Blessed Before We Give

Psalm 34:1–10, 22; Matthew 5:1–12

Today, about thirty names will be read aloud. In a community like ours, a name can bring back a voice, a laugh, or an empty place at the table. Some names are close to many of us; others to only a few. We speak each name with love and entrust each life to God.

Matthew tells us that Jesus sees the crowds. He goes up the mountain and sits down. His disciples come near, and he begins to teach: "Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness."

Those words meet this room today. Jesus does not call grief holy or ask us to hurry through it. He promises that those who mourn will be comforted. Their grief does not place them outside God's kingdom.

The first Beatitude ends, "theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The last one does too. That final blessing is for people persecuted because they seek righteousness. Jesus is not promising that faithful people avoid pain. He is declaring that even those the world rejects belong to God's future.

Between those two promises, Jesus names mercy, peacemaking, and a hunger for life to be set right. The poor in spirit know their need before God; the hungry for righteousness long for more than private comfort. Jesus is describing a different way to see the world—and a people learning to live by God's promise.

Psalm 34 gives us words for that trust. The psalmist sought God and was answered; the afflicted cried out and were heard. The reading ends, "The Lord redeems the life of his servants." It makes room for distress and trust in the same breath. We can miss the people whose names we speak and still entrust them to the God who hears and redeems.

We speak their names because they are loved. We give thanks for the lives we shared and entrust them to God.

Our stewardship begins with what the living have received. We are blessed before we give; our gifts respond to the grace we have received. Valley's worship, music, pastoral care, and mission are part of the life we tend together. Financial gifts help keep that life open—to people who need care, to those seeking a place to belong, and to neighbors our mission reaches. Each household responds according to its circumstances. Giving is a way to share in the life God has given us; it does not measure anyone's worth or place in the church.

At Communion, bread is placed in our hands. We receive it before we can pass it on. The Psalm's invitation to taste God's goodness finds an echo at Christ's table. We come carrying joy and grief, and Christ meets us there.

Then we return to the ordinary week. If someone speaks of a loss on Tuesday, we can stay and listen. We do not need a perfect answer. We can help someone know they do not have to face it alone.

The kingdom is theirs, Jesus says. And in Christ, God holds both the people we name and the people who miss them.

Amen.