



4th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

February 1, 2026

Very Rev. J. David Carter, JCL, JV

There is a desire I have carried with me since childhood—a desire that may sound a little strange coming from someone raised in Louisiana. I have always longed for snow. Those of you who grew up farther north may find that amusing. Snow, for many, is something to be endured rather than desired. But for me, snow was rare, fleeting, almost mythical. It belonged to Christmas cards and television shows, not to everyday life. And so even now, when a forecast hints at snow, something stirs in me. I begin to hope. I begin to get excited.

Last weekend, as many of you know, snow was forecast for our area. I found myself watching the weather closely, waiting eagerly, even childlike in my anticipation. But as the time drew nearer, it became clear that we would not be getting any—while places all around us would. And I noticed what was happening in my heart: disappointment, a quiet frustration, even a subtle jealousy. Why them and not us?

What I should have been cultivating in that moment was not disappointment, but trust—trust in Divine Providence.

Because what followed the snow that passed us by was not a harmless winter scene. What followed was a devastating ice storm across much of the South: homes without power, families without heat, roads rendered dangerous, ordinary life suddenly fragile. Lives were disrupted, and lives were lost. In truth, we were spared a great hardship. What I had wanted—had we received it in that form—might well have become a source of suffering for many. Looking back now, I am deeply grateful that we were spared here in Chattanooga, even as we remain united with those who have suffered elsewhere.

But that raises a deeper and more uncomfortable question: why was my heart not already in sync with God's providential care? Why was my first movement disappointment rather than trust?

That question leads us directly into the heart of today's readings.

Through the prophet Zephaniah, the Lord speaks of a remnant: "a people humble and lowly, who shall take refuge in the name of the Lord." This remnant is not defined by power, control, or security. They do not dominate circumstances; they receive them. Their strength is humility. Their refuge is not in outcomes, but in God Himself.

Saint Paul makes the same point with striking clarity. God does not build His Kingdom according to worldly logic. He does not choose the impressive, the strong, or the self-sufficient. He chooses the lowly and the weak, precisely so that no human being might boast before Him. Everything we have—wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption—is received, not achieved. If there is any boasting at all, it is boasting in the Lord.

And then we ascend the mountain with Jesus.

He sits, He teaches, and He redefines blessedness itself. Notice what He does not say. He does not say, "Blessed are those whose plans succeed," or "Blessed are those who get what they want," or even "Blessed are those who are spared suffering."

He begins instead with this:



“Blessed are the poor in spirit.”

To be poor in spirit is to stand before God empty-handed. It is to let go of the illusion that we know what we need better than He does. It is to trust that His providence is wiser than our desires—even our innocent, heartfelt desires.

In my longing for snow, my heart was fixed on what I wanted God to give, rather than on what God, in His wisdom, was choosing to withhold—for our good. The Beatitudes confront us here, not harshly, but truthfully. They purify our desires. They teach us that blessedness does not consist in favorable circumstances, but in a heart aligned with the will of the Father.

The meek, the merciful, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness—these are people who have surrendered the need to control outcomes. They have learned how to receive life as a gift.

And then, a few days later, came the surprise.

Friday into Saturday, the snow finally did come. Quietly. Gently. Almost gratuitously. Not the crippling ice that had devastated so many, but a soft, beautiful snowfall—enough to delight children, to slow us down, to remind us of beauty without bringing destruction. No widespread outages. No major disruption. Just snow—received, not demanded.

It was a small but profound reminder that God is not indifferent to our desires. He simply orders them according to a wisdom greater than our own. He withholds when giving would harm, and He gives when giving can be received as gift rather than grasped as entitlement.

That is Divine Providence.

The Beatitudes teach us that blessedness does not lie in getting what we want, when we want it, or in the way we imagine. Blessedness lies in trusting the Father—trusting that He knows not only what we desire, but what we truly need. The poor in spirit are those who have learned this posture. They no longer cling to outcomes. They take refuge in the name of the Lord.

So I invite you this week to look honestly at your own heart. Where are you disappointed, frustrated, or quietly resentful because things have not unfolded as you hoped? And where might God be sparing you, forming you, or inviting you into deeper trust?

The Beatitudes are not ideals for the spiritually elite. They are a map for disciples who are learning how to live as children—children who trust their Father.

In the end, the posture of the Christian heart is not complaint or entitlement, but reverence. Not anxiety over what is withheld, but gratitude for what is given—and even for what is taken away.

As Job teaches us, and as life confirms again and again: “The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” And that—far more than snow or sunshine—is the true joy of the Kingdom of Heaven.