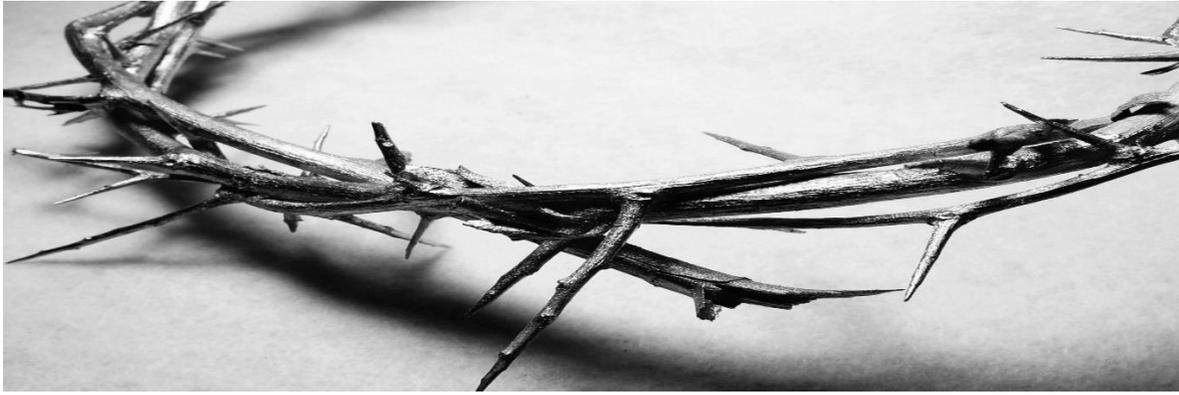


St. Mary's Episcopal Church  
Feb 13, 2022

Message by Rev. Michael Burke  
6th Sunday of Epiphany Year C



*“If religion cannot find a meaning for human suffering, humanity is in major trouble. All healthy religion shows you what to do with your pain. Great religion shows you what to do with the absurd, the tragic, the nonsensical, the unjust. If we do not transform our pain, we will most assuredly transmit it. If.”*

— Richard Rohr<sup>1</sup>

**Are you in a place of blessing or a place of woe this morning?**

That is among the questions that the Gospel brings us today.

We'll come back to that in a bit. But first, let me share with you one the real “high points” in my week. Rev. Dawn and myself have been watching the five-parts “Stories” project, that we'll all be watching together beginning on Sunday March 6<sup>th</sup> after the service, in just a little over three weeks from today.

Back about a year ago, we sent invitations to a cross section of the St. Mary's membership, to be involved in an innovative and exciting project, called “**Stories.**” It's the first part of our *Dreaming Our Future* parish-wide discernment process, planning for the direction of St. Mary's in the decades to come.

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<sup>1</sup> Featured in: [Richard Rohr Quotes](#)

We first made a matrix of sorts, a grid that sorted our membership by a number of factors: length of time in the congregation, age, family configuration, etc. And we chose what we hoped would be a representative sample of who we are today. And we invited those folks to sit for an on-camera interview about their experiences of St. Mary's through the years, and their hopes and dreams for where God might be calling us in the decades to come. And then, for four consecutive weeks, in the newsletter we invited anyone else who would like to similarly interviewed, to let us know, and we added a number of additional voices. All told, we ended up with over fifty interviews comprising more than sixty hours of St. Mary's members reflecting on their own individual and shared experiences of living the Christian life through our faith community.

These long, very personal interviews have been condensed down to a series of short compilation videos that we'll be watching together in a unique series after Sunday worship. We'll have some panelists who will themselves respond to some questions, and then we'll all have an opportunity to reflect, share, and have a conversation about the life, witness, and future direction of St. Mary's. On or around the first week of March, you'll also receive a workbook in the mail that will be a way for you to be involved in this parish-wide conversation. Don't worry about the details right now - we will begin rolling more information out in the Thursday newsletters over the next couple of weeks.

So Dawn and I were previewing these compilation videos together for the first time these past ten days or so. And one of the (well... many different) things that struck me was this sense of the "high place" and "the level place."

The Gospel for today is taken from what scholars call "The Sermon on the Plain," from the Book of Luke. Its both similar and different from a passage in Mathew's Gospel we call "the sermon on the mount." We often call these passages "The Beatitudes", from the Latin root for "blessed".

Occurring in the Gospel passage right before the section we heard Dawn read today, Jesus is up on the mountain. The mountain, in the imagery and symbols of the Hebrew scriptures, was where one went to meet God. Its where Moses went to receive the law, the commandments. Having spent the night on the mountain praying to God, Jesus descends to what the scriptures call a "level place."<sup>2</sup>

The prophets before him often spoke from a "level place," (pe-di-nos' in Greek). Symbolically, it was understood to be the place of human suffering, imperfection, loss, and mourning.<sup>3</sup> In other words: not up high on the mountain, but down here, in the place where most of us live.

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<sup>2</sup> (πεδινός / flat, level).

<sup>3</sup> After Ronald J. Allen, in Luther Seminary's *Working Preacher* commentary for 02-13-2022.

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/reviced-common-lectionary/sixth-sunday-after-epiphany-3/commentary-on-luke-617-26>

### 3

Before speaking a single word, Jesus looks out upon the crowd and begins to heal. I believe that's important. Luke 6:17-19 tells of how power "came out of him" and how Jesus healed all those who were ill and troubled in body and spirit. Then, after having met their needs, he begins to speak to them.

"Blessed are you who are poor,  
for yours is the kingdom of God.

"Blessed are you who are hungry now,  
for you will be filled.

"Blessed are you who weep now,  
for you will laugh. "

The point is not that being poor, or hungry, or weeping are somehow virtuous states to be in. or that we should necessarily desire to be these things, as if only to know God more fully, but rather that *when* you are poor, or hungry, or weeping, *when* you are lost and feel completely alone, know that God is with you. Even when you feel *most* alone, know that God is near.

In Jesus' teaching, as in the prophets before him, it is revealed that the God of high and lofty places, the God of "up the mountain" is also the God of "the level places," far below. God is to be found not just in quiet nights of prayer upon the summit, where the night sky is filled with the glory and starlit radiance of the Creator of all things in heaven and on earth, stretched upon a canvas of magnificence and wonder, illuminated by the brilliance of the milky way and cosmic infinity of worlds too many to number...

But also - right beside and amongst us, in the mother's cry of pain, in the anguish in the eyes of anyone who has been beaten down by life, those with bodies racked by pain and illness and struggle, those lost in the confusion of this life, and... ... as Dawn alluded to last week, those who are simply weary. Bone tired and weary.

There amidst the crowd, in that level place, having healed as best he can, **Jesus loves**. He pronounces blessing upon brokenness, healing in the midst of pain, peace where all is confusion and strife. This is both the mystery and the promise of God.

Next week in the Gospel, we will hear of the depth of this love, and the healing power of mercy and forgiveness. And later, in the culmination of the Gospel story, we will experience this all writ large upon the cross on Golgotha, that the Lord of the starfields bears the pain of a broken creation in God's own body, entering fully into the depth of the pain of the human story, that it might we be redeemed and rise again in glory, both in the here and now, and in a life which proceeds beyond the limitations of this life.

That is the profound reality of Easter. But I am getting a full nine weeks ahead of myself.

The "blessedness" of the beatitudes is not the glorification of suffering... it is the making of meaning, it is the transformation, and it is the redemption of all that has been lost to a world of sin and pain.

And the "woes? ..."

"But woe to you who are rich,  
for you have received your consolation.

"Woe to you who are full now,  
for you will be hungry.

"Woe to you who are laughing now,  
for you will mourn and weep.

"Woe to you when all speak well of you, ...

This speaks to us anytime we stay safely behind the walls of our own hearts, choosing to neither see nor be moved by the suffering of others. That can happen to us, of course, whether we are wealthy or poor. Wealth, however, often affords us a choice the poor frequently do not have: the choice to insulate ourselves away from the needs of others, and to believe falsely that our own prosperity is largely of our own making and is an end unto itself. Each time we hide away from the sufferings of those who are more vulnerable than ourselves... each time we protect ourselves and surround ourselves with any of the distractions of wealth and comfort, in the seeming safety of privilege, in the mindless consumerism of our own unsatiated appetites... we lose a little more of our souls.

A "god" who stays high upon the mountain, untouched by human needs, is no God at all.

That's not "God" we think we see; it is only our own reflection anytime we lose touch with the fullness of our own humanity. And we lose touch with our own humanity when we no longer see or hear or respond to the needs of one another, and the needs of a planet that one of our Eucharistic prayers calls "our fragile island home."

And if we follow that false road far enough, we find that we have reduced the measure... of our own sense of self-worth to the car we drive, the house we live in, the clothes we wear. The living God becomes lost to us even as we become consumed with ourselves. Our possessions end up possessing us.

This isn't some new-fangled teaching. St. Augustine himself, and Martin Luther after him, called this, in Latin: (*homo incurvatus in se*)," It means "humanity curved in on itself."

Jesus, of course, has another word for it. He just called it "Woe." As Jimmy and Bob sang:

*But you and I, we've been through that.*

*That is not our fate.*

*So let us not talk falsely now.*

*The hour is getting late.<sup>4</sup>*

Be kind. Be compassionate. Be bold. Be as courageous as you are able. Have a blessed week ahead. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> From *All Along the Watchtower*, B. Dylan.

Scriptures appointed for this week:

## The Collect

O God, the strength of all who put their trust in you: Mercifully accept our prayers; and because in our weakness we can do nothing good without you, give us the help of your grace, that in keeping your commandments we may please you both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## Old Testament - Jeremiah 17:5-10

Thus says the Lord:

Blessed are those who trust in the Lord,  
whose trust is the Lord.

They shall be like a tree planted by water,  
sending out its roots by the stream.

It shall not fear when heat comes,  
and its leaves shall stay green;

in the year of drought it is not anxious,  
and it does not cease to bear fruit.

The heart is devious above all else;  
it is perverse--  
who can understand it?

I the Lord test the mind  
and search the heart,

to give to all according to their ways,  
according to the fruit of their doings.

## The Psalm - Psalm 1

1 Happy are they who have not walked in the counsel of the wicked, \*  
nor lingered in the way of sinners,  
nor sat in the seats of the scornful!

2 Their delight is in the law of the Lord, \*  
and they meditate on his law day and night.

3 They are like trees planted by streams of water,  
bearing fruit in due season, with leaves that do not wither; \*  
everything they do shall prosper.

4 It is not so with the wicked; \*  
they are like chaff which the wind blows away.

5 Therefore the wicked shall not stand upright when judgment comes, \*  
nor the sinner in the council of the righteous.

6 For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, \*  
but the way of the wicked is doomed.

## **The Gospel    Luke 6:17-26**

Jesus came down with the twelve apostles and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

“Blessed are you who are poor,  
for yours is the kingdom of God.

“Blessed are you who are hungry now,  
for you will be filled.

“Blessed are you who weep now,  
for you will laugh.

“Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.”

"But woe to you who are rich,  
for you have received your consolation.

"Woe to you who are full now,  
for you will be hungry.

"Woe to you who are laughing now,  
for you will mourn and weep.

"Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets."

## Song file:

From "Doctor God," recording by Doc Holiday:

Now I have come to seek the prophet, yeah  
 Oh, Can you tell me is he in today  
 Show me to the man with the healing hands  
 And tell him to come and take me by my hand  
 Don't you know I need, I need the Doctor,  
 Right away

Doctor God, Doctor God  
 Can you forgive me for the way I've been living  
 Taking more than giving  
 I'm just tired of living this way

Doctor God, Oh Doctor God  
 Show me that road to salvation  
 And lead me away from temptation  
 And close that damn door to hate  
 Oh, Doctor God

Songwriters: Dan Penn / Jerry McGill / Johnny Christopher  
 Doctor God lyrics © Hipgnosis Songs Group



## Doctor My Eyes, Jackson Browne

Doctor, my eyes have seen the years  
 And the slow parade of fears without crying  
 Now I want to understand

I have done all that I could  
 To see the evil and the good without hiding  
 You must help me if you can

Doctor, my eyes  
 Tell me what is wrong  
 Was I unwise to leave them open for so long?

'Cause I have wandered through this world  
 And as each moment has unfurled  
 I've been waiting to awaken from these dreams

People go just where they will  
 I never noticed them until I got this feeling  
 That it's later than it seems

Doctor, my eyes  
 Tell me what you see  
 I hear their cries  
 Just say if it's too late for me

Doctor, my eyes  
 They cannot see the sky  
 Is this the prize  
 For having learned how not to cry?

Source: [LyricFind](#)

Songwriters: Jackson Browne  
 Doctor My Eyes lyrics © Universal Music Publishing Group

## History of Us

By The Indigo Girls

I went all the way to Paris to forget your face  
 Captured in stained glass, young lives long since  
 passed  
 Statues of lovers every place  
 I went all across the continent to relieve this restless  
 love  
 I walked through the ruins, icons of glory  
 Smashed by the bombs from above

So we must love while these moments are still called  
 today  
 Take part in the pain of this passion play  
 Stretched our youth as we must, until we are ashes to  
 dust  
 Until time makes history of us.

Jeu de Paume's full of faces knowing peace, knowing  
 strife  
 Leisure and toil, still it's canvas and oil  
 There's just no medium for life  
 In the midst of the rubble I felt a sense of rebirth  
 In a dusty cathedral the living God called  
 And I prayed for my life here in earth



So we must love while these moments are still called  
 today  
 Take part in the pain of this passion play  
 Stretched our youth as we must, until we are ashes to  
 dust  
 Until time makes history of us.

There are mountains in Switzerland, brilliant cold as  
 they stand  
 From my hotel room, watching the half-moon  
 Bleeding its light like a lamb  
 And the town is illuminated, its tiny figures are fast  
 asleep  
 And it dawns on me the time is upon me  
 To return to the flock I must keep.

So we must love while these moments are still called  
 today  
 Take part in the pain of this passion play  
 Stretched our youth as we must, until we are ashes to  
 dust  
 Until time makes history of us.

Source: [LyricFind](#)

Songwriters: Amy Elizabeth Ray / Emily Ann Saliers

History of Us lyrics © Universal Music Publishing Group

## From the prophet Jeremiah, 17: 7-10

*Blessed are those who trust in the Lord,  
whose trust is the Lord.*

*They shall be like a tree planted by water,  
sending out its roots by the stream.*

*It shall not fear when heat comes,  
and its leaves shall stay green;*

*in the year of drought it is not anxious,  
and it does not cease to bear fruit.*

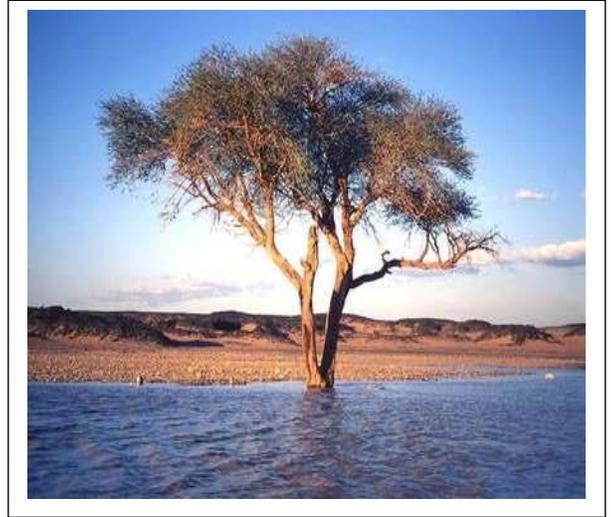
## River of Love, by T Bone (Henry) Burnett

There's a river of love that runs through all time  
But there's a river of grief that floods through our lives  
It starts when a heart is broken into  
By the thief of belief in anything that's true  
But there's a river of love that runs through all time

There's a river of love that runs through all time  
But there's a river of tears that flows through our eyes  
We fight through the night for freedom as it fades  
Into a jail where we fail everytime we make a break  
But there's a river of love that runs through all time

I had to run before I knew how to crawl  
The first step was hard  
But I have had trouble with them all  
But now the night grows darker  
And the day grows dim  
Cause I know I never will see you again  
And I almost made you happy

There's a river of love that runs through all time  
But there's a river of fire that burns with no light  
The flame is the pain of dreams gone up in smoke  
From the lies we deny and breathe until we choke  
There's a river of love that runs through all time...



**Yahweh**, by U2

Take these shoes  
 Click clacking down some dead-end street  
 Take these shoes  
 And make them fit  
 Take this shirt  
 Polyester white trash made in nowhere  
 Take this shirt  
 And make it clean, clean  
 Take this soul  
 Stranded in some skin and bones  
 Take this soul  
 And make it sing  
 Take these hands  
 Teach them what to carry  
 Take these hands  
 Don't make a fist  
 Take this mouth  
 So quick to criticize  
 Take this mouth  
 Give it a kiss  
 Yahweh, Yahweh  
 Always pain before a child is born

*Yahweh, Yahweh*

*Always pain before a child is born*

*Yahweh, Yahweh*

*Still I'm waiting for the dawn*



Yahweh, Yahweh  
 Still I'm waiting for the dawn  
 Still waiting for the dawn, the sun is coming up  
 The sun is coming up on the ocean  
 This love is like a drop in the ocean  
 This love is like a drop in the ocean  
 Yahweh, Yahweh  
 Always pain before a child is born  
 Yahweh, tell me now  
 Why the dark before the dawn?  
 Take this city  
 A city should be shining on a hill  
 Take this city  
 If it be your will  
 What no man can own, no man can take  
 Take this heart  
 Take this heart  
 Take this heart  
 And make it break

*Songwriters: Paul David Hewson / Adam Clayton / Larry Mullen / Dave Evans*

*Yahweh lyrics © Polygram Int. Music Publishing*

## All Along The Watchtower

Bob Dylan

"There must be some way out of here," said the joker to the thief,  
 "There's too much confusion, I can't get no relief  
 Businessmen, they drink my wine, plowmen dig my earth  
 None of them along the line know what any of it is worth."

"No reason to get excited", the thief, he kindly spoke,  
 "There are many here among us who feel that life is but a joke  
 But you and I, we've been through that, and this is not our fate  
 So let us not talk falsely now, the hour is getting late".

All along the watchtower, princes kept the view  
 While all the women came and went, barefoot servants, too.

Outside in the distance a wildcat did growl  
 Two riders were approaching, the wind began to howl.



### Isaiah 21:5-10 *A prophecy of Babylon*

<sup>5</sup>Prepare the table, watch in the watchtower, eat, drink: arise, ye princes, and anoint the shield.

<sup>6</sup>For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Go, set a watchman, let him declare what he seeth.

<sup>7</sup>And he saw a chariot with a couple of horsemen, a chariot of asses, and a chariot of camels; and he hearkened diligently with much heed:

<sup>8</sup>And he cried, A lion: My lord, I stand continually upon the watchtower in the daytime, and I am set in my ward whole nights:

<sup>9</sup>And, behold, here cometh a chariot of men, with a couple of horsemen. And he answered and said, Babylon is fallen, is fallen; and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground.

<sup>10</sup>O my threshing, and the corn of my floor: that which I have heard of the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, have I declared unto you.