



Sunday Sermon  
February 1, 2026  
Bruce Morris

### ***Deacons Sunday***

Matthew 5: 1-12

*“What does the LORD require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?”*

*Today has been designated as Deacons Sunday in the Diocese of New Westminster. A day to celebrate the ministry of deacons, to learn more about what deacons are and what we do, and to encourage folks to wonder whether they, or someone they know, might be called to be a deacon.*

*I don't think it's a coincidence that the readings today fit so well into this celebration – I suspect our Archbishop and the Archdeacon for Deacons have been planning this for a while. For there's no question that all the readings today lead us into an understanding of service and blessing that is completely consistent with the ministry of deacons.*

*Service is at the core of diaconal ministry. In fact, the very name “deacon” is an anglicization of the Greek word diaconos, which means “servant”. Deacons are, by definition, servants, called to be the hands and feet of Christ in the world, called to be instruments of blessing in practical ways, called to extend the reach of the church into the world, and to bring the concerns of the world to the attention of the church.*

*In the early years of the Christian church, deacons were the ones who fulfilled the social work and charitable functions for the community. However, as time and circumstances changed, the Order declined until it was relegated to a short-term training time for those headed for the priesthood. In the latter part of the last century, however, particularly in North America, Anglicans rediscovered the value of extending the reach of ordained ministry into local society. In the Diocese of New Westminster, it was Archbishop Douglas Hambidge who championed the full restoration of the Order of Deacons and the first ordinations into the permanent Order were in 1995.*

*In DNW, we use the term “workplace ministry” to indicate the nature of diaconal service. Deacons are expected to have jobs in secular settings, and to exercise most of their ministry outside the regular reach of the church. Often, the workplace provides the locus for our ministry. We are non-stipendiary, which means that we are not paid by the church. Instead, we earn our incomes from our secular jobs, and give a certain amount of time to our ministries.*

*There are about 50 deacons in DNW, most still active in ministry. Through my work as an assessor in the diocese's discernment process and then as Archdeacon, I got to know them all. Let me share some of their stories.*

- *Linda was a deacon here for a few years. Some of you may remember her and her quirky personality - warm, loving, and occasionally off-the-wall, always leaving laughter in her wake. She trained as a clinical counsellor and through her practice here and in the Fraser Valley, guided many people through difficult times and challenging circumstances.*
- *Ron is an expert in permaculture, the practice of using intensive agricultural techniques that ensure sustainability of the earth and provision of food for those in challenging situations. Ron converted grounds around his parish church into a show-piece of permaculture, also providing a quiet haven for everyone in the neighbourhood, and in doing so, made restorative connections with the local First Nation.*
- *Catherine is a librarian and, as libraries increasingly become a place for the unhoused to gather, get warm, and stay connected, she compiles information on services available to assist those facing challenges. She makes sure that all who come into her library know that they are not alone and that people care about them.*
- *Robert was a welder. Every morning, he would walk to work, leaving about 45 minutes earlier than needed, taking a muffin and coffee with him. On his way, he would find someone who had spent the night on the streets, give them breakfast and chat. Once he got to work, he would put on his welder's helmet and pray for the person all day long. He and his wife established a soup kitchen at the parish hall and on Saturdays, he served meals to the homeless. Now sadly deceased, his legacy lives on through this essential ministry.*
- *Juanita is a chaplain, both in lower mainland hospitals and, through Mission to Seafarers, to the crews on the freighters in Vancouver Harbour. She takes food parcels, small gifts, her smiling presence, and knitted tuques (some of which no doubt came from here) out to sailors who are half a world away from their homes and their families.*
- *Pitman is a lawyer and had a distinguished career at UBC Law School, where he specialized in Canada-China legal relationships. He founded the Westside Anglican Neighbourhood Ministry which serves the Dunbar-Pt. Grey area of Vancouver. A core group of 40-50 volunteers offers their time to canvass the streets, providing care packets and nutritious food for distribution. Providing non-judgmental love and support to those living on the streets.*
- *Dixie is a psychologist, based in downtown Vancouver. Her ministry expands what you'd expect from a mental health practitioner to include spiritual aspects, offering a holistic (or is that a holy) approach to healing. Dixie was instrumental in establishing the Centre for Spiritual Directions at the Cathedral that serves many who seek to deepen their relationship with the divine.*

*There are many more stories, of course, and I am always amazed and humbled to hear the many ways our deacons serve and take the Word of God out into the world in such diverse and profound ways.*

*Four years ago, at our annual Deacons Day, our guest speaker was the Very Rev. Robert Willis, then Dean of the Diocese of Canterbury. Dean Robert joined us from Canterbury via Zoom and spent 90 minutes talking with our deacons about vocation and the ministry of service. Dean*

*Robert insisted that, throughout all of his extensive ministry, the most significant time was when he was a deacon. He said that it grounded him and helped him understand the importance of diaconal ministry to the church and to the world. You can still see the YouTube recording of our time together – it's been viewed over 13,000 times!*

*When I was nearing the time for my own ordination, one of my kids loudly and proudly proclaimed "My Daddy's going to be a Beacon!" That got a few laughs, but it has truth to it – deacons are supposed to light the way, to assist with navigating safe passages through life's obstacles, to guide and to illuminate. The ordination liturgy for a deacon includes these charges to the ordinand:*

- You are to make Christ and his redemptive love known, by your word and example, to those among whom you live and work and worship.*
- You are to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world.*

*In other words, be a Beacon at all times, wherever you are, whatever the circumstances, to extend the light of Christ, and to ensure the Church stays relevant to the society in which we are placed.*

*Now, it's not just deacons who are charged with these ministries - you can find these same elements in the baptismal covenant, to which we have all committed – these are the elements of the Christian faith, that sends us out to do the work of Christ in the world. However, deacons are expected to lead the church in fulfilling its mission, informing, inspiring, empowering, being icons of service so that the whole church can live into its vocation as ministers of Christ, to be a blessing to those around us.*

*Today's Gospel passage, the Beatitudes, has got to be one of my favourites, and I suspect it is for you as well. I find it to be a "feel-good" passage, maybe because of the poetry, the cadence, the promise of good things to come. Or maybe because it reminds me of the Simon and Garfunkel song "Blessing"! In any case, the Beatitudes incorporate the teaching of Jesus into a moving and loving summary.*

*The late Jim Cruikshank, former Dean of Christ Church Cathedral in Vancouver and the last Bishop of Cariboo said that, if you really want to receive the impact of the Beatitudes, personalize it. Here's an example of how he paraphrased:*

- You who are poor in spirit, despondent, depressed, without hope – you are blessed, as the Kingdom of heaven is for you*
- You that mourn – you are blessed, for comfort is here for you*
- You who show kindness to others – you are blessed – you will receive kindness in return*

*Well, it's lost a lot of the poetic rhythm, and I suspect Simon & Garfunkel wouldn't have built a song around it when worded this way, but this approach does provide more concrete context to our modern ears.*

*I'd like to offer another interpretation, using my diaconal voice, and offering the Beatitudes as a call to living and serving within an ethos of ministerial attitude and action:*

- *Be a blessing to the poor in spirit – support them and bring them the peace which passes all understanding.*
- *Be a blessing to those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for themselves and for others, by walking with them, seeking justice for the outcast and the oppressed.*
- *Be a blessing for those who strive to be pure in heart – see that it is Christ in your midst who is at work through all of you.*
- *Be a blessing and let the Kingdom of God shine out through all that you do, all whom you are.*

*For this is the calling for all people of faith – “What does the LORD require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?”*

*Amen!!*