

The Rev. John Sampson, Pastor
Glen Ridge Congregational Church

He Speaks!



"Sermon on the Mount" by Laura James

Sunday, February 1, 2026

Matthew 5:1 – 12

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer.

Amen.

Jesus climbs the mountain, the meeting point of heaven and earth. He brings us with him up higher, and he invites what is above to come down to find us. And it is in this place of communion that he opens his mouth, and he speaks more than we've heard him speak before. His words are truly gospel, because they are good news, even if difficult to hear and live into.

He tells us about the new community he is creating, who will be there, and what its values are. And it is such a different vision of what a society could be. So different from the one that those who experienced his words knew, and so different from the one we know. Because the citizens of Christ's community

are those who are poor in spirit and those who wish to become poor in spirit. Those who mourn and those who take on the practice of mourning. Those who make peace and those who feel called to transform into peacemakers. Those who hunger for what is right and those who work for what is right. And those who suffer for truth and those who take on the discipline of suffering for truth. These are some of those who are being called to enter into Christ's new community. These are the ones invited into his kingdom.

Christ tells those seated around him, and he tells us, that those who take on these values, and who are humble enough to dedicate their lives to this vision, given in the meeting place of heaven and earth, that we will be blessed. He promises us that we will inherit the earth. We will be comforted. We will be filled. We will be shown mercy, and we will be called the children of God.

How different this is from the vision of our world which tells us that the dividers are blest. The warmakers are favored. Humility is weakness. There is no truth, only alternative facts. And that we should be the ones who cause suffering, not the ones who suffer.

I wonder if you are like me, and when you heard these words of the Christ, there was something within you that felt like it could finally exhale. Because there is a place within you that understood and wanted the vision of a different kind of world that Jesus is offering us. These are words of comfort and reassurance that what we know deep down to be right could actually be made real.

But the words we hear this morning are the words that made it down the mountain. These are the words that made it down to the people who weren't strong enough to climb, or weren't interested enough to make the effort to meet heaven as it bent down to embrace Jesus and his closest followers. Perhaps these are the words that have been polished and made more appetizing to us. Because they are words that tell us that if we become the followers of Christ, the citizens of his kingdom, we will be rewarded.

But what if Christ's words offered in a purer, more refined air, never told us we would be rewarded by following them? What if they weren't promises, but commandments? What if Jesus up on that mountain never promised us

blessing, but simply told us to be peacemakers, because making peace is in and of itself the work that God requires of us. We know all too well that there are peacemakers who are never called children of God.

What if we are told we will mourn and never promised comfort? Because we all know that some of us carry a grief that never can be fully assuaged.

What if we are told to be meek, because meekness is what God requires, without the assurance of inheriting the earth? Would we still become a people of meekness? Because history tells us that the meek haven't inherited the earth.

Would we still follow Jesus, would we still want to become his disciples, the citizens of his kingdom, if we truly understood that it may lead to Golgotha, to the place of the skull?

Perhaps if we saw these opening statements not as promises of reward, but the commandments of a difficult path forward, we might, like the crowds, stay at the base of the mountain, not wanting to get too close. We might feel like the exertion the beatitudes require of us, might not be worth making the effort for.

As your pastor, I can't answer any of these questions for you. I can only answer them for myself. But I can commit to all of you that I will continue to invite us to make our church a place where we can ask these hard questions, reflect upon them, and perhaps even answer them, honestly and courageously, not as children seeking easy answers, but as adults who understand the reality and complexity of our lives, and the implications of what Jesus is asking of us.

But even if we don't receive all the blessings Jesus has offered, I do believe that we will be blessed. Because to follow these commandments will bring us into a deeper and more profound intimacy with each other, with the world, and with God.

Amen.