

Sermon – Matthew 5:1-12; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31  
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Grace Lutheran Church  
4 Epiphany – Year A  
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### “Happy Fools”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. Reading *Surrender*, the recent memoir by U2 frontman Bono, I find myself transported back to my youth. Slingshotting copies of the *Post-Crescent* onto front porches on my afternoon paper route, the music most likely to be pumping from my Sony Walkman was U2, the spiritual-if-not-quite-religious arena rockers from Dublin. I love so many of their songs. For my funeral, which will hopefully not be soon, I’m going to leave instructions for Pastor Costello to arrange “Where the Streets Have No Names” for organ and choir, as it’s my favorite song of all time and practically a hymn already. By the way, don’t tell Michael. I want him to be surprised! But if I had to pick one of their tracks as my theme song, hands down it would be, “I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For.” Now, this may be applicable in any number of existential ways, but the truth is more mundane. Soundtracking my life, it would play on a Tuesday morning as I search, again, for my car keys. Or on a Thursday evening as I look for something in the fridge – something that’s always there, by the way. When I can’t find something in the fridge, Erika calls from the next room, “Move things around.” Works every time, by the way. The song might also play on a Saturday night as I look for two ideas to rub together until a sermon emerges.
2. What are you looking for when you’re not looking for your keys or the ketchup? I’d be willing to wager that most of you spend much of your time

looking for *makarios*. *Makarios* appears ten times in our gospel reading today. It means blessed, the same word “beatitude” from which this text gets its common name. An equally good translation of *makarios* is happy. Isn’t that what you’re looking for, in one way or another? Blessing? Happiness? Some of us are single-mindedly focused on chasing the next hit of happiness, from power or substance or acquisition, and the world is only too happy to help us. I can’t search for something on Amazon without ads for it showing up in my Facebook feed every day for a week. *Buy me! Buy me and you’ll finally be happy!* And some of us wander through our days more absently minded, not necessarily chasing anything, just putting one foot in front of the other but getting nowhere meaningful. Or perhaps we’re some of both, all the time. Some of us might even try religion from time to time, by which I mean our attempts to transcend the worldly. But back to Bono, who writes: “It’s a pumped-up person who believes they can live a life free from worldly concerns.” That, he says, is a religion that degrades and punishes, an obstacle, or what Paul might call a stumbling block, in your path that isn’t honest to God’s ways.

3. So where, Jesus, are we to find blessing, happiness, *makarios*? Well, we don’t. It finds us. And it comes to us in those places and postures that the world calls lowest and least. It comes to us in our emptiness but doesn’t leave us empty. To the poor in spirit, the mournful and the meek, it comes. To those who look upon this world with honest eyes, yearning for righteousness, it comes. To those who show pure-hearted mercy as they work for peace, it comes. To those the world turns against, it comes. Happiness and blessing come to us because Jesus, the bearer of the Kingdom of heaven comes to us. Blessing is not at the end of a quest; neither is it found by avoiding the pain and suffering in and around us. To be blessed, the people of Jesus’ day would have known, is to be in the presence of God. And blessing comes to us with Jesus, who comes to us where we are. In our need for God. In our grief at a new diagnosis, our mourning the death of a beloved. Into this sorrowing

world, Jesus arrives as the very presence of God – a God who is not distant but is up close and personal. Incarnate in our midst.

4. This, we know, is the God we need. Until God's project of redemption is brought to its fullness in Christ, we live in a world too short of mercy and peace, too long on mourning. The unexplainable and wholly unnecessary killing of Tyre Nichols, beaten to death by Memphis police officers, reminds us of how sin and evil are at work in our world. I am unaware of any reason why this young man who told the police he was just trying to go home should not have been allowed to go home. As one expert on policing summed it up, Nichols "was not treated as a human being." He found no mercy, was offered no peace. And so, we mourn. We hunger for righteousness, for a world in which such things no longer happen.
5. Into all of this, Jesus comes. As one Lutheran pastor writes, "Getting close to human need is not usually considered wise by human standards." But this, finally, is what Christ will do at the end of his journey, planting his cross as the presence of God in the midst of sin, suffering, and death. This One who begins his teaching ministry by telling us that blessing and happiness come with the presence of God is also the One who makes God present for the forsaken, forgotten, and forlorn. This is foolishness to those who know better, a stumbling block to those caught up in running their own race. But to those who see this world's deep need, the cross of Christ is the very power of God. With Paul, we proclaim Christ crucified, through whom the forgiveness of sins is granted and the resurrection from the dead is guaranteed. Through foolishness, the kingdom of heaven has come near. The kingdom, friends, is yours.
6. There is so much for which we still wait. But note the tenses of Jesus' Beatitudes. Of the nine short saying that make up the body of this teaching, the seven speak of gifts to be received in the future. We *will* be comforted and

filled; we *will* inherit the earth; we *will* receive mercy as children of God who *will* see God. Certainly, there are moments of comfort and fullness and mercy in the meantime, but we are still waiting, trusting in the promise. But for the bookend Beatitudes, we need not wait. In both, the blessing is the same. Blessed are the poor in spirit and blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs *is* the kingdom of heaven. Not someday. Not when you die. Not when Jesus returns. *Now*. Yours is the kingdom of heaven. Just last week, as Jesus was on his way to call his first disciples, we heard him announce, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." While heaven is shorthand for where we go when this life is over, it is also simply wherever Jesus is. And Jesus is here. In Word and water, bread and wine. As you, who make up his Body in the world. Jesus gives himself to you again today, your crucified and risen Savior who meets you in your need with the blessed happiness the world cannot give.

7. What are you looking for? Happiness? The blessed life? It is already here, in your need for God and your broken-hearted mourning. Be meek, shunning power and control and seeking righteousness instead. Live with the pure heart of Christ. Show mercy. Work for peace. Care not what this world thinks or says about you. It is, perhaps, a foolish way to go about living, but nothing else will satisfy in the end. Nothing else will last. Maybe it's time to move some things around, to look at and live life in a new way. For while you were still looking, the One you were looking for came and found you. Jesus gives you the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you; this kingdom is yours. Amen

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.