

Sermon: Epiphany 4

The Rev. Mike Wernick

January 29, 2017

Year A

Micah 6:1-8

Psalm 15

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Matthew 5:1-12

I grew up not quite fitting in... in many ways I was a late bloomer... in some ways I was an outcast... maybe I was socially awkward... maybe I was shy... but I was different... I was aware of things that other kids in school never saw... I was aware of how badly some kids treated... or teased... other kids... I could see... could feel... some of how those kids felt... because I was teased too...

I dug holes in the back yard and filled them with water... I took accordion lessons and could play polkas... I liked to keep my room tidy and neat... as far as I know... I was the only boy at the sixth grade book fair... to buy Betty Crocker's Cookbook for Boys and Girls... and some kids whispered about it... I was fascinated by electronics... when I was 13... I saved up the equivalent of \$304.00 in today's money... to buy a portable tape recorder... partly it had a really cool orange LED that glowed more brightly the louder you spoke... but you didn't want it to be too bright... or the recording would be distorted...

I didn't mind going to the movies by myself... or going into New York City... by myself... and I'd spend the day... visit the museums... walk up and down Fifth Ave... maybe see a Broadway show... I didn't really want to play softball... but I didn't think my parents would take no for an answer... so I reluctantly signed up... and during practice... would stand way out in the outfield... and pick dandelions...

When I was fifteen... I mowed lawns... and walked dogs... and babysat in the neighborhood... and saved birthday money and Chanukah money... so I could take flying lessons... and before I could drive a car by myself... I could fly a Cessna 150 by myself...

I grew up not fitting in... but the more I got away from what I thought my family expected of me... the closer I got to myself... the more I got away from society's expectations for me... the closer I got to God's expectations for me... the more I got away from what the world says and what the world values... the more I got away from what the world is attached to... the closer I got... I pray... to what God values and is attached to...

And now it seems... that the farther I move away from the center of what the synod and the diocese are all about... the less connected I feel... the more I get away from priests and pastors and rabbis and imams and *pra-cha-raks*... the more I get away from people... like you... who are faithful in worship and formation... the more I get away from those who love God... who want to know God's will for them... the more I get away from people who like to talk about real presence... and atonement theology... and social justice... and the dance of the Holy Trinity... the less grounded I can become... When we learn something... we tend to think about receiving something here [head]... but when Jesus taught the crowds... I believe he taught them... he was a living example to them... he touched them here [heart]...

In today's Epistle... we learn about the world... and what God will do... *destroy the wisdom of the wise... and thwart the discernment of the discerning... for God's foolishness... is wiser than human wisdom... and God's weakness is stronger than human strength...* and so of course... *the message of the cross is foolishness to those who think they know it all... but to us who are being saved... it is the power of God...*

And in today's Gospel... Jesus is teaching [heart]... about those who love God... being poor in the world's spirit... makes it easier to see the Kingdom of God... mourners are comforted... because they process how they feel instead of stuffing it all down and pretending it's not there... the meek are blessed... because they don't engage in antagonism or seek revenge... those who thirst for hunger and righteousness are blessed... because that's what God thirsts for... the merciful are blessed because they know that you reap what you sow... the pure in heart will see God... because those

hearts contain nothing that distorts God's presence... peacemakers and airport protesters are blessed... they may contend over certain issues... but they see how violence just... begets... more... violence... those who stand up for the sake of others... are blessed... because they stand up for justice... and those who are reviled and persecuted on account of Jesus... are blessed... because they provide a target at which the ugly wisdom of the world... can spew itself...

When it comes down to it... none of us fit into the world's idea of normal... because the world's normal... is typical... ordinary... expected... and certainly not normative... not determinative... for who we are or how we ought to be... when it comes down to it... the weird people... the dreamers... and the outsiders... push us to question our assumptions about what is... or the world's mistaken notions about how things should be... and help us see how things could be... they help break down the divisions between the barriers we impose... they help us question the labels we stick on to each other... because it is in our uniqueness... in our differences... in our peculiarities... that we are loved... and blessed...

Lutheran Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber... re-wrote the Beatitudes... and gave them a fresh voice... a more contemporary voice... more of what Jesus meant...

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the agnostics. Blessed are they who doubt. Those who aren't sure, who can still be surprised. Blessed are they who are spiritually impoverished who are not so certain about everything... that they no longer take in new information. Blessed are those who have nothing to offer. Blessed are they for whom nothing seems to be working. Blessed are the pre-schoolers who cut in line at communion. Blessed are the poor in spirit. You are of heaven and Jesus blesses you.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are they for whom death is not an abstraction. Blessed are they who have buried their loved ones, for

whom tears are as real as an ocean. Blessed are they who have loved enough to know what loss feels like. Blessed are the mothers of the miscarried. Blessed are they who don't have the luxury of taking things for granted any more. Blessed are they who can't fall apart because they have to keep it together for everyone else. Blessed are the motherless, the alone, the ones from whom so much has been taken. Blessed are those who "still aren't over it yet." Blessed are they who laughed again when for so long they thought they never would. Blessed are those who mourn. You are of heaven and Jesus blesses you.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who no one else notices. The kids who sit alone at middle-school lunch tables. The laundry guys at the hospital. The sex-workers and the night shift street sweepers. Blessed are the losers and the babies and the parts of ourselves that are so small. The parts of ourselves that don't want to make eye contact with a world that only loves the winners. Blessed are the forgotten. Blessed are the closeted. Blessed are the unemployed, the unimpressive, the under-represented. Blessed are the teens who have to figure out ways to hide the new cuts on their arms. Blessed are the meek. You are of heaven and Jesus blesses you.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the wrongly accused, the ones who never catch a break, the ones for whom life is hard, for they are those with whom Jesus chose to surround himself. Blessed are those without documentation. Blessed are the ones without lobbyists. Blessed are foster kids and trophy kids and special ed kids and every other kid who just wants to feel safe and loved and never does. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Blessed are they who know there has to be more than this. Because they are right.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are those who make terrible business decisions for the sake of people. Blessed are the burnt-out social workers and the over-worked teachers and the pro-bono case takers. Blessed are the

kids who step between the bullies and the weak. Blessed are they who delete hateful, homophobic comments off their friend's Facebook page. Blessed are the ones who have received such real grace that they are no longer in the position of ever deciding who the "deserving poor" are. Blessed is everyone who has ever forgiven me when I didn't deserve it. Blessed are the merciful for they totally get it.

We admire artists... and poets... and fashion designers... and musicians... and writers... and dancers... and others who create... others who think outside the box... as long as they don't stray too far from our idea of the box... but sometimes the foolish world tries to restrain creativity... and make diversity divisive... tries to make the world's wisdom... more important than God's wisdom... tries to take the blessing away... and replace it with teasing... or with a curse... but because we are created in God's image... we have been created to create... and we are blessed... when we dig holes... and are enchanted with orange LEDs... when we learn to name and honor our feelings... when we become who God created us to be... even as we're becoming that... when we follow the beat of our inner different drummer and embrace our weirdness... when we seek not our own wisdom... but when we seek God's... and when we do justice... love kindness... and walk humbly with our God... so be blessed!

Mike+