God's powerful Word

Whose speech created what is real, what is of value, what is ...
These words state plainly and simply – I am the LORD your God. You are my people.
We belong to God.

That blessing to be called people of God, children of God ...
the blessing of connection to God that is ours through water and the word baptism
that is our treasure, our greatest asset.

I do not think our world, our culture place much value in the gifts, blessings of God,
though.

To belong to God, to be called, gathered, empowered and sent as God's people
is to risk seeming foolish when compared to other things of life.

Every night of the week, people go to sleep and ask God to choose them
as the one-in-a-million winner of a fortune.

But we go to sleep each night, placing our life, our spirit into God's hands.
How childish, how foolish.

Everywhere, it seems people wait in hope
For the day when the news comes as word that the American economy has turned around,
there's work for everyone and the good life in abundance.

But we wait in hope for the good news of the day when all powers and people are
gathered into one in Jesus, God's Christ,
the day when God's kingdom comes on earth as in heaven.

How wholly impractical, how foolish.

Everywhere people look they see the successful, the rich, the famous,
And they want to be like them, to live like them ...

But we look to our Master – poor, humble, a servant, betrayed and crucified and
killed

And we want to be more like him,
Knowing, trusting, that since we share in a death like his,
We will also share in his resurrection,
Because the LORD is our God, and we are His people.
Servant-leaders of a servant community that looks first to give
And measures success in faithfulness to God's mission.

It's foolishness ... or so it appears ... that we would let go of everything we know and
value

so that we might live in hope of resurrection – the hope of enduring life in God.
That's what makes being church, God's people, so wonderfully challenging –
Because God often calls us into all kinds of foolishness ...

Whether something seems foolish or not can never be the measure for us

...

The measure is always who we have been made to be in Jesus Christ.
God has called us and gathered us here – us of all people.

Jesus sees the crowds.

Jesus hikes up the mountain, and he sits down.

His disciples, his apprentices, follow him.
They walk away from the crowd, and they gather around the Master.
The Master begins to teach them.
Jesus teaches them the ways of God's kingdom.
Later, Jesus will send these same disciples back into the crowd,
Not to live or operate or conduct their business like the
crowd,
But filled with the Holy Spirit,
And empowered for God's mission to call and gather, baptize and
teach
This crowd that God's kingdom has come to them.
Jesus is here.
We are blessed.

We have a great calling, we possess gift, we have tremendous assets –
not by our own strength, but as God's gift.
In reality ...
Some of us are poor. Some of us are mourning. Some of us are meek.
Some of us hunger and thirst for God's justice.
Some of us act with mercy. Some of us work for peace.
Yet, all of us are called and gathered, taught and sent to be God's people together.
And it is from that divine act of calling
and gathering us to Jesus that all of us are blessed.
Called and gathered, we hear Jesus speak.
We're blessed – in all our varied and various conditions.

And maybe that's why we have such a hard time with these words of blessing
And the great sermon that follows – because these words speak who we are
More than anything we do.
What we do, how we live and act and behave flow out of that,
But at the beginning – it's a matter of being ... who we are.

We are God's people.
God says, "I am the LORD, your God. You are my people."
That is the promise. That is the hope.
That is forgiveness and reconciliation, redemption and eternal life.
This is the treasure -- a relationship, a calling, a gathering, a mission.
The LORD is our God. We are God's people.
We are blessed because we have been called and gathered.
You belong.
You belong to God.
That is our treasure,
Our holy identity – ours, as a gift of God's speaking –
In Jesus name. Amen.