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St. David's Episcopal Church  
Year A, 5 Epiphany, Matthew 5  
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It is a privilege for me to be with you this morning. Your rector Elizabeth and I have been friends since I moved to Virginia thirteen years ago. I know how much she loves St. David's, and I appreciate your welcome to me and your care for her as she recovers.

Last week, our gospel story from Matthew recounted the calling of the first disciples. Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John were all just going about their business as fishermen in the sea of Galilee when Jesus passed by and invited them to follow him and help him fish for people. Now, they have traveled throughout Galilee, and Jesus has been busy proclaiming the gospel and curing people with every kind of ailment. The crowds have gathered, and that brings us to this morning's gospel, known as the Beatitudes. These Beatitudes are the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, several chapters of Jesus teaching his early followers about this new kingdom of God that he is initiating.

I think that our tendency when we hear these well-known words of Jesus is to wonder which category we fall into. Do we count as the poor in spirit? Are we the merciful, the pure in heart? What does it mean to be a peacemaker, and do we check those boxes? I am pretty sure I don't count as persecuted, so where does this leave me? As tempting as it might be to try to sort ourselves, I think that is a limited reading of the passage.

Let's start by considering the context. Jesus has made a name for himself by helping people in need. Those who were gathered at the foot of that mountain were seeking something they believed he could give. Presumably, they came with many different challenges - physical, mental, emotional, spiritual. None would have been desirable, and yet, Jesus sums them up and calls the people blessed. *It seems that their blessedness was founded in their need to encounter Jesus.* This was the common thread; what made them blessed in his eyes was not just their particular struggles but their knowledge of their need for God.

The same is true for us. Blessedness is rooted in the awareness of our vulnerability and the trust that we are dependent upon God and one another. While the Beatitudes certainly can bring comfort when we readily fall into a category of "Poor in spirit" or "meek" or "mourning," we also can understand them as examples of something larger. Blessedness comes in the hard places of our lives when we are brought to our knees and reminded of our dependence on God.

As I thought about this, I decided to take the liberty of adding to Jesus's list of who is blessed. It seems that there are signs of blessedness everywhere. Earlier this week, an old friend hosted a party to celebrate her recent divorce from a man who had not been a good spouse. I had never been to such a party, and there was a beautiful sense of hope for her future. But I don't think that I was the only one who also felt such sadness for the years that she had spent in a very painful relationship. *Blessed are those who are struggling in their marriages.*

This week, I also heard of an old high school friend who died of a drug overdose. The covid pandemic has both overshadowed and heightened the opioid epidemic, as well as increasing the abuse of alcohol and other drugs. *Blessed are those who struggle with addiction and blessed are those who are fighting to stay sober.*

All of us watched in horror this week as there were three separate mass shootings in California. These were on top of 40 mass shootings that have occurred in this country in the first few weeks of 2023. *Blessed are those who are victims of violence. Blessed are the police officers and first responders who care for them.*

And as I look at those I care about and the world around me, my list goes on. Blessed is the teenager who reached out in kindness to my daughter when she needed a friend. Blessed are the exhausted or worried parents. Blessed are those who are fighting for justice and equality for themselves or others. Blessed are those who have cancer or other illnesses, and blessed are their caregivers. Blessed is that person at the stop light holding a sign asking for money. Blessed are those who still grieve the loss of a loved one, even when the rest of the world has moved on. Blessed are those who make St. David's a community of love and caring and welcome for all who come in the doors.

I could keep going, and you will have your own list, of course. But the good news of this morning's passage is Jesus's promise that *we are welcomed and held in our need for him.* We live in a culture that values success and independence, but the Beatitudes remind us that our faith is counter cultural. It is in our weakness and vulnerability that we are drawn closer to the heart of God, and it is there that we are drawn closer to one another as well. When we expand our definition of blessedness, it is evident all around us. And we come to see that we are blessed when we are blessings to each other. I love that bumper sticker quote that says, "*Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about.*" So may we accept the invitation of the Beatitudes this morning- to see the blessedness in ourselves and every other child of God. Amen.