

**KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2026
SERMON: "LIVE AS IF LOVE IS REAL"
REV. IRENE WILLIS HASSAN
SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 5:1-12**

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5 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, **2** and he began to teach them.

He said:

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

5 Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

7 Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. **12** Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Sermon: Live As If Love Is Real

You may have noticed that I don't generally preach about what's happening in the world. First of all, if I did that, I'd have to do it every week, because there is always something happening in the world that is worth noticing.

But today felt like a good day to tackle what we might call "world problems," because the lectionary – the calendar of the church year that follows Jesus' life and ministry – gives us the Most Famous Sermon of All Time: the Beatitudes.

In this sermon, Jesus speaks words that have lived on the mouths of pastors, comforters, and revolutionaries for generations. These words have been used again and again to soothe and encourage people through whatever thing was happening at the time.

Contextually, Jesus is speaking to His own people during a period of political turbulence. Rome is threatening Jerusalem. His community is oppressed, heavily taxed, and publicly executed for even small acts of resistance. In many ways, it makes sense that people in modern contexts of political oppression and uncertainty still turn to these words for comfort, especially those who are downtrodden, weak, and mourning. The Beatitudes, which is what this sermon is traditionally called, feel like equal parts song of comfort and battle cry.

And yet, as we have talked about before, Jesus did not save His people from Rome. In fact, Rome burned Jerusalem to the ground and killed nearly the entire community shortly after Jesus died. So we have to ask the uncomfortable question. What was the point of the Beatitudes if they did not save the community from tyranny and oppression?

This is another reason I don't often address world problems in sermons. There is a lingering hope that Jesus empowers us to overthrow oppression and rescue the weak and burdened from evil systems, and the truth is that this rarely happens. Gaza is reduced to rubble, no matter how much the world shouts or protests. The Hutus all but massacred the Tutsis in Rwanda. The same pattern unfolded for the Bosnians, the Armenians, and so many others. We saw it happening in real time. We prayed. We marched. We raised our voices. And still, the worst happened.

Jesus did not save His people from the Romans. Jesus did not save the Tutsis, or the Palestinians, or the Bosnians, or Alex Pretti or Renee Goode, or anyone else who did not deserve to be killed despite whatever explanations were later offered.

So what was His point, then? Are the Beatitudes just what Karl Marx once called the “opiate of the masses,” words meant to keep suffering people calm by promising them something better later? Was Jesus simply telling people to endure their pain quietly because their reward would come in another world?

That question matters. Because sometimes Jesus talks about the Kingdom of Heaven as somewhere beyond our earthly experience, and sometimes He talks about it as something meant to take shape here. And when those two ideas collide, we are left standing in an uncomfortable in-between. We see the gap between what Jesus describes and what we actually experience, between what we hope for and what keeps happening anyway.

That feeling, the hopelessness, the despair, the awareness of how little effect we seem to have in the face of such enormous suffering, is exactly why the Beatitudes are so famous.

Jesus’ sermon names our smallness and refuses to let it be the end of the story. Jesus recognizes what it feels like to be weak, scared, and overwhelmed, and He speaks life into those places. He does not deny the darkness. He speaks directly into it. And what He asks is not that we fix everything, but that we live as if love is still real.

That is hard to do when the world feels hopeless. So what do I mean by that?

I want you to think about a moment in your life that felt too heavy to carry. A moment when the future felt closed off. My guess is that what carried you through was love. Maybe it came from family or friends. Maybe it came from a stranger who showed up at exactly the right moment, or a pet who curled up in your lap as you cried. Maybe it came through prayer, through God meeting you with a quiet and steady presence.

Living as if love is real does not mean pretending things are fine. Piles of rubble where homes once stood in Gaza do not erase the love shared between the people who lived there. Death itself does not erase love. Love endures past it. The deaths of Alex Pretti and Renee Goode did not stop people in Minnesota from caring about immigrant neighbors. If anything, those losses intensified the commitment to love more deeply and more deliberately.

Even when things feel hopeless, even when we suspect we might not win in the end, we can still choose love. The Beatitudes do not make us naïve. They make us brave in a different way. They call us to tell the truth even when it does not win. To care for the vulnerable even when the world does not. To live as if love is real, even when it costs us.

Not because it will save us from suffering, but because it reveals who God is and who we are called to be. People are made to give and receive love, even in the darkest places.

Blessed are you when you feel small.

Blessed are you when you mourn.

Blessed are you when the world is breaking your heart.

This is why I don't usually preach about what's happening in the world. Not because it doesn't matter, but because I don't believe sermons can fix it. Words alone do not stop empires. Prayers alone do not prevent violence. Even Jesus' most beautiful sermon did not save His people from Rome.

But that does not make the Beatitudes meaningless.

They tell the truth about where God is found when the world is on fire. Not with the ones who control the outcome, but with the ones who are crushed by it. Not with the victors, but with the mourners. Not with those who feel powerful, but with those who feel small.

The Beatitudes do not ask us to believe everything will turn out okay. They ask us to believe that love is still real anyway. That mercy still matters. That truth is still worth telling. That even when we cannot change the world, we can refuse to become numb to it.

So no, I don't usually preach about world events. Because I don't want to offer easy answers to unbearable questions. But when Jesus stands before a suffering people and says, "Blessed are you," He is not ignoring the pain of the world. He is naming who belongs to God in the middle of it.

And that is not nothing.

That is faith.

That is hope.

That is the courage to live as if love is still real, even here.

Amen.