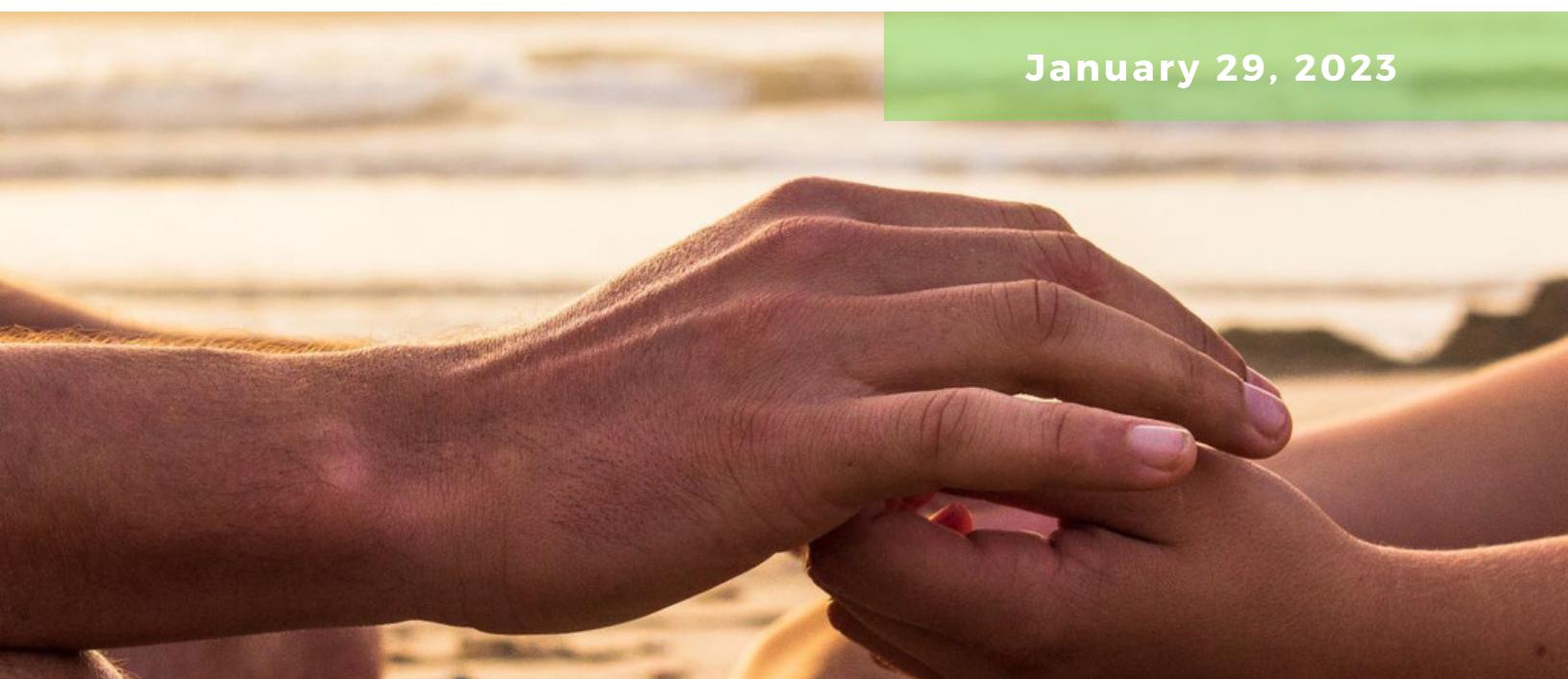


THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

January 29, 2023



PEACEMAKERS

the blessed children of God

by Drew Downs

When Jesus gets up and preaches the sermon on the mount, we all know it's bound to be a barn-burner. And he offers a most radical, generous, challenging sermon for every person of faith. There's something in there to make anyone squirm.

And in his opening list of blessings, sometimes referred to as "The Be-Attitudes" (because they share the kind of attitude that can help us all be with one another a lot better) Jesus

challenges us to really take on our responsibility to being the change we want to see in the world.

At the heart of all of it is stepping out into the breach: the space between the armies: to bring, not only an end to war, but *also* peace. Shalom. Justice, health, wholeness. To risk ourselves, to make Christ's presence known, and make peace possible. To be the children of God to one another.

AFTER THE EPIPHANY

2023

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Blessed

Scripture gives us a few different visions for what a blessing is and how to feel about it. What is common among all of them is that blessing is God's grace. *How* we receive that grace and *when* is where those visions start to diverge.

Does God bless you for being a good person? This was the most common view of how gods interact with people. And our God long ago sought to differentiate from that view. That blessing was not *transactional*. God doesn't bless *for* doing the right thing.

God blesses through promises. We see in the promises to the first humans, to Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob, that the blessing comes through a promise—and affection—because the point is generosity.

God prefers mercy. There's a reason Jesus preaches repentance and forgiveness more than anything else. Because the point of faith isn't earning or receiving anything. It is the generous offer of grace. Something God does constantly and Jesus compels his followers to do incessantly. *Is forgiving seven times enough? No, seventy times seven!*

While it is easy to find transactional grace in the Bible, it is *far* from the central concept. Jesus teaches us that we are blessed to bless others. We receive the sacraments to share God's grace with one another. That is our generous act of love and mercy.

With love,
Drew

AFTER THE EPIPHANY

2023

FOR SUNDAY

The Fourth Sunday After the Epiphany

January 29, 2023

Collect

Almighty and everlasting God, you govern all things both in heaven and on earth: Mercifully hear the supplications of your people, and in our time grant us your peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Reading

From Matthew 5:1-12

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Reflection

Jesus kicks off his most famous teaching by saying that people are blessed when they feel bad. A most counterintuitive idea. When I feel bad, I *don't* feel blessed.

Similarly, when I am feeling bad, I don't *then* feel a blessing hit me.

We can then take this out even further. When we scope out our world and see the people who really are poor in spirit, the very thing we *don't see* is blessing.

Which leaves us, then, with this as some *eventual* promise. That it comes in death or at the end of the age. This does provide us *some* comfort. But most of us really would prefer to have a bit more of that blessing *now*.

AFTER THE EPIPHANY

We are wise to remember, however, just how much the people following Jesus are likely to *only* see blessing in the form of relative success in the community. That, if one has children, for instance, they were blessed. And the ones without, therefore, are obviously cursed. Same goes for money, power, influence, and any other means of evaluating each other in society.

To speak of one without these things as blessed is to circumvent *that evaluating*. It renders blessing outside the realm of one's place in society.

These blessings also highlight a couple of other things.

They come as antidotes to what ails, regardless of standing. These blessings meet the real needs of people.

And they also come to transform society.

We tend to see blessing as personal and individual. But these blessings are all essentially relational. They come to those who witness pain, mourn, demure, strive, show mercy, show dignity, and work for peace. When we are doing this work with one another, we are blessed to be children of God and inheritors of the Kin-dom.

In this way, blessing itself becomes redeemed. Because even the concept of God's blessing had become a vehicle to benefit the powerful, connected, and wealthy. Not the means by which those things came to them, but the excuse for why they are deserved *and not shared*.

What easily resonates with us is how Jesus can see the need for blessing in the world. And he offers a way for us to see that blessing is actually for us. It is ours. And it is the blessing of our whole community. In love and grace and truth.

ST. STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
215 N. 7TH ST TERRE HAUTE IN 47807
812.232.5165