

## Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

Annual Meeting Sunday

February 1, 2026

Matthew 5:1-12

### To Bless and Be Blessed

*A sermon preached by The Rev. Dianne Andrews at  
St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, Bainbridge Island, WA.*



Word had gotten out about a man who was travelling throughout Galilee teaching, preaching, and healing. Can you imagine what it was like to learn that Jesus was in the area... and that it might be possible... actually to see him... and to hear what he has to say? Crowds had begun following Jesus. Word about him was going viral. Today was the day to gather with others in an open place to catch a glimpse... and to hear a good word. It would have felt good to come together with others who were hungry to hear Jesus speak... because... just like us... the gathered would have brought with them their worries and their wounds, their fears and their hopes. The people needed to hear a good word. Life was hard and it wasn't getting any easier.

When Jesus arrives with his entourage, he heads up the hill and gets settled. Taking a moment to gaze upon multitude, Jesus begins his message with the well-known blessings we know as the Beatitudes. The words fall not merely onto the people... but into the them. The words "Blessed are" land like sweet drops of rain. The people feel it. They need to know that they among the blessed. We, too, are hungry to be claimed as beloved... hungry to be blessed... hungry to know that there is more to our lives than the day-by-day struggles and hardships we have known. As Jesus speaks... hearts and minds are opened.

Inquiring minds want to know: what does it actually mean to be blessed? What can come of this knowledge? If we dig a little... we find that the Greek translation of the word "blessed" is more akin to words like flourishing, of being fortunate, or of receiving divine favor. Remembering that Jesus actually spoke Aramaic, the message becomes even more counter-cultural in meaning. The Aramaic interpretation of "blessing" emphasizes a sense of spiritual "ripeness"... a readiness for inner transformation in which one is turned around and set right... a transformation that leads to new perspectives and active righteousness. "Blessed... or fortunate... are those who are poor in spirit... for theirs is the kingdom of heaven... which could also be heard as: "blessed are the poor in spirit because they are "ripe" to find their home in the breath of life." "Ripe are those who mourn or weep for people who are suffering"... their capacity to care grows ever- larger. "Ripe are the gentle"... for what was once rigid has softened. "Ripe are those who hunger and thirst for justice...". Eugene Peterson's contemporary language version of that beatitude about justice reads: "You are blessed when you 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."<sup>1</sup> To hear that when we open ourselves to God's big love... when we open ourselves to receive God's blessing... we are ripe for the great mystery of God's love doing its powerful work in us. Our work is to know and feel that we are blessed... that we may help others to know that they, too, are blessed. The starting place for our work in the world, as

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 5: 9, Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language//Remix*, 2006.

a people of God, is to know and feel that we are blessed... that we may go forth and bless others. Our work in helping to build up the reign of God... is to be a blessing in the world... to bless... and to receive blessings in a positive feedback system that lifts up and heals.

As we come together today for our Annual Meeting to tend to the business of this parish, we are to remember how blessed we are as a people of faith here on Bainbridge Island. We celebrate the life we share in with the full realization that St. Barnabas is far more than a building, far more than any one ministry or any one event. We are a people who are committed to deepening the bonds of community in the knowledge and love of Christ. We are called to build bridges of welcome and to help heal what is broken. The moment is ripe. In our brokenness and we come to be broken open... to be challenged, and to be reminded that we are blessed... so that we can offer hope and blessing to a world that is hungry to know God's abundance. In our giftedness... we seek to nurture one another as we seek to make a difference in the world, all in faithfulness to God's love known in Christ Jesus and in the beauty and mystery of this Episcopal tradition we treasure.

Many of you may have met, or may know of, The Most Rev. Katharine Jefferts Shori, who was the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church from 2006 to 2015. During a casual conversation at a parish event, Bishop Schori was asked this question: "If I were a person without a church or a denomination, and I came to you to ask about becoming an Episcopalian, what would you say?" I love how Bishop Schori responded. She said,

*"The Episcopal Church is a tradition that thinks your gifts are important, that you have a ministry by virtue of being baptized and that the job of this group of people called the church is to support one another in living out our baptismal ministries in the world.*

*We are a diverse body of people. We don't all think the same thing. Sometimes it is challenging, but its also exciting. It is much more interesting to talk with someone you disagree with than it is to somebody who says "yes" to everything you say.*

*We are a strongly traditional church in the sense that we retain a way of worshiping that comes from the very earliest days of the church and even from its Jewish roots... but at the same time the tradition gets expressed in an incredible variety of ways.*

*You will find in this body people to love, people who will love you, and people who will challenge you... and they may be the same ones. This body will challenge you to grow in your relationship with God and in your ability to serve and love your neighbor.<sup>2</sup>*

There is more than enough blessing to go around. In community, blessing is less about the feeling that "I am blessed" than about how "we make blessing... [how] we bless one another... and [how] we bless others."<sup>3</sup> Such an awareness within communities of fellowship... magnify the blessings to overflowing. Each one of us comes here with a unique life story and faith journey. Each comes with gifts to offer and wounds to heal. Together, we create a tapestry of beloved community

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<sup>2</sup> The Most Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori, on "Why Should I be an Episcopalian?", 2008.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQSWporCpfY>

<sup>3</sup> On Being interview with the Dalai Lama, Jonathan sacks, Katharine Jefferts Schori, and Seyyed Hossei Nasr,  
<https://onbeing.org/programs/his-holiness-the-14th-dalai-lama-of-tibet-jonathan-sacks-katharine-jefferts-schori-seyyed-hosseini-nasr-pursuing-happiness/>

that is organic... as the tapestry changes with each new addition and each farewell. It is for us to show up for one another and to share the gifts we have been given. In worship we are fed and then set forth to be builders of community and doers of the Good News that calls the world to life. In a bare bones description of church, John Sea writes that our purpose as a community of faith is to “Gather folks, tell stories, break the bread.” When it comes to understanding what it means to be a vibrant community of faith, Kent Ira Groff says it well in a poem entitled “Doing Good News”:

### **Doing Good News**

How do you share Good  
News?  
How do you spread  
Light?  
Make friends.  
Do Good.  
Break bread.  
Risk and pray until others ask  
The source.<sup>4</sup>

...and that is what we are called to do...

*Amen...*

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<sup>4</sup> Kent Ira Groff, *The Soul of Tomorrow's Church*, Upper Room Books: Nashville, 2000, pg. 143.