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**A: Epiphany 4
Matthew 5:1-12**

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“Blessed Are Who?”

Who remembers what our gospel was about last week?

John gets arrested, Jesus moves to a new place, gathers some followers, and takes up John’s message.

And then today it would seem like the next thing Jesus does is climb a mountain and preach to crowds.

So we’ve gone from 4 disciples to crowds in the space of a week.

But of course that’s just because the lectionary has skipped ahead a bit!

Anyone know what happens in the part we skipped?

“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

News about him spread all over Syria,

and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them.

Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and the region across the Jordan followed him.”

Jesus has been BUSY!

And it wasn’t just preaching and teaching.

He had been healing people, setting them free, performing miracles, changing their lives in such a dramatic way that they would always see that moment with Jesus as the turning point –

the point at which they began to know God in a whole new way,

at which they had become a different person at their core,

at which the meaning and purpose of their lives had become clear,

at which the call on their life had changed.

People had experienced the amazing love and awesome power of Jesus,

and after that experience nothing would ever be the same.

That’s the backdrop for Jesus’ words that we hear today.

God, in Jesus, had been meeting people

in their sickness, in their pain, in their fear, in their hopelessness, in their despair – and he had blessed them.

And now Jesus was telling them and their family members and friends and neighbors

what God had done and what God would continue to do.

Now I know what happened the times God healed me - I couldn’t help but tell people,

especially people who were going through the same thing.

So I am sure that many people there that day were people who were suffering

and who had been brought there by a family member or friend or neighbor who had been healed.

And so Jesus speaks to them: *“Blessed are the poor in spirit.... Blessed are those who mourn....”*

In other words, what Jesus was saying back then to those people

and what he is saying right here today to everyone who is listening

is that if you are poor in spirit, if you are depressed, if you are not filled with life & energy & vitality, then you have come to the right place!

And you can step right now from the emptiness of your current reality,

the futility of this world, of meaninglessness of this earthly kingdom

and into the fullness of a new reality, a different world, a heavenly kingdom.

If you are mourning, if you are grieving, if your heart has been broken, then you have come to the right place!

And you can step out of your mourning and your grief,

and feel the comfort of God’s touch, mending your heart.

Or maybe the emptiness, the lack, the need wasn't/isn't depression or grief.
Maybe it's another kind of emptiness, a hunger or thirst for righteousness or justice,
and Jesus was saying to them back then and is saying to us today
is that if you have been oppressed, if you have been treated unjustly,
if you haven't received what you should have – food or shelter or education or a livable wage job –
then be assured that God knows what you need
and will give you the strength and courage to survive until those needs are met.

Then Jesus goes on to talk about another kind of need – the need to be healed from hurts inflicted by others.
Because if we stop and think about Jesus' words to those who show mercy,
we will realize that the only people who need to show mercy
are those who have been wronged, those who have been hurt, those who have been sinned against.
And to those people then and now Jesus explains
that as you respond with mercy and love and compassion, you, too, will receive these things.

So some of what Jesus is saying is if you have a need in your life –
if you're depressed, if you're grieving, if you've been wronged, if you've been oppressed,
God knows your need and God will fill it.
That may not mean that healing or injustice or oppression or wrongful treatment will stop immediately,
but it does mean that God will give you whatever you need to endure.
So Jesus begins by addressing those who have come with an emptiness inside.
Maybe you're depressed, maybe you're grieving,
maybe someone has hurt you or wronged you, maybe you've been treated unjustly.
If that's the case then I am here to tell you that there is hope.
I, myself, have experienced depression and grief.
I, myself, have been hurt, and have been treated wrongly.
And God has met me in all those situations and has blessed me – with love and grace and mercy and healing.
And God can meet you and bless you, too.

But what if you here today and you don't have an emptiness or hurt or need inside?
Then are you blessed?
Well the answer to that is: it depends.
Let me explain.

There's a key verse in these beatitudes that addresses that question –
and it's the verse that says, "*Blessed are the meek....*"
Now when you hear someone described as "meek", how do you interpret that?
???
That's what I always assumed, too!
But I went to a Bible study this week and it's amazing the things one learns!
This week I learned that the ancient Greek word that is translated "meek"
is a word that was used to describe the goal of horse training –
which was to break a wild horse and train it to be completely submissive to its rider,
so it obeys every command of its rider without hesitation,
and so it is so in touch with its rider's intentions that the horse and rider function as a single unit.
Horses in that place and time were nearly always used in battle.
And so you can understand how crucial it was for horses to be trained to be "meek" –
because the more submissive and obedient the horses,
the better chance there was of winning the battle for one's king and kingdom.

And that's what's key for those of us who are here today
who are not feeling empty or depressed or grieving or wronged or oppressed at the moment.

If we're one of those things then we are going to be open and receptive and desirous of what Jesus has to offer.

But if we come here full, without any emptiness or need,
if we are leading a pretty safe and comfortable and happy and full life at the present moment,
if we already feel "blessed",
then there may not be room for us to receive any additional blessings.

So if that is where we are emotionally and spiritually,
then this is the verse that calls us into that place where we can be blessed.

To be meek means to submit our wills to God.

What that means is that we have to be willing to give up everything else in our lives –
our family members, our friends, our homes, our jobs, our bank accounts,
our comfort, our power, our privilege – if that's what God wants us to do.

We have to be like that wild horse and allow God to break us and train us
so that we can be submissive and obedient and responsive to God and to God alone.

It's like having God riding us and directing our every step.

It's like being so in tune with God, that we respond to God's every intention.

And when we realize that we are moving in unity with God,
then we can move with trust and faith and confidence and courage
into battles where we are fighting for justice and peace,
where we risk being reviled and persecuted and hurt.

So if you are here and you are not in a place of emptiness, but rather in a place of fullness,
then the call to you is to submit yourself to God
and allow God to train you through prayer and Bible study to be "meek",
to be obedient and responsive to God's every move and every word,
so that together you and God might accomplish God's will – for you and in you and through you.
That's the other kind of blessing.

The people who came to Jesus that day did not just come for information – they came for transformation.
I hope you, too, are here for transformation, because that is what being a disciple is all about.

Jesus comes us today to touch you – no matter what is going on in your life situation,
no matter how you are feeling, no matter what you are thinking.

Whether you come here today empty or full, in sorrow or in joy, filled with despair or hope,
hurting or healed, there are blessings here for you.

Those blessings are ours when we come to Jesus for healing.

Those blessings are ours when we come to God to be broken
and then show up for Bible study and prayer to be trained.

Those blessings are ours when we open ourselves to the power of the Spirit
& invite that Spirit to enlighten our minds, create new hearts & restore right spirits within us.

Jesus comes to us today to touch us, and heal us, and set us free.

Jesus comes to break us, and train us to work as one with him.

Jesus comes to us today as he came to others over 2000 years ago.

He comes to heal. He comes to save. He comes to set you free.

Whether you are already kneeling before Jesus because you are broken
or whether you kneel before him in submission now,

Jesus comes to touch you, to heal you, and to raise you up to a new life!

Jesus has come right here and right now to say, "Blessed are you! Rejoice! And be glad!" Amen