

Late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a Jewish American woman,  
the fourth of seven children,  
entered her poem into an auction.<sup>1</sup>  
The poem went like this:

*Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,  
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;  
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand  
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame  
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name  
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand  
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command  
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.  
"Keep ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she  
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"<sup>2</sup>*



Of course now you probably recognize  
this as the poem, New Colossus,  
whose lines are embedded  
on a plaque at the base  
of the Statue of Liberty.

Emma Lazarus wrote the poem  
for an auction that was raising funds

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emma\\_Lazarus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emma_Lazarus)

<sup>2</sup> Emma Lazarus, The New Colossus <https://www.nps.gov/stli/learn/historyculture/colossus.htm>

to build the statue's pedestal in 1883.<sup>3</sup>  
In late 19<sup>th</sup> century into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
the United States experienced  
a major wave of immigration  
as this country became more industrialized and urban.  
Most people during that time,  
came to this country in hopes  
of better living conditions  
and more economic opportunity.  
At the time of Lazarus's poem,  
many of those immigrants came from European countries.<sup>4</sup>

But we're not actually  
here to talk about immigration.  
Immigration is just a policy,  
it's a term.  
It is just a symptom of a larger disease.

And it turns out  
that Jesus didn't say anything  
about immigration reform  
or about immigration laws.

Which can be frustrating for us,  
who are hoping to be able  
to use scripture on our side;  
whatever side that might be.  
we are hoping he might have said something...  
but in actuality Jesus  
did not address every topic,  
that comes up in life.



However, Jesus did say something  
about the poor, the homeless,

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<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emma\\_Lazarus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emma_Lazarus)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.history.com/topics/u-s-immigration-before-1965>

the tempest-tost, the wretched refuse,  
the huddled masses yearning to be free  
...Jesus actually had a lot to say about them  
as one of them.

Matthew's gospel tells us  
that news of Jesus's ministry  
was spreading, rapidly.  
As he went through Galilee,  
he taught in their synagogues  
proclaiming the good news of the kingdom.  
Which of course meant  
the direct opposite of whatever news  
the Roman kingdom might be proclaiming.

What do you think the good news was  
for 1<sup>st</sup> century Jews?  
Certainly they may have been hoping  
Jesus would promise  
to overthrow the wretched, corrupt,  
Roman government  
removing its oppressive yolk forever.

What was the good news  
for these mostly uneducated,  
backwater poor people?

Was it a promise of education  
and opportunity for their children?  
Was it a promise for jobs and fair wages?  
Was it the thought of better security and well protected borders?

As Matthew tells his story, (Matt. 4:23-25)  
"Jesus went throughout Galilee,  
teaching in their synagogues  
and proclaiming the good news  
of the kingdom and curing every disease  
and every sickness among the people.

So his fame spread throughout Syria,  
and they brought to him all the sick,  
those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains,  
demoniacs, epileptics,  
and paralytics, and he cured them.”



Jesus certainly wasn't preaching  
a good news to the poor and the captives that said,  
*good things come to those who wait.*  
Jesus wasn't proclaiming a good news that said,  
*you just need to pull yourselves up by your bootstraps.*  
Jesus didn't make the anyone in the crowd  
take a drug test before he cured  
their diseases and sickness.

His proclamation of good news  
was such that their poor lives,  
right then and right there were affected.  
Their lives, right then and there  
were freed, healed, made whole.  
They were living proof a very near kingdom.

As Whit said last week,  
Jesus's sermon on the mount  
(and we might argue his whole life's message)  
turned things upside down—  
at least upside according to most  
kingdoms, empires, nations;  
which meant right-side-up  
according to God's kingdom.  
Christ wasn't just proclaiming good news,  
he was good news.

He is the message and messenger all in one.  
How's that for upside down?

His proclamation;

*I am here to offer you release from all captivity;  
to comfort all of you who mourn  
bringing you signs of life  
when you feel like ashes and death;  
to bring healing to all that seeks to destroy you,  
heart, mind and soul;*

that message of good news  
was his incarnation among us as one of us.

And then with the crowds on his heels  
Christ goes up on a mountain,  
just like Moses did those many years ago  
and something divine happens.

(Matt. 5:1-3)

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."



In the Hebrew Scriptures,  
the divine thing that happens,  
was the Lord giving Moses the law.

A law that was to be written  
on the people's heart;  
a law which gave this small nation  
an identity and a purpose.

Israel's mandate from God?  
*You are to be a nation of people  
who reveal my glory and love  
to the world.*

You will do this by welcoming  
the stranger and the outcast,  
*the forgotten into your midst.*  
You will make sure  
that when you harvest your crops  
you leave some for the widow and the orphan,  
*the homeless and poor.*

You will bring me glory  
by honoring the land,  
recognizing it as your partner  
in this continuing creation.

This sort of code for life was radical.  
What sort of God would have  
wishes and desires like this?  
Aren't the gods capricious and fickle?  
Don't they demand our sweat and toil?  
*What are human beings  
that you are even mindful of them Lord?*  
Yet, that is exactly what Christ  
is showing about God;  
that the Lord **is** mindful of creation and creatures.

So when Jesus climbs the mountain,  
maybe the disciples are expecting  
a similar divine moment.  
Maybe they are wondering  
what new sort of law  
will get written on their hearts.

Can you imagine the shock,  
the bewilderment the disciples  
and the crowds would have had  
when Jesus preached,  
*blessed are the poor in spirit*

*for theirs is the kingdom of heaven?*

Full stop.

You will bring glory to God,  
you who are poor and seen as filthy,  
you who are uneducated and downtrodden,  
you who are 'oppressed so hard they could not stand,'  
you are blessed—  
you are the ones who will show the world  
God's glory and love.  
It seems so backwards  
and so counterintuitive.  
How do people who seem forgotten,  
unprepared and unworthy,  
how are they ushering in the kingdom of God?

Anthropologist and physician Dr. Paul Farmer says,  
*"The idea that some lives matter less  
is the root of all that is wrong with the world."*

**Which means if that is what is written on your heart, it is evil.**

At the end of this past week  
the president made remarks  
about other countries  
using a particularly vulgar term  
to talk about those countries  
that quite frankly are known to be  
poor.

Countries where political  
manipulation and corruption  
mean the rich get richer  
and the poor get poorer.  
Countries where there are so many civil wars  
and drug lords they don't even make our news feeds.

Countries that surely understand  
the far-reaching effects  
of globalization and imperialism,

things that leave a stench  
and stain not easily removed.

Countries, that oddly enough  
would have looked just like  
a small, back-water, poor village  
in the near east, called Nazareth.

Archeologist say that Nazareth was a place  
where garbage and excrement were dumped<sup>5</sup>  
—leading Nathaniel in John’s gospel,  
to sound an awful lot like the President asking,  
“Can anything good come Nazareth?”

**This is worth repeating,  
“The idea that some lives matter less  
is the root of all that is wrong with the world.”  
Which means if that is what is written on your heart, it is evil.**



*Blessed are the poor in spirit  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven...*  
says a man from a---you know what country.  
It still sounds so backwards  
and counterintuitive.  
It still rings in our ears,  
messes with our minds,  
and bangs on the doors of our hearts.  
For the savior of the world came from  
a poor garbage dump;  
the anointed one  
who sets us free and heals our sickness;

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<sup>5</sup> Fr. James Martin <https://www.facebook.com/FrJamesMartin/>

that messiah was raised in the slums  
and saw the poverty of his own people.

He claims *blessed are the poor*,  
because he is one well acquainted  
with poverty and all its sickening symptoms.  
Christ says that when you help the least  
it is like you have helped him,  
because he is among the poor,  
he is the poor.

Christ came as one of us,  
and more like the ones of us who are  
poor, poor in spirit, just plain ole poor.

And if the kingdom reaches its fulfillment in Christ,  
then most certainly  
blessed are the poor in spirit  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

We who are rich ought to take note.  
Could it be that we are missing something crucial?  
What is the law written on our hearts?  
Is the law that we find there lacking tremendously?  
Is it a law written first and foremost  
with the love for the poor?

Maybe when Jesus says,  
*you will have the poor with you always*,  
it is a promise that he too will be with us always,  
urging us in particular, we who are rich,  
using the voices of the poor,  
their hands, their rags and their oppression,  
their misfortune to say something  
about the reign of God to us.

Crying out to us as they  
climb on boats to cross raging seas;  
crying out to us  
as they eat free and reduced lunches

in our school cafeterias;  
crying out to us as they brave  
walking across miles of sweltering deserts;  
crying out to us as they use food stamps  
in front of us at Wal-Mart;  
crying out as they buy  
our donated clothes at Goodwill  
and go to the ER because they don't have  
any insurance.

We will have the poor with us always  
and perhaps that is how we, who are too rich;  
too rich sometimes notice,  
too rich to sometimes take care,  
too rich in the wrong things  
—it is in the poor where we will meet our Savior.

The one who is anointed to proclaim  
even to us that we will be set free  
from our captivity to money  
and false security  
and things.

Because we want to be called blessed too.



This divine thing that happened  
on that mountain top when Jesus said,  
*blessed are you who poor in spirit,*  
*for yours is the kingdom of heaven;*  
Christ, I trust, is willing to rewrite the law  
on our hearts even now.

Rewrite it so that we might not think

too highly of ourselves.  
    Rewrite it so that we might  
        see ourselves bound to the poor  
            as brothers and sisters.

Rewrite the law in our hearts so  
    that we would truly be open to receive,  
        *your tired, your poor,*  
        *Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,*  
            *The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.*  
        *Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost*  
        to **us.**

Because in sending these people into our well-adjusted lives,  
    Lord you seem to be sending yourself.  
    We often pray, Come Lord Jesus,  
    now give us the radical, counterintuitive  
        rewritten hearts to let you in.