

Epiphany 4 Year A January 29 2023 Matthew 5 1-12

I am a part of that generation that spans the divide between the time before the Internet, and the time after it exploded into all of our lives. What I mean by this, is that I grew up, and had formative years, when the internet was not our constant companion. I can remember not even having a computer in the house, much less the internet.

But slowly, as I grew up, the computer and the internet became more and more present. In homes, in schools, in business. Pretty soon, it became more and more common to use a computer or the internet every day of your life.

When I went to college, the explosion really happened. Facebook hit the scene – but not to the public at first. It started out as a social site for college campuses and their students. The schools that were on Facebook were limited at first. My college's student body organized a petition and got our small liberal arts college in.

The effect of it was almost immediate. People all of a sudden began spending hours on their computers. They were not searching the internet and its almost infinite content. They were on one site, Facebook.

It was not just the time sink that was part of the phenomenon in my college. It was also the way people interacted with each other. What they learned about and what they thought about their fellow classmates.

I will never forget what a friend said to me once. She said, “I thought I knew these people, but then Facebook happened, and now I really know them.”

Well, of course, this was not limited to college campuses for very long. Soon enough, it was unleashed into the world. It would

change people's habits and daily patterns. It would also spawn a massive wave of new social media sites and apps.

The young generations growing up today have computers, the internet, and social media as constant companions. How the world talks and how it sees itself is now directly linked to these technologies.

I am sure I am not the only one, who spends too much time on a device and on social media. I have never dared – and I would be a little afraid – to track just how much time I spend on them in

a week. All that email, and Facebook, and YouTube, and countless other programs and sites and apps. The hours would just pile up.

There is, however one phenomenon of social media that I have never become a regular user of, and that is Twitter. Now, it is impossible these days not to be touched by Twitter. People repost and comment on tweets all the time. News outlets report on who is tweeting and what people are tweeting about. Who owns Twitter is newsworthy. Even if I do not use it, I know what is going on with it.

There is something about it that I have always found uninviting. Something about the limitation of characters that can be used in a tweet. This seems to limit communication and conversation.

From what I can tell, that seems, by and large, what happens. From what I observe, there are a lot of people trying to grab other people's attention. Often by being provocative, funny, combative, or hateful.

So, I stay away from it.

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Then, this week, I was reading our gospel lesson. I was presented with Jesus' sermon on the mount and the beatitudes.

It hit me that the beatitudes could all be tweeted out as individual tweets. They would conform nicely to the 280 character limit. And what powerful messages they could carry in those 280 characters.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Send.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” Post.

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.” Share.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” submit.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.” Re-tweet.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” Hashtag.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of

God.” Forward.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Copy.

“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and
utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.” Paste.

What words of power. What words of truth. That the poor,
the destitute – their rightful inheritance is God’s heavenly
kingdom.

That those who mourn have the blessing of God, because he mourns with them, and comforts them out of his eternal love.

Those who are humble and gentle, all of creation is for them, a blessing from their loving father in heaven.

Those who are hungry and thirsty for justice will be satisfied, because justice is what God yearns for as well.

Those who show mercy will know mercy, for mercy is the way of God.

Those who are pure in heart, will be blessed by seeing God all around them.

God's children will be known for the peace that they bring, and they will be ridiculed by others for it, and they will be scorned for it. But it is peace that breaks down barriers, it is peace that defeats darkness, and it is peace that nourishes life.

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If you are like me, and you are troubled by the discourse you see unfolding on the internet, and if you are like me and you are uneasy with the forum with which these conversations take place, do not lose heart. Because with faithful and genuine words, the power of Jesus' Gospel, the love of God can be proclaimed.

If you are not like me, and have dived head first into social media and our comfortable with its forms, or if you have grown up knowing only a world that communicates this way, then I implore you, carry the gospel with you wherever you go. Take those statements of 280 characters or less you find in the gospel, and share them without shame or fear.

And if you are someone who already does this, then thank you. Please continue your good work. For the world needs to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

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This is not contained to online dialogue alone. These most recent mass shootings in California are painfully familiar, and predictable.

In their horrific wake, the same partisan lines are drawn. The same rhetoric gets deployed. And the same outcome seems inevitable – nothing happens, nothing changes.

I know that for myself, I ask, “what can I do? What can I say in response?”

I know for myself, at least, the simple and pointed words of the beatitudes speak to this crisis of gun violence.

Blessed are the meek.

Blessed are the merciful.

Blessed are the peacemakers.

Blessed and those who mourn.

I am learning, for myself, that before I enter into any talk about this evil that plagues our community, this sickness that infects our society, I need to begin and end anything I say or think about it in Jesus. Because Jesus assures us that he is with the victims, and that he is with those striving for justice and peace.

Where you find ignorance, respond with understanding.
Where you find hatred respond with compassion. Where you find
anger, respond with love.

Blessed are those who proclaim the word of God.

Blessed are those who carry the gospel with them.

Blessed are you, who bring Jesus Christ to a world in
desperate need of Him.

Be bold. Be courageous. Because we have the Good News of
Jesus Christ. We have his short, simple words of compassion,
comfort, and strength.

And I can think of nothing else, that the world needs more.

Amen