

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
COMPASS, PA

February 1, 2026 – FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY, YR. A

The Rev. Dr. Nina George–Hacker

Homily: “Upside-Down Kingdom Blessings”

Micah 6:1-8 (What does the Lord require? Do justice, love mercy, walk humbly)
Psalm 15 (Those who are blameless may dwell with God)
1 Corinthians 1:18-31 (The message of the Cross is foolishness to those perishing)
St. Matthew 5:1-12 (Jesus teaches the Beatitudes)

Imagine a world where losers are actually winners. Where everything you thought was important or valuable is turned upside-down. That’s exactly what Jesus is promoting in today’s Gospel, as He sits on the hillside, looks over a broken, struggling crowd of poor and lost souls, and says, “Blessed are you.” We usually define “blessed” as comfortable, wealthy, popular, or happy. But Jesus flips this entirely, declaring that those who are poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who hunger and thirst, and the meek are all blessed by God. But we need to understand as Jesus does, why there is blessing in this brokenness.

“Poor in spirit” are people who know they need God, not those who are self-sufficient. For those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, because God is a God of justice He will satisfy their desire for that which is right and good.

As for “those who mourn,” Scripture (Psalm 34: 18-19) tells us that God is near to the brokenhearted and the crushed in spirit, and that He offers comfort which the world cannot provide. And in a society that prizes power and retribution, Jesus praises humility, gentleness, and grace in those who are “meek” and “merciful.” In return, they shall receive mercy and kindness.

When Jesus says that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are poor, persecuted, and reviled for His sake, and that they are blessed, this does not mean they will “happy” or spared difficulties in life. Being blessed by God means being shown God’s grace and favor, and the awareness that His presence and love are with us always, no matter what.

Jesus’ message is reinforced in our Old Testament reading, where the prophet Micah calls God’s people to reject empty religious rituals, and instead, to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. That is “Beatitudes” living.

St. Paul further reminds us in today’s Epistle that God chooses what is “foolish” in the world’s eyes—the weak and despised—to shame the wise, so that we may only boast of our Lord Jesus Christ and our relationship with Him. For Paul, God is at His most powerful, and we understand Jesus most clearly, when we see Him nailed to a cross in agony and dying. There we confront and experience greatest God’s love and God sharing in our humanity and pain. That’s the “foolishness” of the cross. But that’s also the power of the cross—*God with us*.

Jesus Christ is not the superhero who rescues us out of all our problems and pain. Jesus Christ is God taking upon Himself our flawed and sinful nature, in order to empathize with our suffering from the inside out—and atone for our sins, because we cannot. And because He is God, He will be with us—and all who are hurting—*always*.

It is on the cross that we see God’s Kingdom breaking in upon the world. Jesus proclaims this truth when He announces that those who are poor in spirit, those who mourn, who hunger and thirst, the meek, the merciful, and the pure in heart, are all of them blessed, because they experience the essence of the God’s Kingdom, which is *love*—in all its complex dimensions.

Of course, none of this is obvious. After all, those who mourn are grieving; the poor in spirit are suffering; those who long for righteousness can become victims of unrighteousness; and the meek are often stepped all over. But the cure-all remedy is the nearness of God's Kingdom—not as some heavenly utopia or reworked society, but as the very presence, power, grace and mercy of our loving God, particularly as we know Him in Jesus Christ.

We cannot obtain the blessings of the Beatitudes on our own. We can't earn membership in the Kingdom of God and we do not merit status as children of God. We can only accept this blessedness as a *gift* from God. To do so, we must embrace Christ as Lord and Savior, the ruler of our lives, and then submit ourselves to *His* definitions of love, justice, mercy, and worthiness.

When we make Christ the Lord of our lives, we are adopted as children of God. As such, we are granted citizenship in His Kingdom, and all His blessings become ours. Jesus will look at you from His holy throne and say: "Blessed are you faithful, for the Kingdom of Heaven is yours. Blessed are you who mourn, for I will comfort you. Blessed are you who are merciful, for I will show you mercy. Blessed are you who speak out for justice and peace; I will cause righteousness to break forth."

How might we trust that God's love is truly what transforms the world and redeems our lives? That the power of God is not in violence, retribution, triumph, or being right about everything? As St. Paul writes in his famous passage on Christian love, even if we know the future and can fathom all the mysteries of creation, if we can move mountains, give everything to the poor, speak in the languages of both mortals and angels, but have not love, then our words are nothing but hot air, and our deeds are empty and meaningless.

That's why Paul says that godly love is kind and patient, not envious, or arrogant, or boastful, or rude, and that love doesn't insist on its own way as the right way; instead love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. And love never, ever ends (1 Corinthians 13:1-8). Paul is telling us that it's not about how *much* you know, *what* you know, or even *who* you know. All that matters is that that you are fully known and fully loved *by* God.

And because this is true, then our worth—*anyone's* worth—is based on being known and *loved by God*, not rightness or wrongness; skin color, ethnicity, or gender; wealth or poverty; success in life or lack of it. Believing and trusting that we are loved by a God who will never abandon us frees us to stop chasing after meaning and value that is tied to being right, getting richer, or winning—or even making a difference in, or changing the world. That's God's job.

The blessedness that God offers us is the exact opposite of what the world pushes on us, and so we rejoice in being upside-down believers—because, if you think of it, only when you turn a full container upside down do the contents come pouring out!

As we go forward into a new year as a parish family, I encourage you to delight in being drenched by that outpouring of God's blessings, as you draw closer to Jesus through prayer and Scripture, and in Word and Sacrament. *Celebrate* that you are God's child and a citizen of His Kingdom, and that you are richly blessed, now and forever. Amen!*

* Sources: Jonathan Grieser, "The Foolishness of the Cross," 30 January 2011, <<https://jonathangrieser.com/2011/01/30/a-sermon-for-the-fourth-sunday-after-the-epiphany-year-a/>> 26 January 2026.
Alex Stevenson, "The Beatitudes: God's Promised Blessings," n.d., <<https://pastoralex.fortunecity.ws/epiph4a.htm#Blessings>> 26 January 2026.
David Henson, "Love Builds a House," 29 January 2024, <<https://stjamesepiscopal.com/epiphany4/>> 26 January 2026.