

# Vision Beautiful

Today we begin a five-week exploration of a collection of Jesus' sayings known as the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus' radical vision of what God's reign on earth might look like is a vision of wholeness for all people. Paul reminds us that God's wisdom is different from worldly wisdom. Micah and the psalmist describe ways to live this vision beautiful.

## Focus Scripture: Matthew 5:1–12

After Jesus' baptism, he calls a group of disciples. They travel throughout Galilee teaching and healing, sharing the good news that God's realm is breaking into the world. It is a message that the gospel writer's own community desperately needs to hear. Matthew is written to a group of new Christians after disaster has happened. The temple has been destroyed, the people scattered. Jesus is no longer present in the flesh. What laws will govern the community now? What will the new community look like? What is the good news for those trying to be faithful in a hostile world?

Of the four gospels, Matthew most wants to show that Jesus fulfills Israel's experience. In this gospel, Jesus is shown as the new Moses, teaching from the mountain as Moses did when he gave Israel the law. The gospel writer arranges Jesus' words in five blocks of teaching, reminding readers of the "five books of Moses." Chapters 5 to 7 – the Sermon on the Mount – form the first block.

The Beatitudes begin the Sermon on the Mount. They are a series of sentences beginning with the word *blessed*, or *happy* in some translations. Blessing is God's free gift to humankind, a sign of covenant relationship with God. Such blessing may look very different from the world's idea of happiness. In these sayings, Jesus turns human notions of happiness upside down. What kind of living brings God's blessing? Jesus teaches that the blessed ones are those who are humble of heart ("poor in spirit"), who are gentle, who show mercy, who hunger and thirst for God's ways. Those who mourn will be comforted; those who make peace will be called God's children. Those who are persecuted in the cause of justice will find themselves part of God's transforming reality.

There is urgency in Jesus' teaching. He uses the present tense – this is happening right now. In Jesus' coming, God's love is revealed and made manifest. This teaching is directed to the disciples, the Twelve and the larger group of men and women who accompany Jesus. The Beatitudes describe the way of life for those who commit themselves to follow. For Matthew's community, this vision beautiful is what life should be like.

Living in right relationship with God and neighbour brings blessing – calling out the best in us and others. The other readings spell out this vision of wholeness. **Micah 6:1–8** describes a dramatic confrontation, a lawsuit between God and Israel. What must Israel do to be in a right relationship with God? Verse 8 summarizes: do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. **Psalms 15** gives a similar response. The psalmist asks who may come before God in the temple. It is those who do what is right, speak the truth, and do no evil to their neighbours.

In **1 Corinthians 1:18–31**, Paul echoes Matthew's theme of worldly values turned upside down. God's wisdom seems like foolishness to the present age. God overturns the established order. God chooses us to play our part in God's plan. In Christ we are strengthened to bring about God's reign of justice and peace.

•••••

Our experience today is, in many ways, similar to that of Matthew's community. We may not be persecuted for our faith, but the ways of faith often seem foolish compared with the values of society. In what ways do the gospel values challenge contemporary views – turn them upside down? What challenges do you find in trying to live according to the standards expressed in today's readings?



January 30, 2011

**Focus Scripture**  
**Matthew 5:1–12**

**Additional Scriptures**  
**Micah 6:1–8**  
**Psalms 15**  
**1 Corinthians 1:18–31**

**O God, you turn things upside down, calling the wise to embrace your folly. Help us to grow in acknowledging our need for you. Open us to the vision of your reign on earth, and strengthen us to do our part. Amen.**

Check out Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage. Spirit Sighting are posted weekly prior to the date of use.

## The Focus for Ages 12–14

Young people need positive relationships with peers and adults. They desire association, companionship, and critique from their peers regarding their roles in society. From adults they desire affection, identification, values, and help with solving large problems. (See the resource sheet “Eight Developmental Needs of Young Adolescents,” (p. 95), for more information.) While young people long for meaningful relationships in community, this age finds comfort in the predictable peer group that can quickly become exclusive. They may dream of a world that welcomes each person and cel-

brates their presence, yet their experience is often far different from this dream. Ordinary life challenges can alienate them from even their closest friends. They might experience anxiety and fear when their peers face the unavoidable circumstances of normal life.

People of faith are often called to be part of communities that at first they may not want to join. Jesus teaches that there is more in these relationships than one first sees. Pray that young people will find the willingness and courage to give relationships that help them experience God’s dream a chance.

January 30, 2011



### Materials needed

#### Before the session

- ❑ Prayerfully reflect on this week’s scripture, Matthew 5:1–12, and biblical background material (p. 59). As you prepare for the session, name the communities to which you belong and reflect on the dynamics in these communities.
- ❑ Read the resource sheet “*Eight Developmental Needs of Young Adolescents*” (p. 95). (Note: the resource sheet, “*Is This Me?*”, p. 96, is a youth-friendly version of this resource for use with young people.) As you think about the young people in your group, identify one or two needs each one seems to be working on at this time.
- ❑ Set up the worship area with a *green cloth*, a *white pillar candle*, the *small boxes* from previous sessions (see December 26 session for information, and be sure to have additional boxes for any newcomers), a *Bible*, and an *offering basket*.
- ❑ To access connections between current events and the focus passage, visit [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca), and click on *Spirit Sightings*. Bring information that might inform this week’s session.

- ❑ Bring *basic supply kit* (see p. 2), *Bibles*, *matches*, and if possible, *Seasons Music CD, vol. 9* and *CD player*. *Seasons .mp3 Downloads* are available for purchase from [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca).

#### Gather

- ❑ Bring *song “A World of Difference”* (pp. 2–3 in *Music Section*, also #2 on *Seasons Music CD*).
- ❑ Bring *poster “Landscape with Tree.”*

#### Engage

- ❑ Bring *copies of today’s resource sheets “Moses and Jesus” and “You’re Blessed.”*
- ❑ Bring *poster “Christ in Cookham.”*
- ❑ Bring *copies of the resource sheet “Dreamers of a Different World”* (p. 98).

#### Respond

Choose one or two options. Prepare and bring materials.

- ❑ **Picturing a dream world:** bring *poster board, art and craft materials*
- ❑ **Journal:** bring the *journals* from last week, or *notebooks* or *fancy/coloured papers*



# Vision Beautiful

**Scripture**

Matthew 5:1–12

**FOCUS** To imagine a world where relationships reflect God's dream.

## GATHER

**Welcome** the young people to the fourth Sunday after the Epiphany. Remind them that during this season we are invited to catch a vision of the realm of God. Greet visitors and invite the young people to share the significant events from the week.

**Gather** around the worship table in the worship area. Direct their attention to the poster *Landscape with Tree*. Ask:

- **If you were sitting under this tree, whom would you most like to be with you?**

Ask each person to retrieve the small box used in the previous weeks. Invite them to write a word or draw a symbol on the box that represents a treasured relationship in their lives. Place the box on the worship table.

**Sing, listen to, or read** the song “A World of Dif-

ference” (pp. 2–3 in *Music Section*, also #2 on *Seasons Music CD*). Receive the offering.

**Pray** Observe a moment of silence, then go around the group and invite each person to complete the prayer sentence, “Thank you, God, for ...” Encourage each person to name their cherished relationship. If any would prefer not to speak aloud their thanks, invite them to “pass.”

**Making connections**

Ask:

- **What is the difference between an acquaintance and a friend?**
- **In what ways do you act differently between those you know well and those you have just met?**

Remind them that relationships are important to people of all ages.

## 2 ENGAGE

**Setting the scene**

Today's focus text is commonly called “The Sermon on the Mount.” It follows the stories of Jesus' baptism, his temptation in the wilderness, and the calling of the fishers. The mountain is important to the story for a couple of reasons. First, in the Jewish faith, the mountain is the place where the community was created through the giving of the Ten Commandments. Further, Matthew wanted to make comparisons between Moses and Jesus. In today's focus text, for example, Jesus teaches from a mountain just as Moses did when he gave the law to Israel. Distribute today's resource sheet “Moses and Jesus.” Invite the young people to work in pairs. Assign each pair a set of scripture texts to compare. Allow some time to work, and then invite the pairs to report their findings to the whole group.

**Moving into the story**

Display the poster *Christ in Cookham*, distribute

today's resource sheet “You're Blessed,” and invite a volunteer to read **Matthew 5:1–12** aloud as group members look at the poster. Instruct the reader to stop on the highlighted words. During the pause, invite group members to take turns calling out the synonyms in the right column for the highlighted words.

After the reading, explain that these sayings are beatitudes. *Beatitude* is a word meaning “very great happiness.” In these sayings of Matthew 5:1–12 Jesus gives a vision of God's reign, which is a very great happiness for people of faith.

- **What is the vision of God's reign that Jesus helps us to see in these sayings?**

Matthew was writing to a community that was trying to live God's way in the midst of a hostile world. How they lived and related to one another was very different from the way of the world around them. Form pairs and ask each pair to look at two of the Beatitudes – **verses 3 and 5,**

verses 4 and 6, verses 7–9, and verses 10–12 – and prepare to share responses to these questions with the group:

- **Who is blessed in each?**
- **How is this different from those the world thinks of as blessed?**
- **How might this quality make a difference in the life of the community?**

Jesus teachings often turned worldly wisdom

upside down. In this beautiful vision, Jesus also turned upside down the world’s idea of happiness.

### Connecting scripture to life

Distribute the resource sheet “Dreamers of a Different World” (p. 98) and read about people whose lives reflected God’s vision for the world. Discuss the questions provided on the resource sheet.

# 3

RESPOND

Choose one or more of the following options.

- **Picturing a dream world** In the Beatitudes Jesus gives a vision of God’s reign. Provide poster board and art and craft supplies for young people to illustrate a “scene” from a vision of God’s reign as described by Jesus (Matthew 5:3–10). Working alone or in pairs, invite the young people to choose a different scene to illustrate. Encourage them to be creative. Their work doesn’t have to be realistic, but could be symbolic or abstract. Put the scenes together to create an illustrated “text” of the focus scripture. If possible, display the artwork for others in the congregation to see. Provide a brief explanation of the artwork.
- **Stories of God’s dream** Jesus offers us a glimpse of God’s dream for the world. Display the poster *Christ in Cookham*. Invite the young people to find a partner and focus on a character or grouping of characters

in the poster. What is their story? Create a short story or skit about the chosen characters that illustrates how they are part of God’s dream for the world. Are they “poor in spirit?” What is their story? Do they “hunger and thirst for righteousness?” What is their story? Present the stories or skits to the class. Consider presenting them for the congregation as well, perhaps in worship or some other venue.

- **Journal** Jesus’ idea of happiness turns that of the world upside down. Distribute the journals from last week, or notebooks or fancy/coloured paper to create a journal. Invite the young people to reflect on how living Jesus’ idea of happiness might change the way they live. A sentence starter might be: “I am happiest when...”



# 4

BLESS

**Gather** in the worship area and relight the candle, if it has been extinguished. Invite young people to take the word or symbol out of the small box from the Gather activity. Encourage them to name two ways the relationship they identified helps them experience God’s vision beautiful.

**Sing, listen to, or read** the song “A World of Difference” (pp. 2–3 in *Music Section*, also #2 on *Seasons Music CD*).

**Sending out** Say to the person on your left, “(Name), may God give you the courage to live the dream.” Extinguish the candle and leave together.

# REFLECT

How did the young people apply Jesus’ understanding of God’s dream for the world to themselves and their relationships? How might the young people be a part of making that dream a reality in the world?



# Moses and Jesus

Throughout the gospel, Matthew wants to show that Jesus fulfils Israel's experience. In today's focus text, for example, Jesus is shown as the new Moses, teaching from the mountain just as Moses delivered the law from the mountain. Matthew even arranges Jesus' teaching narratives in five sections, reminding readers of the "five books of Moses" (the first five books of the Hebrew scriptures, which were traditionally thought to have been written by Moses). Chapters 5 to 7 form the first of these blocks.

The Beatitudes, which are a series of sentences beginning with the word "blessed" or "happy," begin the Sermon on the Mount. Upon closer examination, however, the "blessings" of which Jesus speaks seem rather strange. They look very different from the world's idea of happiness, which Jesus turns upside down.

Read the following scriptures to find the similarities between Jesus and Moses. Write the similarities in the middle box.

<b>Moses</b>	<b>Similarities</b>	<b>Jesus</b>
Exodus 1:15–16		Matthew 2:16
Exodus 2:11–15		Matthew 2:13–15
Exodus 13:3		Matthew 2:15
Exodus 33:12–16		Matthew 3:17
Exodus 3:1		Matthew 4:1
Exodus 19:16–20:1		Matthew 5:1
Exodus 34:29–35		Matthew 17:1–8



# You're Blessed

Read Matthew 5:1–12 aloud from the text on the left. Pause at each highlighted word for another person to read the synonyms for the word from the column on the right.

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

**Blessed** \_\_\_\_\_  
are the **poor in spirit**, \_\_\_\_\_  
for theirs is the **kingdom of heaven**. \_\_\_\_\_

Happy, fortunate, golden  
those who are at the end of their rope  
perfection, shalom, humble of heart

**Blessed** \_\_\_\_\_  
are those who **mourn**, \_\_\_\_\_  
for they will **be comforted**. \_\_\_\_\_

Happy, fortunate, golden  
those who have lost what is most dear  
soothed, consoled

**Blessed** \_\_\_\_\_  
are **the meek**, \_\_\_\_\_  
for they will **inherit the earth**. \_\_\_\_\_

Happy, fortunate, golden  
gentle, lowly, vulnerable, humble  
have all they need

**Blessed** \_\_\_\_\_  
are those who hunger and thirst for **righteousness**, \_\_\_\_\_  
for they will be filled.

Happy, fortunate, golden  
right stuff, love of God and neighbour

**Blessed** \_\_\_\_\_  
are the **merciful**, \_\_\_\_\_  
for they will receive **mercy**. \_\_\_\_\_

Happy, fortunate, golden  
compassionate, tender-hearted, full of care  
compassion, tenderness, care