

Sermon Transcript

Faith Through Pain and Hope

**Micah 6:6-8 and Matthew 5:1-12 | Fourth Sunday After Epiphany |
February 1, 2026 | Pastor John Klawiter, preaching**

Grace and peace to you my friends in faith,

I just completed some cool continuing education over the last few days and the facilitator of the training kept repeating a line throughout the course:

“There’s more knowledge in this room than the guy at the front of the room.”

His point was that we have so much to learn from each other. Look around. Let that sink in.

Collectively, there is so much knowledge, life experience, faith-filled expressions in this sanctuary.

We sing together. We pray together. We have fellowship together. We serve together. Our gifts and offerings help care for our neighbors and make a difference in the world.

Wow, isn’t that cool?

Jesus has just begun his ministry and people are drawn to him. He’s healing people and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom. The kingdom is near. God is present.

So they clamor as close to him as they can. He sees the massive crowd, he goes up a mountain.

When I hear “sermon on the mount”, I think this must’ve been quite the hike. But this is the mount of Beatitudes in modern day Galilee, Israel (**SLIDE of Mount of Beatitudes**).

What do you notice? *It’s not that high, is it? But it’s also not that far from the water. It’s probably not too far out of town.*

It’s accessible. It’s a safe place to go and be in the presence of Jesus. Jesus ministry is about dwelling among us. Being the facilitator of God’s grace.

I think people are drawn to him because he truly empowers them to be the bearers of God’s kingdom into the world. Like he knows that collectively, they carry so much power, they’ve just never been told that it’s theirs.

He reveals that truth to them in a powerful way. He blesses them. The people are identified by love. God’s love. It’s THEIRS. And Jesus is telling them that God’s blessing goes with them.

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Jesus begins his most famous sermon not with commands, but with compassion. Not fire and brimstone, but blessing and abundance.

The last few weeks living in Minnesota have been heavy. I've named that honestly in worship. It's led me to important conversations with you—how will we move forward? How is the church a place for us to be spiritually fed and united, even when we all see things differently?

We haven't looked away from pain, from injustice, from the weight so many are carrying—personally and collectively. And I'm not taking anything away from that today. Because things are still heavy.

But there is something else that is also true. People everywhere are helping others remove those burdens.

Last Sunday afternoon, a large crowd gathered at Gustavus Adolphus Lutheran Church in Saint Paul. My wife, Taryn, and I talked about how important it would be for regular Minnesotans to just get together and have a message of love from our scriptures.

It would be even more powerful if people from OTHER traditions, not just LUTHERANS, could speak up and share.

We witnessed something holy (**picture of clergy**). An imam. A rabbi. A Disciples of Christ pastor and a Lutheran pastor who shared on behalf of the five ELCA immigrant congregations in Saint Paul.

Different traditions. Different scriptures. Different prayers. But one shared truth: Love your neighbor.

It's not "tolerate your neighbor." It's not "interrogate your neighbor." And it's not even "decide whether your neighbor deserves care." It's love.

One of the highlights was then taking those positive signs (**SLIDE of SIGNS**)—with messages of love and scripture—and walking along the street while we sung.

We got many honks of affirmation. Neighbors took pictures as they drove by and gave us plenty of smiles. We could tell that it meant something to them.

Until the very end. Two cars drove by and the drivers gave us a different response. Emphatically showing us their middle fingers as they sped by.

In a different time and place, that reaction would probably get me upset. But the sign I was holding up and showing him literally said, "Love your neighbors. All of them."
(**SLIDE**)

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When pictures got posted on Facebook, negative comments trickled in. It was weird. The guy was mad about women talking and Muslims being present with us. What lens does this guy have on the world? Wow. I certainly don't get it.

And yet, I am called to love those neighbors—angry and gesturing obscenities in our direction or trolling us on the internet. God loves them too. The least I can do is love them and pray for their anger not to overwhelm them.

This gathering was for the people to be present FOR our communities. And to donate money and items that our neighbors desperately need (**SLIDE of donations**).

Our synod raised over \$80,000 and counting to respond to immigrants in need of help. We saw a need—and we responded.

That's OUR church. We should be proud of that response.

We continue to pray for all who respond in these moments—our community responders, our firefighters and police officers. My unit from the National Guard, who made headlines for handing out coffee and donuts (**SLIDE of MNNG**), while also providing a space for peace. These people find themselves in uncomfortable spaces, doing the best they can. They are not strangers. They are our neighbors looking out for neighbors. It can be exhausting.

Jesus preached this sermon to people who were tired. People who were afraid. People who were unsure how they were going to make it. Jesus did not say, "Escape the world." He told them they were blessed to be in the world.

Every time we help without questioning, every time we give without judging, every time we love without needing certainty—we become living sermons... kinda like what happens in this real scene at Walmart captured on video (**VIDEO**).

No questions asked; no criteria for why. Just one neighbor helping another.

I saw that on Sunday's event, but I see it here, too.

It's like our people serving a community meal (**SLIDE**) at Zion Lutheran on Monday. Getting ideas on how Faith can do the same. Or those who helped bring back the Father-Daughter ball (**SLIDE**) after a two year break.

The world is heavy. Jesus isn't promising us the world is lighter than it is. But we make it lighter for our neighbors. We lift burdens through simple acts of mercy.

We have named fear, injustice, grief, and uncertainty—because faith that skips over pain is not faith at all.

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Real faith tells the truth about suffering... AND still believes in hope. That hope looks like love without interrogation. It's mercy without conditions.

It looks like neighbors showing up for neighbors, delivering groceries, providing rides, helping with bills, demanding safety for all.

That's why the event on Sunday was something important to witness. I saw humanity show up for each other. It was one of those moments that filled my bucket. I felt the weariness melt away for an afternoon.

And that is the good news today. That even in a heavy world, love still moves us. We are blessed. Through it all. What happens to that blessing?

It moves (*hold the beach ball*). It flows. Grace abounds. And God is still being revealed—on a mountain, in a grocery store, on Arcade Avenue in Saint Paul or from the pews at Faith in Forest Lake.

God is revealed through ordinary people, in ordinary moments, choosing to share that blessing with the world. Amen.