

# Sermon

Matthew 5:1-12 | Peter Lane

Last Wednesday was the feast of the conversion of St. Paul, the patron of this parish. This morning we read the Beatitudes, perhaps the most essential condensation we have of Jesus' message. Today is our annual meeting and this past week was crazy. And so it is an important day to claim. St. Paul & the Redeemer is a critical institutional part of the Jesus Movement. St. Paul & the Redeemer is a critical institutional part of the Jesus Movement.

## Part I: the Jesus Movement.

We need a Jesus movement. The Most Reverend Michael Curry, the presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church describes the Jesus movement this way. By the way, I'm Reverend, he's the Most Reverend. So listen up. "God came among us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth to show us the Way. He came to show us the Way to life, the Way to love." Listen now. "He came to show us the Way beyond what often can be the nightmares of our own devisings and into the dream of God's intending." "He came to show us the Way beyond what often can be the nightmares of our own devisings and into the dream of God's intending." Have we not as a country devised some nightmares recently? We need the Jesus movement. There is this notion in the ascendancy right now that blessed are the winners, for they are not pathetic. Blessed are the puffed up. Blessed are the prettiest. There is this notion in the ascendancy right now that blessed are the ones who flaunt their strength, for they shall feel important. There is this notion in the ascendancy right now that the only way to be blessed if is some other group is cursed. There is this notion that might makes right, that God only blesses Christians or America or white, heterosexual males. No. No. No. We need a Jesus Movement. Well, there is a Jesus movement and we are already part of it. The hundreds of thousands who marched with the women last Saturday. That is the Jesus movement. Those like the Diocese of Indianapolis who are taking concrete actions against structural racism. That is the Jesus movement. Those who take the ideals of Jesus into their workplaces day in and day out, that is the Jesus Movement. Those who welcome refugees into their

community, that is the Jesus movement. We are part of the movement in all those ways. Although, I am sad to report that we have been stymied for a time in welcoming the refugee. We were supposed to welcome the refugee family we are co-sponsoring in the next few weeks. Yesterday we received notice that our family is caught in the four month delay ordered by the executive action. We will still co-sponsor them when they do arrive. We will still meet next week after the 11:15 liturgy for an orientation and planning meeting. We are not giving up. Giving up is not part of the Jesus Movement. And we need a Jesus movement.

The Beatitudes that we read from Matthew this morning highlight a life so different from one that would have been widely praised in the Roman world of the 1st century, so different from one that would be widely praised in our world today. Blessed are the mourners and the meek, the makers of peace, the thirsters after righteousness? Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. If you need a litmus test on who belongs in the Jesus movement, don't go by who claims to be a Christian, use the litmus test of the beatitudes. Jesus suggests a way of being that is a provocative alternative to what is held up in broader society. This way of being doesn't brag about one's grandness but owns a poverty of spirit. It doesn't bravely claim strength at every moment but owns suffering and pain. And don't think for a second that Jesus is describing a weak or apathetic people. No. People in the Jesus Movement hunger and thirst for righteousness. And the community that lives by the beatitudes finds, even amidst suffering, deep wells of joy. Drew Hart, whose book some of us will read this week says of the Jesus Movement, "Jesus understood his revolutionary industry to be on the border where Gods disruptive kingdom and the old social order of domination collide." We find ourselves placed on the border where God's disruptive kingdom and the old social order of domination collide. To live there faithfully means cultivating eyes that can see blessedness in the meek and merciful, cultivating strength that is put towards the goal of peace, cultivating an openheartedness that allows us to

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mourn when things are sad, cultivating a fortitude that sees in persecution God's presence. And cultivating a community that rejoices and is glad. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

## **Part II: the institutional Church**

Now, can the Jesus movement take an institutional form? We didn't just read the Beatitudes this morning. We also read the story of the Conversion of St. Paul. Some have thought over the years that St. Paul & Jesus were a bad mix. Tolstoy thought you couldn't follow Jesus and have the institutional church of the Creed. Many in recent times have argued that Jesus' prophetic life was betrayed by Paul's zealotry. I disagree. Jesus needed Paul and the Jesus Movement needs institutions. I laugh then at the name of this parish. St. Paul & the Redeemer. Even our name is asking us to hold together the movement and the institution. Paul, after that Damascus Road experience, was a great institution builder. He founded churches. He raised money. He trained leaders. He gave the theological underpinnings. Jesus was a wandering teacher. There are a few who are called into that lifestyle. Most of us will participate in the Jesus Movement as people with jobs and mortgages and families. In order to live the beatitudes, we need the encouragement of community and the opportunities of service. Paul helped form the Jesus movement into an institution that could meet those needs. The reality of human nature is that our best ideals still need to be turned into reality through rules, put into practice through organizations. Pope Francis said, "It's hypocrisy to call yourself a Christian and chase away a refugee." That is most certainly true. And yet we need the UNHCR. Unless we are to do away with national borders, we need thoughtful, smart lawmakers to figure out how to put our Christian ideals into practice. It is not easy. We should give thanks today for those thoughtful, brave members of the Jesus Movement who work for the ACLU, and at places like Refugee One, and the ones who work for the government. The Jesus movement needs people protesting outside of JFK's terminal 4. And the

Jesus movement needs bureaucrats crafting policy. Jesus needed St. Paul.

And I believe that Jesus needs St. Paul & the Redeemer. How do you keep feeding the hungry in this neighborhood decade after decade without an institution? Open Kitchen started like 4 or 5 rector's ago. So did a food pantry. Our garden is there because of the help of KAM Isaiah Israel. We can welcome a refugee family because we can marshal the volunteers and the dollars and partner with Refugee One. This robust institution allows us to maintain a long legacy of beauty in music and in liturgy. We are holding a funeral for Jay Turner on February 18. He was a faithful parishioner who hadn't come in many, many years because of his age. Because we have a robust institution, we are here to hold a dignified and faithful funeral. We keep retelling the great stories of the faith and celebrating the great mysteries of the sacraments. That helps us to raise our children to love all that is true and noble, just and pure, lovable and gracious, excellent and admirable. The Jesus movement needs institutions, or more precisely, the Jesus movement needs this institution.

Here we are. The calling is clear. The specific actions will be discerned. And the challenges, very real, will be overcome.

St. Paul needed Jesus, don't we all know it. But Jesus also needed St. Paul. Here we stand.

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