

Be-attitudes of Nonviolence

April 2026



Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.
Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.
Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:3-10

Blessed Are...

Called to the Be-attitudes

We often refer to the beatitudes as **Be**-attitudes. According to our Christian tradition that concept would be right on target. The **Be**-attitudes are a direct invitation to **Be** the person that Jesus calls us to be. Quite differently from the commandments that direct us what not to do, the **Be**-attitudes invite us to what we are to be and do to be Christian people. That is all of us.

Ghandi, the father of nonviolence, read the Beatitudes daily as part of his spiritual practice. He reflected on the beatitudes as preparation and grounding for the work of nonviolence he was called to do.

We too are invited to that nonviolent way of life by **being** compassionate, understanding, and accepting- portraying love for all. As we reflect on these Beatitudes today, we are called to put them into practice in our current reality.



John Dear leads us, as do many others, to a deeper understanding of how to meet this challenging call. Not only do we understand the beatitudes in a new way we also are giving specific direction for actions- for **Be-ing**. Consider Dear's reflection from October of 2020:



[The Beatitudes: Manifesto of Nonviolence](#)

"Open your Bible to Matthew 5 and you will never be the same. Gandhi and King called those passages the grandest manifesto of nonviolence ever written—beginning with the storied Beatitudes. Grand for a number of reasons—for their poignancy and conciseness, for their sheer poetics, for their morality and practicality.

Recently, however, I learned that some scholars are rethinking the original Greek translation. The passive "Blessed are..." is not accurate, they say. Better the more active phrase: "Walk on! Walk forth!" If true, it rings a different tone, a tone of doggedness, support, encouragement. God cheers us on that we might go the distance in pursuit of justice and peace.

Walk On! Walk Forth!

Something along these lines:



Walk forth, you poor in spirit, you humble and powerless. Keep going. Don't be discouraged by your poverty. The reign of God is yours.



Walk forth, you who mourn the victims of war and hunger. Keep going. You will be consoled.



Walk forth, you meek and gentle and nonviolent. Inherit the earth and enjoy the blessing of creation.



Walk forth, you who hunger and thirst for justice. Don't give up. You will be satisfied. "Justice will roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream."



Walk forth, you merciful. Keep showing mercy in a merciless world. Forgive everyone. Be compassionate to everyone. Show mercy to everyone. Mercy will be yours.



Walk forth, you pure in heart. Keep going. Be filled with the light of peace and see Christ in the poor, in the enemy, in one another.



Walk forth, you who make peace. Keep on going. Speak against war. Organize peace vigils. Write Congress, demand the troops come home, work for nuclear disarmament. Become who you are, the sons and daughters of the God of peace.



Walk forth, you persecuted for justice. Keep going. Don't give up. You stand on the shoulders of Dr. King, Dorothy Day and Mahatma Gandhi. Your reward will be great.

The beatitudes are "grand, too, for a subtle reason—for the furtive critique that lay behind them. Namely, every culture of war, such as Jesus lived and died in, fuels itself by an antithetical set of maxims. One might name them—'anti-beatitudes.'

They are easily reconstructed, because, alas, they're all too familiar. We've been tutored in them all our lives; they hang in the air, live in our very bones. This false spirituality of violence, injustice and war is what Jesus spoke out against:

"Blessed are the rich, the reign of this world is ours." Empirically the rich rule the world, and the rest suffer and die, often in misery. But Jesus counters with the real truth. Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who have nothing—no power, no prestige, no possessions, no

success. They receive the first and greatest blessing—entrance into God's reign. The rich lay claim to all things, except that. Thus Jesus calls us to live in friendship with the poor, to let go of power and domination, to embrace our own powerlessness. Which is to say, share our lives with the poor, practice downward mobility, and they'll share with us the reign of God.

The warmonger's chief tenet: "Blessed are those who make others mourn." Those who kill, who support war, who pay taxes for killing, who build nuclear weapons, who execute people—blessed are they, the warmongers insist. More, blessed are you if you never mourn. But Jesus sets this anti-beatitude right. He says, blessed are the billions who mourn their loved ones lost to starvation, injustice, relievable disease, and war—from Hiroshima and Vietnam to El Salvador and Iraq. God's consolation will flow to them. As for us, mourning leads to peacemaking. As we mourn with those who mourn, we receive God's consolation. Otherwise, no comfort will be ours.

And the motto of every warlike culture: "Blessed are the violent and the invincible, the proud and the powerful, the domineering and oppressive. But Jesus says the meek are blessed—the gentle, the humble, the nonviolent. The violent inherit nothing but blood and destruction. The meek, they inherit the earth. Pursuing nonviolence wins the blessing of creation itself. As St. Francis discovered, creation and nonviolence are inextricably linked.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for injustice." The siren song of the System. The System sustains itself by all manner of injustice and lawlessness and greed. But Jesus offers a contrary word. Desire for unjust gain shall forever thwart fulfillment. The unjust will never be satisfied. But those who are passionate for justice, they'll find satisfaction, true meaning. They'll take part in God's very purpose—the transformation of disarmament and global peace.

"Blessed are those who show no mercy." So the culture summons us. No mercy to the poor, to women and children, the elderly and the homeless, victims, outcasts, enemies, refugees, the hungry, the undocumented, the unborn, those on death row, those who are different, those we don't like. But the culture keeps the spiritual consequence close to its vest: The merciless will be shown no mercy. On the other hand, says Jesus: God's mercy comes to the merciful.

"Blessed are the impure of heart." The warlike culture tells us that it does not matter if we are filled with darkness and confusion and violence. But such darkness, says Jesus, shades our view of God. It obscures our recognition of Christ in the poor, in the enemy, in one another. Rather

"Blessed are the pure in heart"—those with disarmed hearts, nonviolent hearts, hearts of universal love. To attain such wholehearted love, we must practice contemplative prayer, turn our violence over to God and receive in return God's gift of peace. Thus illumined by the light of God, we'll see God in the poor, in the struggle for justice, in the bread and the cup, in creation, in the poor, in the enemy. The pure in heart will see God. The beatific vision will begin here and now.

"Blessed are the warmakers." Thus say the warmongers. No, says Jesus. "Blessed are the peacemakers"—those who help end war and the conditions for war, who create peace. They are sons and daughters of the living God. Peace is God's purpose for humanity. God is a God of peace. Since we are God's children, we make peace, too. The warlike culture tries to name us its patriots, warriors, "good" Americans. It wants to tell us who we are. But Jesus tells us the truth: we are the beloved sons and daughters of the God of peace. That means, like Jesus, we act according to the God of peace, practice nonviolence, resist war, demand that the troops come home from Iraq, and try to live and breathe the holy Spirit of peace.

"Blessed are those who never stand up for justice, who do not rock the boat." The silent, the indifferent, the comfortable, those who keep their distance. Blessed are you—you've made it! You'll ruffle no feathers and invite no trouble—but neither will you possess the reign of God. The reign of God belongs to those "persecuted for the sake of justice." In a world where war and nuclear weapons run wild, peacemakers get no thanks, no honors. They're harassed, threatened, put under surveillance, arrested, jailed, even killed. But Jesus says, this is your opportunity to practice nonviolence, to meet hatred with love—just like the prophets and saints.

So Jesus declares: "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me. Rejoice and be glad for your reward will be great in heaven." Do we draw heat for our work against poverty, the death penalty, nuclear weapons. the war on Iraq? Take heart—rejoice and be glad. We're on the right path. We are joining the ranks of Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. King, Dorothy Day, Archbishop Romero, and Sister Ita Ford.

The Beatitudes of Peace, uttered contrary to the anti-beatitudes of war that pulse through the veins of our culture. If we follow these guideposts, hear this encouragement, we learn, the Gospel teaches, that the God of peace is alive and at work among us—giving us God's reign, God's consolation, God's creation, God's satisfaction, God's mercy, God's face, God's calling us her daughters and sons, and God's best reward.

In other words, take heart. God is leading us along the path of nonviolence into the fullness of life, a life of peace. There really is good news after all" (John Dear, October 2020).

Thank you, John Dear for your prophetic words! Our challenge is to **Be** the **Be**atitudes.

Which "be-attitude" calls you to reflection and action?

How will you "walk on, walk forth" moving your feet?

