

Blessings and Woes

Luke 6:17-26 - Epiphany 6C

Greg Bohlken, Feb 16, 2025

The Holy Gospel according to Luke, the 6th chapter. ***Glory to you, O Lord.***

Jesus came down with the twelve and stood on a level place with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

“Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

“Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.

“Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

“Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven, for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

“But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.

“Woe to you who are full now,
for you will be hungry.

“Woe to you who are laughing now,
for you will mourn and weep.

“Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

The Gospel of our Lord. ***Praise to you, O Christ!***

The poor & hungry & weeping. The rich & full & laughing. We see it. This dichotomy of pleasure seeking versus suffering, the haves

and have-nots. We see what the world values. You might feel like our broken world is barreling down a crash course toward more brokenness.

- Developed nations like the United States using far more than our share of the world's resources while others are dying for a chance to live.
- So many of us can't imagine what persistent hunger feels like, while children continue silently starving to death around the world and even going hungry here in our own backyard.
- Being excluded and sent away if you have the wrong skin color or cultural heritage or gender identity or pronouns.
- Refugees being sent back, labeled as illegal job stealers and even humble Lutheran Refugee resettlement services are now accused of being money launderers.
- Politicians leading a power-grab and wealth-building machine instead of leading governments where justice rolls down like water and righteousness like an ever flowing stream, (Amos chapter 5) so that all may be fed & housed & loved & valued & celebrated.

In our exhausting litany of woes, we hear Jesus. Blessed are you, poor and hungry and weeping and outcast – my Kingdom is for you.

And for listeners with power and influence and security, Jesus warns: Woe to you rich and powerful, fat and happy – as long as you trust in yourself and don't have room for God's Kingdom then this is as good as it's gonna get for you.

The Gospel comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable.

The Kingdom of God is upside down from what our world values. There's deep meaning to the Lord's Prayer when we pray, Oh Jesus, may your Kingdom come, your will be done. In prayer, we actively make room for God's kingdom in our lives. As Henri Nouwen said, "Prayer moves us from hostility to hospitality."

And this message of God's upside-down Kingdom emanates throughout Jesus' life:

- As early as Mary's pregnancy with Jesus, she sings the Magnificat, "He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty" (Luke chapter 1).
- And when Jesus began his public ministry with his inaugural speech that quotes the prophet Isaiah, Jesus said "God's Spirit has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed," (Luke chapter 4).
- Even just before giving his life in sacrificial humility on the Cross, Jesus stooped down to wash his disciples' feet. The King of Heaven doing the profoundly dirty work of a servant.

Again and again, Jesus proclaims that God's Kingdom values the opposite of what the world values.

And did you catch the first verse of today's well-known Gospel reading? We usually call this Jesus sermon the Beatitudes but in Luke

it's labeled the Sermon on the Plain, meaning the level flatland. Usually when Jesus saw a crowd he went up on a high mountain or out on a boat on the lake to preach – that was for acoustics – it helped sound travel so everyone in the crowd could hear. In today's Luke passage, "Jesus came down and stood with the crowd." What better way for God to say, "I am with you!" than to come down and be with us. Luke writes that, "everyone in the crowd was trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them." Jesus knew they would clamor to touch him and he came down to physically embody his message for them. Gustavo Guederrez challenges: "You say you care about the poor. Tell me, what are their names?" Jesus got close enough to know people by name. It reminds me of Revelation when John wrote, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth and God came down to be with God's people" (Revelation 21). That sacred 80's theologian Belinda Carlisle famously got it right, "Oooh baby do you know what that's worth? Oooh Heaven is a place on Earth!"

Embodying his message in physical presence is also exactly how Jesus shares his gift of love with us in Holy Communion so that we are united in Christ, filled to Love God, Love Others, Serve. I love the Martin Luther quote, "God doesn't need our good works, but our neighbors do."

Jesus comes down. Among us. To be in the midst of the rich & haughty, and the poor & hungry.

Jesus comes down, into our crowded mess.

Jesus comes down and makes a new way, offers his wholeness to all of us who hunger

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to be filled with him. Woe to those haughty enough to not want Jesus around. But still, Jesus comes down. Blessed are you who clamor to touch him and be healed and find new ways to share life together. **Amen.**