

Matthew 5:1–12 (ESV)

The Sermon on the Mount

5 Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

The Beatitudes

² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

⁵ "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

⁶ "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

⁷ "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

⁸ "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

⁹ "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

¹⁰ "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 5:21–24 (ESV)

Anger

²¹ "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' ²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and

whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. ²³ So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

These are trying times.

A world Pandemic

Civil unrest

Political transitions

Economic uncertainty

Isolation from others

A church family unable to minister in the same way they are used to. No choir. No home and hospital visits. No gatherings around a meal.

In the Bible when plagues or bad times came the people would repent.

The prophets would call them back to their own sins.

How should the church respond and behave in these troubling times?

This week I saw the cross being used as a symbol of political protest.

A cross, a symbol of God's love and sacrifice.

Martin Luther faced an uprising

Peasants' Revolt of 1524. Historians estimate that as many as three hundred thousand peasants were involved in this rebellion. It called for, in essence, the abolition of serfdom.

People looked to Luther for religious support and guidance through tough times.

To the princes, Luther says, "For rulers are not appointed to exploit their subjects for their own profit and advantage, but to be concerned about the welfare of their subjects."

To the peasants, Luther says, "You excuse your actions by claiming that you desire to teach and to live according to the gospel." And then Luther says, "Your own words and actions condemn you."

Luther gives us the final word here in a classic statement: "Now dear people, there is nothing Christian on either side, and nothing Christian is an issue between you. Both lords and peasants are discussing questions of justice and injustice in natural or worldly terms. Furthermore, both parties are acting against God and are under his wrath, as you've heard. For God's sake then, take my advice. Take a hold of these matters properly, with justice and not with force or violence, and do not start endless bloodshed in Germany. For because both of you are wrong, and both of you want to avenge and defend yourselves, both of you will destroy yourselves and God will use one rascal to flog another."

On a particularly hectic, crowded day Jesus goes up on a mountain to teach the disciples how to be Christian in all times.

The Beatitudes (Matt 5:2)

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⁷ "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

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Greatness isn't found by elevating yourself over others.

Greatness is found on your knees.

Ordination on your knees.

Anger (Matt 5:22)

...everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.

That's quite clear

How do we heal our world when there is a fire raging within us?

²³ So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

You are not able and ready to heal until you have restored your relationship with your brother.

So what do we do as Christians when times are tough?

We were all ready to get rid of 2020, but 2021 isn't starting off any better.

How do we change that?

In 1527, Luther wrote a letter in the midst of an outbreak of the bubonic plague in Wittenberg. He was responding to a Lutheran leader in Breslau, who asked whether a Christian ought to leave a city in the midst of a plague outbreak for someplace safer.

In his treatise, Luther wrote:

"I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine, and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not

to become contaminated and thus perchance infect and pollute others, and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. ... See, this is such a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy and does not tempt God.”

Luther himself had been ordered to leave the university in Wittenberg, where he taught. He refused. Instead, he and his pregnant wife, Katharina von Bora, a former nun who had learned some nursing skills in the cloister, stayed behind and opened a wing of their home as a clinic.

The Rev. Kurt Hendel at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. “Love for neighbor is the ultimate criterion that Christians must use as they choose what to think and plan and do — not only during a time of pandemic, but in all times, in all aspects of their lives,”

Times are tough, but they are not too tough for God.

But we have to behave as Jesus taught us in order to survive.

Take a deep breath and a break from the crowds.

That means the voices from your TV.

Blessed are those who Love and serve your neighbor.

Blessed are those who Fight less, love more.

Blessed are those who go to your knees and pray.

That is where you will find me.