

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church

Shobonier, Illinois

Epiphany 6C

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Luke 6:17-26

Blessings and Woes

And [Jesus] lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: "Blessed are you . . . [and] woe to you . . ." (Luke 6:20 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

Jesus had just spent the night on the mountain praying. He had chosen twelve from his disciples and designated them apostles. And, then "He came down with them and stood on a level place." In His presence were the twelve, along with other disciples, and others who had come to Him "to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. And those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all." How exactly how it all happened, we aren't told, only that He healed them all.

And, as at other times when He did miracles, He also taught. And while what we hear today sounds similar to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, Luke's version is shorter and is often called "The Sermon on the Plain."

And as we listen to Jesus today, we'll see that the Kingdom of God is quite different from the ways of the world. Thus, Jesus says some very challenging things. Like Matthew, Luke has some "Beatitudes," or "Blessed are" statements. But he also includes some "But woe to you" statements. They're the opposite of beatitudes. We might call them "Woeitudes." They're

tough and harsh. Still, Jesus gives it to us straight. So here in the Sermon on the Plain, Jesus speaks truth to us, whether we like it or not. God grant that we hear Him.

First, Jesus gives us the Beatitudes, the “Blessed are’s.” But even here, we’ll find some things we don’t like to hear. It’s in the first half of each beatitude. Take the first one, for instance: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” We like the “Blessed are you” part. And we like the promise in the second half: “for yours is the kingdom of God.” But it’s who Jesus says is blessed that troubles us.

“Blessed are you who are poor”: We don’t like that. We don’t like to be poor. And yet, there is something to be said about the blessedness of being poor. Because when you’re that kind of poor, you have to rely on God to take care of you. There’s a reason Jesus spoke elsewhere of how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Because when you’re rich and you can get anything you want, there’s a special temptation to not rely on God. You can become very content with your life here on earth. All the pleasures you can desire are yours. And so, what do you need God for? Or so you think.

But when you’re poor, and especially when you’re poor because you follow Christ, that can be a blessed place to be. You realize that this life, and this world, is not all so wonderful. You look to God to supply your needs. And if you’re poor in part because you’re a Christian, well, that’s nothing new. Christians have often been deprived and discriminated against economically in times of persecution. Also, Christians may not have as much disposable income as the unbelievers do, since we give a greater percentage of our income away—giving generously to our church, for instance, to support the ministry of the gospel.

So, Jesus says, “Blessed are the poor.” Oh, we may not have a lot of money. But what we do have is worth so much more. Infinitely more. Our Lord Jesus tells us, “for yours is the kingdom of God.” The kingdom of God—what could be more valuable than that? “For the kingdom of God,” as Paul says in Romans, is a matter of “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Rom. 14:17). To have righteousness, right standing before God, to have peace with God, to have a joy that goes deeper than your circumstances. I wouldn’t trade those gifts for all the money in the world!

The next beatitude: "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied." Again, we don't like the hungry part. It means that nothing in this life can fully satisfy us. We realize that something is lacking, something is missing. Our life is not perfect, it's not complete. Not in this life, that is. But we have a future to look forward to, a future when all will be put right. You will be satisfied, Jesus assures us. Jesus Himself is going to come and fix all things, set all things right. You have His word on it, and He is the one you can trust.

Next: "Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh." This life is a vale of tears, isn't it? You and I weep, we mourn, at the constant stream of death that surrounds us. And one day that stream will come and sweep us away. Or our sons or daughters, our parents, our friends, relatives, and neighbors. There is so much to make us weep in this life. But the day is coming when we can put all that mourning and sadness behind us.

For our Lord Jesus has overcome the sting of death. He took all our sins upon Himself, into His own body, and He paid the price for our iniquity on the cross. Now your sins are forgiven. The death sentence has been served, but you didn't have to pay it. Jesus did it for you. And because He is the holy Son of God, death could not hold Him. He rose victorious from the dead. And all those who trust in Him as their Savior, who are baptized in His name, Jesus shares His resurrection victory with. We await that day with sure hope. And then, in the resurrection, our tears will turn to laughter, in a joy that never ends.

One more beatitude: "Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets." We don't like to be left out. We don't like to not be liked. And hopefully, we're not disliked because we're being a jerk. But there is a dislike we incur precisely because we belong to Christ. The world hates Jesus, and therefore they hate His followers, too. Get used to it. It comes with the territory. And the world, our current culture, is becoming increasingly more hostile toward Christians. So, don't be surprised when you feel the brunt of it. To be sure, we don't go looking for persecution or martyrdom. But when it comes, it comes. And when it comes, take it as a badge of honor. You belong to Christ, and someone doesn't like that. Oh, well. Our Lord calls us blessed, and that's what counts, and so we are. "Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven." The glory we will enjoy then far outweighs the grief we experience now.

So those are the Beatitudes as we have them in Luke. But we also get a set of woes—the “Woeitudes.” And we do well to hear them too. For these “Woeitudes” are simply the opposite of the Beatitudes, stating them in the reverse: “But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.”

You think you’ve got life easy now? You think you don’t need God? You’re rich, you’re full, you’re happy, you’re popular? Everything’s going your way, you’re living your best life now, and you think you’re fine on your own, as you are. Well, guess what? You’re not. Your good life could be gone in a moment—in a tornado, in a car wreck, in a heart attack. You have no guarantees. Wait, there’s one thing I can guarantee you: You will die. All your stuff will do you no good then, when you stand before the judgment seat of God. And what will you do then? All your supposed goodness—all your relative goodness over the really bad people—all of that will not amount to a hill of beans, and you will be heading down the highway to hell.

So is Jesus speaking so plainly here just to scare us? No, to warn us. Jesus speaks this plainly with these woes as His way of saying “Whoa!” Whoa! Stop and take a look in the mirror! Do you have what it takes to overcome sin and death and hell on your own? No, you don’t. No one has.

Only Jesus Christ can give you what you need. Only He has the righteousness and the life and the gift of heaven to bless you with. Here in the Sermon on the Plain, Jesus makes it plain: He warns you with the woes, and He freely offers you His enormous blessings. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener