

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Epiphany 6C
February 13, 2022
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,

St. Paul wrote (1 Cor. 15:19) that if it's only for this present life that we have hope in Jesus Christ, then we are the most pitiful group of people on the face of the earth. If this life is as good as it gets, then we who trust in Jesus Christ truly are a pitiful lot. But the good news is that Jesus Christ *has been* raised from the dead, the first fruits from the dead. Since Jesus has risen from the dead, there is the promise of more to follow. Therefore, if you aren't happy now, you will be, thanks to Jesus. But this happiness is no feel-good emotion. It isn't a happiness that you pursue, rather it's a happiness, a blessedness, that pursues you, a blessedness that is found only in Jesus Christ, and is given out freely to all who trust in Him.

Jesus was doing well that day He preached on the plain — healing the sick, casting out demons and teaching with authority. Power was just pouring out of Him, so that people rushed to touch Him for healing. There were a lot of happy people that day. People who found health, peace of mind, for the first time in their lives, just for touching Jesus. Jesus could have used the opportunity to preach a message of happiness — "Don't worry, be happy." I'm here to fix all your problems. But He didn't.

He lifted His eyes and looked them on His disciples and said to them:

"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.
Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied.
Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.
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!" (Luke 6:20-22)

While this sounds similar to the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5), this is often called the Sermon on the Plain. Jesus demonstrates the truth that "as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are [God's] ways higher than your ways and [God's] thoughts than your thoughts." (Is. 55:9). Jesus presents a very different perspective on our preconceived notions of blessedness or happiness. And if being poor, hungry, weeping, and despised is really what it means to be happy, we probably wouldn't be rushing to pursue it.

But look, and listen. Who are these blessed ones? What is it about their poverty, their hunger, their weeping, their rejection that makes them blessed? What they lack now, they will have. Yours is the kingdom of God. Your deepest hunger will be satisfied. You will laugh. Great is your reward in heaven. The blessedness of a disciple is born out of a trust that recognizes the reign of Jesus at work in, with, and under everything — not only the good, but also the bad, and even the ugly. It's faith's recognition that Jesus Christ is not the way around suffering, pain, sorrow, and death, rather, He is the only way **through** your suffering, pain, sorrow, and death to eternal life. This is happiness with a cross embossed on it.

You may be poor now, but count yourself blessed in Christ, because nothing less than the kingdom of God is yours.

You may be hungry now, but count yourself as blessed, because the One who multiplied bread and fish in the wilderness gives you His own Body as Bread and His Blood as Wine, a foretaste of His feast to come when your hunger and thirst will be filled forever.

You may be weeping now, grieving over sin and death and the grief that the sins of others have caused you, but your mourning will be turned to joy, your sadness into gladness, and your tears to laughter on the day you rise to greet your Savior.

You may be hated now because you are a disciple of Jesus, and, indeed, you should expect it. People may make fun of you, exclude you, think you're stupid or simple or irrelevant. They may even consider you evil just for being a Christian. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.

Blessed are you — poor, hungry, weeping, despised, persecuted disciples. To the world you look like Jesus, your Savior, who was rich but became poor so that out of His poverty you might become rich in the kingdom of God. He hungered, fasting forty days in the wilderness, so that out of His emptiness you might be fed with the Bread of Life and live forever. He wept, a man of sorrows, familiar with suffering. He wept over the world's condition, over the hardness of men's hearts, over their slowness to believe, so that by His tears you might have eternal joy. He was hated, despised, beaten, rejected by the religious, the powerful and crucified. And that poor, hungry, weeping, despised Man on the cross is your acceptance, your justification before God, your righteousness, and your salvation.

Fittingly, Jesus speaks a word of "woe" to His disciples who are already rich, are now well fed and content, are laughing, and who are the life of the party. Riches may bring creature comforts, but they don't last and they cannot save. Rich and poor both get buried the same six feet under. Food may fill you to gluttonous excess, but it isn't food that lasts. We starve in spiritual death without a steady diet of the Bread of Life. The world is filled with laughter, but the laughs are hollow and short-lived. The punch line comes on the Last Day, when Christ appears to judge the living and the dead, when the real laugh is that "your sins are forgiven in His death." Popularity is fleeting and fickle. The false prophets and false apostles were popular too.

Now this doesn't mean we shouldn't be thankful for riches, food and drink, laughter, popularity, if any of these come our way. But we should be aware that while the world treasures these things, we don't pursue them or find real happiness in them. If we do, they will become idols that turn our hearts and consume us. We will pursue them to our death, and never achieve anything remotely resembling the happiness and the blessedness Jesus has in store for us.

Behind Jesus' woe is His sorrow over our fallen condition. He knows our hearts, and how closely we cling to riches, how we look to food for comfort (we even call it "comfort food"), how we love to laugh when we want to cry, how we long to be accepted and popular. His sorrow is over lives so clogged with these things, we will lose sight of the one thing that will bring us joy.

"Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night." (Ps. 1:1). "O taste and see that the LORD is good! Happy is the man who takes refuge in him!" (Ps. 34:8). "Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit." (Ps. 32:1-2).

Jeremiah writes, "Happy/Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord." (Jer. 17:7). He is like a tree planted by the water; whose roots reach deep down into the stream. Even when the heat of day comes, there's no fear. Not even in a dry year is there any worry. Rooted deeply in the Lord, trusting in His Promise to save, hearing His Word, eating and drinking His Body and Blood, watered in Baptism, you will never fail to bear fruit.

Now this is a happiness worth pursuing. But, you know what? You don't have to pursue it. You already possess it in Jesus. So, "blessed are you" is a statement of faith, not of sight. And therefore, a statement of the cross — a statement that cannot be proven or deduced, but can only be believed. But that doesn't make it weak or uncertain, no, in fact it's exactly the opposite — that's what makes it so sure! Because it is rooted and grounded not in anything of this world, which comes and goes and changes so fast — it's rooted in the death and resurrection of Christ. The death and resurrection of Christ that has reconciled us to the Father and the Father to us. The death and resurrection of Christ that has given us new life, and provides all that we need.

In the name of the Father and of the (X) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener