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June 7, 2020

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“When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain” (Matt 5:1).

1 Kgs 17:1-6; Matt 5:1-12

With Easter behind us, the church enters the long stretch of what was once called the “Time after Pentecost.” The feel of the liturgy is one of putting one foot in front of the other, Sunday by Sunday. There is real work to be done in the months ahead to ground the mystery of Jesus in our actual lives. Faith is a verb, a way of life, and this is a time for basic formation and practice.

I remember my first year away at college, sitting in my dorm room in Dubuque, Iowa, over-sized textbooks and some school supplies purchased at the bookstore piled on the desk before me. I was eager to begin but anxious about the challenges ahead, far from home, on my own for the first time. What would I become, or what would become of me?

We have signed up to be disciples. Today we begin classes with the daunting curriculum of the Beatitudes. Jesus, our teacher, gathers us around him on a mountainside. His words are both strange and wonderful, about being poor in spirit, meek, hungry and thirsty for justice, merciful, pure of heart, peacemakers. He also speaks of sorrow, being persecuted and vilified, as all prophets are in their own time and place. But we are blessed because, though still on earth, we are already in heaven.

Jesus is like Moses and Elijah in this mountain setting. His life was about fulfilling the Law and the Prophets. Elijah could command drought to punish kings, call down fire

on false prophets, and his rolled cloak could part rivers. Moses spoke face to face with God, liberated a people and led them through the desert to a promised land.

How different Jesus was, coming in weakness and humility to bring good news to the poor, speak truth to power, heal the sick and welcome outcasts. He preached forgiveness, God's limitless mercy and, in the end, he entered his glory by laying down his life for a sinful world.

We will not absorb the many paradoxes and parables of our rabbi in a single semester, a year or four or more, or a lifetime. But if we stay the course, we will become like him. This is the blessedness we want for our lives, to shape and direct our dreams and determination to make a difference. What higher goal is there than to sojourn into the lowest places, to live and serve the underside of this world, where relationships are deep, joy is hidden in suffering and grace is everywhere.

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