



- [Micah 6:1-8](#); [1 Corinthians 1:18-31](#); [Matthew 5:1-12](#); [Psalm 15](#)
-

Message by the Rev. Michael Burke

Jesus and the Streets of Minneapolis

First, an apology. This will likely be a bit long. Not long enough to Door Dash in a pizza, (and don't order a pizza delivered unless you are going to get enough for everybody) but a lot has happened in the world and a lot probably needs to be said. Out loud and up in church by someone wearing a white dress-thingy. And if your PTSD is giving you a run-for-the-money this week, you might want to go get a cup of coffee or donut instead.

Fair enough?

So... I have a practice. A discipline, if you will. Because my weeks are pretty full. Sunday through Thursdays, on Friday or Saturday, my Sabbath day, I often observe an electronics fast. That is, I shut off my phone, laptop, the TV, and all the associated background noise. Instead I do laundry. I water my plants, I take a walk. I have a fire in the fireplace or read a book. I putter around the house. Endless cleaning my garage, the house project that never ends. I listen to a lot of music. Anything so that I might create time and space to again hear that small still voice of the Spirit in this world.

But this past Saturday, January 24th was different. I had been in communication with friends and fellow clergy who were on the streets of Minneapolis, and I had gone to bed with a prayer on my heart for God's presence with them.

So, when I awoke, I rolled over and picked up my phone from my bedside, and pulled up the Facebook page of my friend, the Rev. Mike Kinman. Mike is the former rector of All Saints Episcopal Church in Pasadena, he was Provost of Christ Church Cathedral in St. Louis, none of which really matters.

And Mike was there in Minneapolis, livestreaming. And I lay there in bed, covers pulled up, the sky dark outside my windows, my cats snuggled up against my back, Mike was just walking around, saying hello to people, filming the scene., checking on folks who looked like they might have been out in the cold a little too long, because the temperatures were frigid. It seemed like everyone in the neighborhood had come out to support one another.

And then, I watched as Mike, and the neighbors, got tear gassed, not once, but twice. There was no warning, no order to disperse was heard. I watched a store keeper, a restaurant or café owner actually, venture out into the sidewalk to get him, leading Mike inside her establishment, washing out his eyes and mouth with water. I watched as an E.R. nurse triaged people coming through the door, helping those who had been assaulted with chemical irritants.

And then, just ten minutes later, I watched as an armed paramilitary officers of Homeland Security pushed a woman to the ground. I saw a young man reach to help up, and to place his body between hers and the officer's, and to get pepper sprayed himself. And I watched as he was himself pulled to the ground. And then, I watched as officer after officer piled on, striking his head, and then shooting him. In the street of Minneapolis, USA, not thirty feet away, in front of his neighbors. Ten shots, maybe more. Bang bang bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang.. .

And I looked at his still, lifeless body, as the officers scrambled away.

And I was still in bed. With the covers pulled up around me. With the cats lying close to the small of my back. With it still dark and still outside my window. And I had just watched a man die at the hands of his government. I thought of May 4, 1970 and four students shot by National Guardsmen on the campus of Kent State University. Four dead in Ohio.

And I looked at the clock. I had been awake for 22 minutes.

That's how MY week started.

And I lay there in bed, I had a thought. Within three days, I thought, they will have created a narrative about this man, who name I will learn is Alex Pretti. And they will dig

through everything he has ever done to paint a narrative that attempts to thoroughly discredit him, to blame him and his actions for his own death, and to excuse, “explain” the actions of the officers, and to make it clear that this man, Alex Pretti, was “not like me,” and that I should simply be sad that “an unfortunate and regrettable incident has occurred.”

And then, right on the heels of that thought, I said to myself, “Michael, you have been at this too long. You are getting cynical in your old age. How did you, a son of a U.S. Navy veteran and American Legion Post Commander, a “law and order guy” raised on John Wayne movies and old Westerns, come to such levels of distrust of your own government? Shame on you.”

And I felt a little guilty. And I reminded myself not to jump to unwarranted conclusions.

Well, friends, it’s been eight days. And I was wrong. It did **not** take the United States government three days to malign Alex Pretti.

It took three hours, Three hours to declare him guilty of his own death, and the Federal officers unnamed but not responsible were just doing their jobs.

It took three hours to see for myself, yet once again, what our black and brown siblings have been telling us consistently for a long long long time. The 1991 Rodney King beatings shook the nation because, for the first time, or so it seemed, there was video, and we could see for ourselves.

George Floyd. Tyre Nichols. Laquan McDonald. Jason Harley Kloefer, the list goes on and on and on. We have some repenting and changing to do, “Christian” America. And now, we see for ourselves, with our own eyes, the shooting of Renee Good and Alex Pretti, and we can judge for ourselves. But powerful are the unconscious forces that push us back into believing the false narratives of the past – that these people are *different from us*, deserve this and they brought it upon themselves.

But nine, not two, nine people have died either at the hands of ICE or in ICE custody in the last four weeks. And last night, the news broke about Alberto Castaneda Mondragon who suffered eight skull fractures when ICE says he “purposefully ran headfirst into a brick wall.” The Associated Press quotes medical staff at the Hennepin County Medical Center

as saying “There was no way this person ran headfirst into a wall. “¹ He had fractures and contusions on all four sides of his head.

Friends, there are 73,000 people, according to Homeland Security data, who are being “detained” in correction facilities and camps, right now, a number of them children. I just can’t get the image out of my head of 5 year old Lima Conejo Ramos, with his blue bunny hat and his spiderman backpack. And Liam and his father were here legally, working while his asylum claim was working through the courts.

A government that cannot enforce the law without killing its own citizens, terrorizing neighborhoods, traumatizing children, and abandoning constitutional limits has lost sight of what we call ‘the will of the people,’ “the consent of the governed,” and its most basic obligations and core of humanity. Is this the best America can do?

And our culture would have us all divide off into our respective camps, and cheer for one side or the other like they were sports teams. Red jerseys vs blue. Or maybe hats. I don’t know.

It’s what I call the “little lie.” It’s a deadly lie, spiritually and physically,.

But it’s a reflection and sliver of the BIG LIE. The Big Lie looks at Jesus on the cross and says, If he was really the son of God, he should have sent angels to come save him.” “He would have been fine if he just minded his own business and obeyed the law.” “ You know just last week he rioted in the temple, overturning tables. He made himself a target.” Terrorist.”

The late theologian Walter Wink said that in the crucifixion, Jesus unmasked the Powers. He showed them for what they are. But how deeply we want to return to the comfort and familiarity and maybe even the social respectability of The Big Lie.

“Might makes right” “First comes Public Safety; second comes the Nation²”

Canadian Bruce Cockburn sang: “It will all go back to normal if we put our nation first”
“But the Trouble with Normal is it always get worse.”

¹ Associated Press reports, January 31, 2026.

² The Clash, “Midnight Log”

Violence begets violence, in an unending spiral to destruction. Capitulation to tyranny only brings more of the same. Power and violence is never satiated. It always wants just a little bit more of our lives and our souls.

And when the public institutions, and the Church, lose their public voice and witness in the name of an anemic and pacifying “neutrality,” or a call for a “false peace” with oppression, where then should our hope lie?

Let’s go to the Scriptures.

All across the nation this weekend, churches who follow the Revised Common Lectionary, that three year pattern and schedule of specific scripture readings appointed for each day, are all hearing the same Bible passages as we are today. Micah Chapter 6, 1st Corinthians 1, and Matthew Chapter 5. Somewhere out there in America, some young pastor is vainly trying to explain to some angry parishioner that she didn’t just “choose” these “Woke” passages for her sermon today.

In the Micah passage, the setting is a courtroom scene in a longer piece where God has challenged the nation of ancient Israel to defend their systemic injustices and lack of care for the stranger and the vulnerable. They are practicing a highly transactional faith, and point to offerings and wealth and praise and even their own first born children. But God is having none of it. Rather, says the character of God, I simply want justice, I want kindness, and I want to see some humility in walking with me.

Wow! Imagine a world in which justice, kindness, and a humble walk with God were the benchmarks or standards. How would some of our political or religious systems today measure up to that?

God, throughout the passage, continually calls the People back to remembering who they are. Forgiven, redeemed, brought out of slavery and oppression themselves, that they might re-imagine what faithfulness requires.

Frederick Douglass used to preach that we have to remember the past, that it might inform both our present and our future. Cesar Chavez would weave images from the Book of Micah and God’s call, in many of his best speeches on behalf of the immigrant, the poor, and the working people.

In Corinthians, Paul contrasts the conventional wisdom of this world with the power of sacrificial love. For many, in Paul's time as well as here and now, the ways of God are naïve, weak, and more than useless. "Foolishness," says Paul.

But to those who are being saved, says Paul, the symbol and mystery of the cross is God's power. God's choice of the lowly, despised, and weak is to shame those who excel in the accumulation and use of domination. The cross is the definitive Christian rejection of a certain kind of power-over, the power of coercion and domination, that is widely valued and sought after in this world.

And, I might add, is fully on display all around us today.

All this provides the setting for what we often call "The sermon on the Mount." It is Jesus's big take-down of the way the world operates, and a vision of an alternative way of being human. Taken as a whole, it proclaims that God's favor is not aligned with power and strength or control as exercised in our culture, but that "Blessing" is with those who are NOT exercising domination over others. It lies with those who know their need, who are able to recognize their own vulnerability, who feel the pain of injustice, who refuse the seductive allure of violence and coercion. "Hunger for righteousness" is another way of saying "longing for justice,"

Its language echoes that of Psalm 37:

The wicked have drawn the sword and bent the bow
to bring down the poor and needy,
to slay those whose ways are upright.
But their swords will pierce their own hearts,
and their bows will be broken.

“

Blessed are.. Blessed are... All that Jesus says seems so different than all that we think we know.

Jesus reveals a new kind of power, for a new way of being human: Power as inner transformation leading to societal change. Power as poetic and creative nonviolent resistance, power as Hope among the hopeless. mutual care, serving, healing, lifting up and protecting the vulnerable, and transforming the world by transforming hearts **and**

systems. Meekness is understood as strength and change without violence. “Swords into plowshares”, the ancient prophets and poets say. Power grounded not in fear and division, but in a return to wholeness grounded in Love and *hesed*, *Hesed*, from the Hebrew can be understood as loving kindness, steadfast love, or mercy.

And when the prophets , and Jesus, speak of Love, they aren’t speaking largely about sentimentality and “niceness”. The Love of God is socially disruptive, and inherently “political.” The Roman Empire didn’t crucify people for vague sentimentalities and flowery hearts and prayers.

Transformation. At the core. Personally? Or collectively, as a society? Yes. Both. Personally and collectively, the two are inextricably linked in the Gospels.

We’ve been talking about this for several weeks now as we worked through passages in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, even back to Christmas Eve.

(By the way, on the counter in the narthex or “gathering area” are hard paper copies of past sermons, if you feel a need to catch up on the conversation.)

The sermon on the Mount is a revolution of values, an up-ending of our usual patterns of seeing and acting. It is dangerous stuff. It is Incendiary. The simple demands of the Gospel will take your well-ordered, comfortable, self-centered life and blow it up. That’s why history records two thousand years of both church and government trying to spiritualize it, or to domesticate, defang, or defuse it.

Jason Isbell sang “ You thought God was an architect, now you know. He’s something like a pipe bomb, ready to blow. And everything you built, its all for show, goes up in flames. In 24 frames.”

Blessed are... Jesus says. There’s that word... blessed. The English word “blessed” is at best a problematic translation. In Greek, it is “Makarios.” We really do not have a good English equivalent. A state of flourishing, deep sense of well-being, in harmony with God. One translation I have seen is rendered “God walks alongside and is close to... ... those who are poor in spirit. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, or justice.

God walks alongside and is close to... Emmanuel. Literally, in English, “God with us.” “God for us.”

Mary's song, the Magnificat, To lift up the lowly and cast down the powerful. Is this making any sense? It's all connected in Scripture. Hear the Gospel, people of God.

Over the next several weeks, we are going to roll out some practical ideas about how you can remain grounded and resilient and hopeful in Days Like These. We will talk about some ways that you who are not likely targets of deportation can walk alongside and support those families who are. Ways that you , me, us, can begin to be changed. And to change the world. Put **Sunday, February 15th from 1-3 pm** (2 weeks from today) on your calendars. We are still in the early planning stages. E-mail me if you want to help with that.

Following Jesus is not complicated. It's just... hard, sometimes...

So how did the Holy Scriptures become the song book for the Empire? That's probably left for another day.

Its late,. I've yammered on far too long. Thank you for your patience.

But here is where we are headed: All this... all this...walking in the Way of Jesus, is learned. It is practiced... It is made visible and real... It is incarnated. In Community. In the Body of Christ. You and I, in a Christ-centered community. Every week.

"Take and eat. Do this in remembrance of Me.

The blood of Christ, shed for thee. Christ's Body. Broken. For us.

Without community, we are cut off. We have a tendency to become isolated, and easy prey for the temptations of despair, of loneliness, of discouragement, of an overwhelming rage that can metastasize either outward in hostility or inward in depression. And community doesn't need to be perfect. In my experience, I have always grown more in imperfect community, but one whose heart is in the right place and where we feel fed.

Do you want to make a difference in Days Like These?

Do you want to stay sane in Days Like These?

Start with re-committing to an authentic community of shared values. Show up, even on those days you might not feel like it, because somebody else needs you here. Walk in the door, and live out those values. Who needs encouragement? Who needs support? And

walk out those doors strengthened, a tiny bit more grounded and resilient. And do the same.

Today, right after service we have our annual congregational meeting. Come join us.

Build the kind of community you can give your heart to and really believe in.

In the memory of Renee Good, In the memory of Alex Pretti. Of Keith Porter. Heber Sanchez Dominguez, victor Manuel Diaz, Paray La, Luis Beltran Yanez-Cruz, Luis Caceras, Geraldo Lunas Campos...

In the memory of the names we have never been taught to remember.

In the memory of the One who said, Do this in remembrance of ME.

The barefoot rabbi from Gailee, and in the company of all of his long haired, funky bunch of friends. .

Oh, Sermon's over. Here comes the pizza guy! Amen.

Scriptures Appointed for this Day - Fourth Sunday of Epiphany Annual Meeting Sunday Feb 1, 2026

The Collect

Almighty and everlasting God, you govern all things both in heaven and on earth: Mercifully hear the supplications of your people, and in our time grant us your peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Old Testament - Micah 6:1-8

Hear what the Lord says:

Rise, plead your case before the mountains,
and let the hills hear your voice.

Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the Lord,
and you enduring foundations of the earth;

for the Lord has a controversy with his people,
and he will contend with Israel.

10

"O my people, what have I done to you?
In what have I wearied you? Answer me!

For I brought you up from the land of Egypt,
and redeemed you from the house of slavery;

and I sent before you Moses,
Aaron, and Miriam.

O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised,
what Balaam son of Beor answered him,

and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal,
that you may know the saving acts of the Lord."

"With what shall I come before the Lord,
and bow myself before God on high?

Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings,
with calves a year old?

Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
with tens of thousands of rivers of oil?

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you

but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

The Psalm - Psalm 15

1 Lord, who may dwell in your tabernacle? *
who may abide upon your holy hill?

2 Whoever leads a blameless life and does what is right, *
who speaks the truth from his heart.

3 There is no guile upon his tongue;
he does no evil to his friend; *
he does not heap contempt upon his neighbor.

4 In his sight the wicked is rejected, *
but he honors those who fear the Lord.

5 He has sworn to do no wrong *
and does not take back his word.

6 He does not give his money in hope of gain, *
nor does he take a bribe against the innocent.

7 Whoever does these things *
shall never be overthrown.

The Epistle - 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

The Gospel - Matthew 5:1-12

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.

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

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

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

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

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

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

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

The Widow, the Orphan, and the Stranger

- Psalm 10:14 (helper of the fatherless) & 68:5, (defender of widows)
- Exodus 22:21-24 = Commands to the people of God to
 - Not mistreat or oppress strangers
 - Not take advantage of a widow or an orphan
- Leviticus 19:34 & 25:35
 - Treat the stranger as you would the 'local'
 - Help the 'locals' as you would a stranger
- Deuteronomy 10:18
 - God defends the cause of the fatherless, widow and orphan. We are to love the strangers and fear the Lord.
- Deuteronomy 14:28-29
 - Strangers, fatherless, widows and Levites are grouped together so that they all may glean. When THEY glean, we are blessed. The Levites had no allotment or inheritance of their own.
- Deuteronomy 15:7-11
 - "Do not be hard-hearted or tightfisted. Do not harbor this wicked thought
 - God listens carefully to these people: "he may appeal to the Lord...
 - There will always be poor in the land, Therefore.... I command you to be open-handed.
- Deuteronomy 24:17-18
 - Do not deprive the alien (stranger), or the fatherless of justice
 - Do not take the cloak of the widow as a pledge
 - Remember: You were once in this situation!!! That is why God commands this!

- Deuteronomy 26:12
 - The 'set-aside' was for the Levite, the alien, the fatherless and the widow so that they may eat.
- Deuteronomy 27:19
 - There is a curse upon the person who WITHHOLDS justice from the alien, fatherless or widows
- Deuteronomy 31:12
 - Include the alien (stranger) in your gatherings (assemblies) SO THAT they can fear the Lord and follow carefully all the word of this law.
- Proverbs 15:25
 - The Lord tears down the proud man's house but he keeps the widow's boundaries intact
- Proverbs 23:10
 - God seems to be very concerned about the boundaries of the fatherless. "Their defender is strong and he will take up their case against the one who encroaches on their fields

Other scriptures to consider:

Isaiah 1:17,

James 1:27,

Job 29:12-17

Jeremiah 7:6-7 & 49:11

Matthew 25:31-46

Playlist

The Trouble With Normal (Bruce Cockburn)

Strikes across the frontier and strikes for higher wage
 Planet lurches to the right as ideologies engage
 Suddenly it's repression, moratorium on rights
 What did they think the politics of panic would invite?
 Person in the street shrugs—"Security comes first"

[Refrain]

But the trouble with normal is it always gets worse
 The trouble with normal is it always gets worse

Callous men in business costume speak computerese
 Play pinball with the third world trying to keep it on its knees
 Their single crop starvation plans put sugar in your tea³
 And the local third world's kept on reservations you don't see
 "It'll all go back to normal if we put our nation first"

But the trouble with normal is it always gets worse
 The trouble with normal is it always gets worse

Fashionable fascism dominates the scene
 When the ends don't meet it's easier to justify the means
 Tenants get the dregs and the landlords get the cream
 As the grinding devolution of the democratic dream
 Brings us men in gas masks dancing while the shells burst

But the trouble with normal is it always gets worse
 The trouble with normal is it always gets worse
 The trouble with normal is it always gets worse
 The trouble with normal is it always gets worse.

3

Developed nations often push poorer nations to replace subsistence agriculture (growing their own food) with the production of cash crops (such as sugar, coffee, or bananas) to sell into the global market. However, a crop failure due to [monocropping](#), or a drop in the global price of the cash crop, can lead to starvation because they have no money to buy imported food but the traditional farmlands can no longer be used to grow their own food for the farmers' community to eat. In good times cash cropping can produce more wealth while in bad times it can cause starvation, but in either case it creates an affordable source of cash crops for rich nations to import ("put sugar in your tea").

STREETS OF MINNEAPOLIS (Bruce Springsteen)

Released the week of January 26th, 2026.

Through the winter's ice and cold, down Nicollet Avenue
A city aflame fought fire and ice 'neath an occupier's boots
King Trump's private army from the DHS, guns belted to their coats
Came to Minneapolis to enforce the law or so their story goes

Against smoke and rubber bullets, in the dawn's early light
Citizens stood for justice, their voices ringing through the night
And there were bloody footprints where mercy should have stood
And two dead left to die on snow-filled streets, Alex Pretti and Renee Good

Oh our Minneapolis, I hear your voice singing through the bloody mist
We'll take our stand for this land and the stranger in our midst
Here in our home they killed and roamed in the winter of '26
We'll remember the names of those who died on the streets of Minneapolis

Trump's federal thugs beat up on his face and his chest
Then we heard the gunshots and Alex Pretti lay in the snow dead
Their claim was self-defense, sir, just don't believe your eyes
It's our blood and bones and these whistles and phones against Miller and Noem's dirty lies

Oh our Minneapolis, I hear your voice crying through the bloody mist
We'll remember the names of those who died on the streets of Minneapolis

Now they say they're here to uphold the law but they trample on our rights
If your skin is black or brown my friend you can be questioned or deported on sight
In our chants of "ICE out now!" our city's heart and soul persists
Through broken glass and bloody tears on the streets of Minneapolis

Oh our Minneapolis, I hear your voice singing through the bloody mist
Here in our home they killed and roamed in the winter of '26
We'll take our stand for this land and the stranger in our midst
We'll remember the names of those who died on the streets of Minneapolis
We'll remember the names of those who died on the streets of Minneapolis

January, 2026