The Beatitudes Heard Again
All Saints' 2026
Matthew 5:1-12
All Saints', Brooklyn
November 1, 2026
The Rt. Rev. Dr. Bonnie A. Perry

Good Morning! On this most blessed day when we remember and celebrate the lives of those who have gone before us, a day when we recall all the saints of the ages, I invite us to turn to the words Jesus offered, early in his ministry when he climbed up on a mountain and began to teach.

It's a bit hard for us to hear these words as if for the first time, because, well it's not the first time we have heard them. So as someone begins to read, "*Blessed are the poor in Spirit…"* our minds may wander, and we may begin to ponder our grocery shopping lists, or the ridiculous thing one of our co-workers said on Friday, or even the looming reality of an election this week that may or may not got smoothly. And pretty soon the next thing we know, we hear someone say, "The Gospel of the Lord." And we automatically intone, "Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ."

The Beatitudes, come and gone…

I know sometimes that happens to me. Maybe never to you. But to assist myself and perhaps you to hear Jesus' words anew, I'd like use the work of biblical scholars, Eugene Peterson and Amy Jill-Levine to provoke new insights and understandings of Jesus' beatitudes.

Jesus says, "*Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*."

Biblical Theologian, Amy Jill-Levine says, "The Hebrew for being poor in spirit is to recognize that we cannot do it on our own, that we are in fact dependent upon one another, we need each other and God."

Imagine for a minute what it would be like if we understood ourselves to be poorer—to not have it all figured out so we invite others into our world to figure things out. Imagine the community that could be formed.

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

Eugene Peterson writes, *"You are blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you."*

I read this beatitude as the gift of being able to mourn. To be cracked open in the searing physical absence of someone we love, in acknowledging that emptiness there is a space for God's balm.

Often these days, when I am by myself, praying or even when I am working out each morning, I find myself overcome with tears of grief. Grief over the people who have died, who I miss so very much, like my mom, my friends Carol and Linda.

Or even grief over beliefs I had in our country and our commitment to democratic processes. Like grieving the death of someone I love, I also find myself crying for principles of fairness, and due process, that I thought were baked into our country's way of being and may be slipping away.

And so I cry, and mourn what we have lost, it is then, in the crying that somehow the sharp edges of sadness and anger are sanded and softened just a bit.

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

Amy Jill-Levine, says that the word used for *meek* refers to someone who understands that they may have privilege and authority, but that they know they can in fact learn from others. A meek person will let go of their real or perceived authority, get off as she says, "their high horse" and listen and learn and change.

For me, it's a sense when we know we do not have it all figured out, and that we are prepared to change, its then that we can begin to understand what really matters, its then we'll inherit the earth. .

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

Eugene Peterson writes, "*You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. God is the food and drink of the best meal you'll ever eat."*

Those moments when we know we, perhaps with others have righted a wrong, addressed an injustice, opened a pathway for others, once we experience that we understand that something has shifted and changed, a hunger has been satiated for eternity. That is fullness that floods the soul.

I had an experience of this sitting in the gallery of our state house and watching several laws that End Gun Violence Michigan had worked for were actually passed. It was an amazing experience. I felt full. Satiated.

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

Eugene Peterson writes, *"Blessed are you when you care. At that moment of being 'Care-full' you find yourself cared for."*

Friends, you know what this feels like. You know what this is. When we give ourselves, when we are all in, of our own volition, caring with all we have, that care that love, comes back to us, like a full-length mirror taking us all in and showing it right back. Mercy begets mercy, care creates care.

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

Amy Jill-Levine says, "To be pure in heart is someone who does not think evil thoughts about others." Whoa. I imagine how much brain space and emotional energy I would have back, if I stopped spending time, thinking of others who have violated my norms and values. It's one thing for me to be righteously angry at a norm or value that is transgressed. For example, "How dare you arrest someone without a warrant and due process?" That is different from me, thinking and wishing evil upon someone who violates my values.

I think I actually lose a part of my soul, when I forget that every single person in the world, is made in God's image and likeness. I am called as a person of faith, to honor that *Godness* in them. When I get lost in thinking evil or less than good or nice thoughts about others, I distract myself from looking for God in our world.

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

Eugene Peterson writes, *"You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family."*

I remind myself again, in order to bring my best self to disputes or disagreements, I must remember God's presence in the other person, in the people on the other side. When I remember this ontological reality, I am able to better reveal the holiness inside of myself. That I too am a child of God and must act that way.

Lastly, Jesus says, "*Blessed are you who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."*

Eugene Peterson says, "*You are blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you deeper into God's Kingdom.*

When life is easy, I can fool myself into thinking that I am managing things just fine on my own, making good use of my gifts. When life is hard and I feel judged, persecuted, picked upon, it is then that turn more to God. Because I know I am in way beyond, what I can do on my own. Persecution reminds us all that we are not islands. We are each marked as Christ's own forever and desperately in need of God's help and love.

When I know this, I move slower, with more grace and care. The world is better.

May we, as we hear these ancient words take them in anew, may they touch our souls, and enable us to live out and embody this roadmap upon which Jesus calls us to travel.