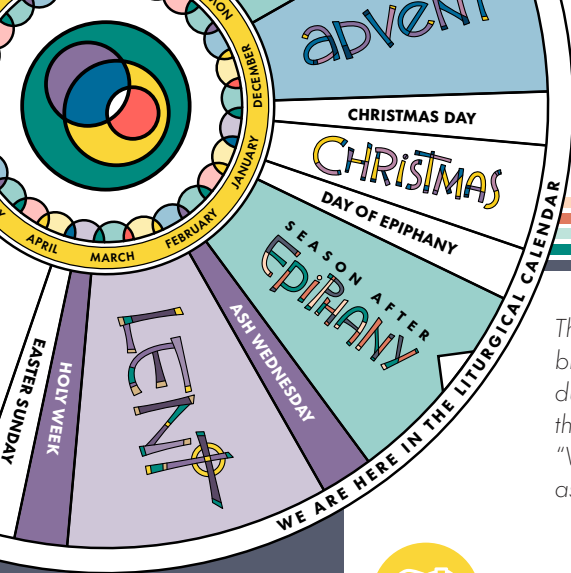


Matthew 5:1-12

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany, Sunday between January 28 and February 3



The Season after Epiphany began with the three wise ones following the star and ends with the bright lights of Jesus' Transfiguration on the mountain. Epiphany means "showing forth," and it is during this season when we are called to look for how God makes Godself known throughout the world. In his poem, *Epiphany*, Biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann wrote the following: "We are—we could be—people of your light. So we pray for the light of your glorious presence as we wait for your appearing."



Scripture

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he began to speak and taught them, saying:

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

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.



Questions

- These verses in Matthew are known as the Beatitudes—a list of ways Jesus says people are blessed, in other words happy and honored, in the kingdom of God. What characteristics does Jesus say those who are blessed will have?
- It's the season of Epiphany, a time when we celebrate how God's love is shown through Jesus. What are some ways love is shown in the world Jesus describes in this passage?
- Why might the disciples be surprised by the kind of kingdom Jesus describes? How would they tell this story from their point of view?
- Share a story about when something turned out differently than you expected, in a positive way? How did it feel?
- How do you think our world might be different if we celebrated and honored the same qualities Jesus talks about here?

Look it Up!

The Beatitudes say "blessed are the peace-makers" rather than "peace-keepers." Peace takes work. Look up the Corrymeela Community in Northern Ireland, and learn about how they worked toward peace in the midst of conflict in their country.



mini
REVOLUTIONS





Activity

In today's reading, Jesus teaches about what makes someone "blessed." We can define "blessed" as "happy in the fullest, greatly honored, considered amazing." Sounds wonderful, right? Jesus' beatitudes were surprising to those who heard them because they weren't what people were expecting at all. The disciples likely thought of themselves as the heroes of their story, but Jesus was praising the meek, the peacemakers, and the poor in spirit.

As a group, think about what people would have expected to hear. Who would have been considered blessed, or happy to the fullest, by most people? Individually, or in small groups, come up with 3-5 beatitudes that the original disciples might have expected to hear. Feel free to use these fill-in-the-blanks:

Blessed are the _____,
because _____.

Happy to the fullest are the _____,
because _____.

Considered amazing are the _____,
because _____.

After you're finished, share your beatitudes. Think about how Jesus' beatitudes differed from what the disciples probably expected. What surprised you about Jesus' list of blessings? Remember that Jesus was traveling and teaching about the good news of God's love for the world. How do you think people reacted to hearing Jesus' beatitudes?

Next, think about our society today. Who might Jesus call blessed that we might not expect? Again, individually, or in small groups, rewrite the beatitudes for today's world. You can list them or draw pictures to illustrate the changes you made. When you're finished, share what you created with one another. What are some ways you can care for those Jesus would consider blessed?

Alternate Activity

Today's Bible passage is a famous one, partly because the second half of each beatitude is so surprising! Jesus was bringing good news about God's love in unexpected ways. Sometimes it can be fun to turn our expectations about familiar things upside down.

Divide into two groups. Each group will finish the following popular clichés, filling in the second half with an unexpected but true answer (i.e. the early bird gets... the best waffle). Before you begin, your whole group can decide whether to complete the clichés one by one and compare each cliché as you go along or whether to complete all the clichés in separate groups and compare lists at the end.

- Better to be safe than...
- Strike while the...
- It is always darkest before...
- A rolling stone...
- A bird in the hand is...
- If you can't stand the heat...

If you have extra time, discuss the traditional answers to these clichés, and decide whether you like the old or new versions better. What are some other familiar sayings you think could use an update?



Micropractice

Jesus says those who mourn will be comforted. When you are feeling sad or disappointed, notice how you are comforted. Are you comforted by a grown-up or a friend? Are you comforted by the Holy Spirit? Feel that comfort, and be blessed.

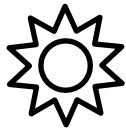


Download a graphic to share with your community and on social media. You can download it here: illstrtdm.in/minirevAAE4



Prayer

Dear God, thank you for sharing your love with the entire world. Help us look for your hope and blessing in unexpected people and places. Amen.



WHEN JESUS
SAW THE CROWDS...



HE TAUGHT THEM

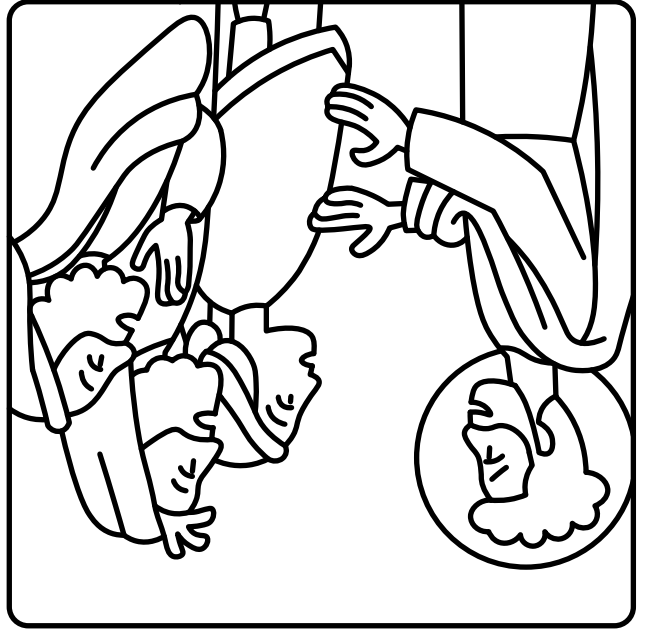
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"BLESSED

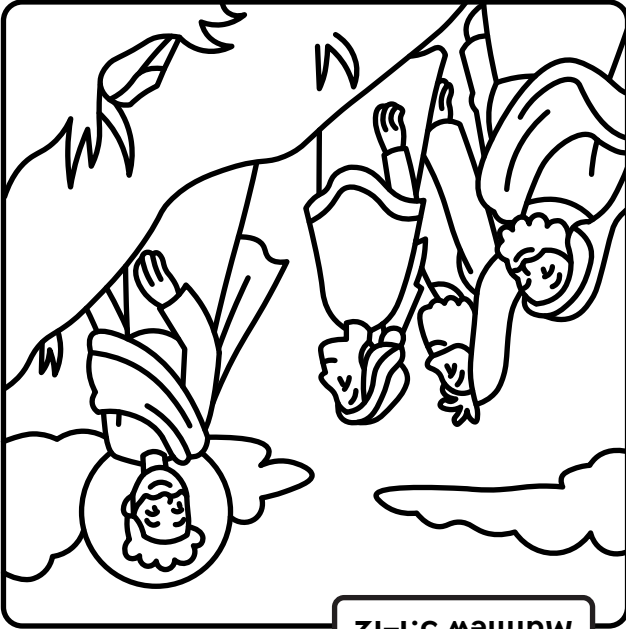
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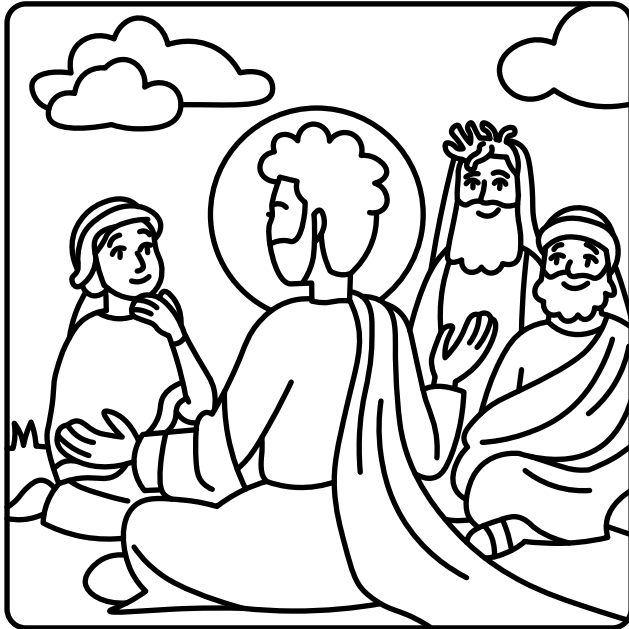
4. Jesus' words surprised the disciples, but he finished by telling them, "When you are mistreated, because you follow me, know you'll be celebrated, happy and okay in the end. You are not alone; other faithful people have struggled before you."



1. Jesus left the crowds he had been teaching and went up a mountain. His disciples followed. Jesus began teaching them about the kingdom of God where there is abundance—more than enough food, money, love, and resources for every one to thrive.



Matthew 5:1-12



2. He said, "The kingdom of God will bring hope to those who feel hopeless. Sad people will be comforted. Those who are humble will be given the whole world. Those who want what is right will get what they want."



3. "Those who show mercy will receive mercy. Those with good hearts will see God. Those who work for peace will be called God's children. Those who face trouble for doing what is right will be celebrated in God's kingdom."