

6 Epiphany Year C February 16 2025

Luke 6:17-26

1

ME

HOW DO I STRUGGLE WITH THIS?

I am a person who puts more emphasis on what I see rather than what I hear or read. I contribute this mostly to the fact that I am hard of hearing and so I am not confident in what I hear from others. I will listen closely to what people have to say, but I pay more attention to what people do. I hear people play a good game or make promises, but it is what they do that I trust the most.

Starting in the sixth chapter of Luke's Gospel, we learn how the original twelve disciples were selected. **The selection process took place on a mountain after a night of prayer.** After that important announcement, Jesus and his disciples descended from the mountain and walked into a large crowd that was gathering on a plain. **This crowd was comprised of people from all around the region who were there for two reasons, to listen to what Jesus had to say and to be healed.**

There is a small and yet important change in the narrative of the story which takes place when Jesus looked up at his disciples and began to speak about what we have come to know as the Blessings and Woes of Luke's Gospel. **The focus of his message went from the large crowd to the twelve disciples and those who were listening closely.**

The blessings passage mentions the poor, the hungry, and those who weep, for God loves them and knows their struggles. **Jesus informed the disciples and the listening crowd that they should rejoice and leap for joy when others hate, exclude, revile, and defame his current and future followers, for those who have been persecuted will find their reward in heaven.**

The “woe” portion of Jesus’s teachings follows the blessings. Jesus told his listeners not to be joyful if they are rich, well fed, and laughing because their good fortune will turn around. Jesus also warned his listening audience not to get too comfortable with the praise of others because their accolades will ring hollow.

2

WE

HOW DO WE ALL STRUGGLE WITH THIS?

It has been my experience that these of passages of blessings, curses, and persecutions from the Bible are used to justify bad decisions and harmful behavior. The common offenders of this deliberate misuse of scripture are people either in positions of great influence or victims themselves. These passages can provide them an easy and convincing method of absolving themselves of personal responsibility so that they can continue to neglect or even cause harm to people in vulnerable positions OR expect others to rescue them from their circumstances in life.

Their reasoning goes like this – "It is okay to be poor, hungry and sad since God loves you." Now be quiet and accept your fate. As for the rich and satisfied suffer from their share of persecutions because others are envious of them and their success. I don't think that is what Luke had in mind when he penned these words thousands of years ago.

Here are my thoughts about Jesus's intentions for the blessings and woes in Luke's Gospel. I draw my conclusions by observing what happened within the large crowd.

People were being "healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured." People were finding their physical and mental conditions changed and reversed by Jesus. The blessings from God addressed the poor, hungry, and the weeping because they were to expect their lives to be changed for the better.

The "woe" functioned in the same fashion; those who were rich, content, and respected would discover that their lives could become empty, and in some situations, even painful.

In both cases the poor and rich have their worlds turned upside down and their situations are reversed.

3

GOD

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT THIS?

Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins, Gay Byron has this insight to help us today have a better understanding of what Luke was intending to teach with today's passage

(quote) In Matthew, Jesus simply opens his mouth and begins to teach his disciples. For Luke, Jesus focuses his eyes on the disciples after (Luke says)

They (the large crowds) had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases, and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And everyone in the crowd was trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

The reference to (Jesus') eyes in (the following passage) "Then he (being Jesus) looked up at his disciples and said ..." should not be glossed over as insignificant. **It is here and also in what is missing after the proceeding healing section that we find the theological import for this epiphany passage.**

The parallel account describing the healing of those who are troubled with unclean spirits (which is also found in Mark) indicates the following: "Whenever the uncleaned spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, 'You are the Son of God!'" **Luke does not include this acknowledgement of the Divine in the Sermon on the Plain; rather it is placed in an earlier healing story during Jesus' stay in Capernaum whereby the "demons" acknowledged that Jesus was the Son of God.**

This strategic ellipsis, calling attention to the lack of recognition of - or inability to see - the Son of God, makes the fact that Jesus is gazing at the disciples all the more poignant. **It is not so much that the people are able to see God in this encounter with Jesus.** The subtle undercurrent and the word of hope in this passage is how the disciples (and presumably all those would-be followers of Jesus) are seen by God! **So the raising of the eyes by Jesus is a symbolic metaphor for the watchful eyes of God, who is ultimately responsible for the blessing and curses that are at the heart of this (passage) sermon. (end of quote)**

4

YOU

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO ABOUT THIS?

For me, the key to understanding this passage from Luke is the fact that Jesus looked at his current and future disciples. Jesus was watching and explaining that it was he, along with those who follow him, who would be acting differently from those who are of the world. The world says that it is okay for the poor to remain poor and that there is no need to address those who are hungry since there is not enough food to go around. When people are sad or frustrated with life, others, seeking ways to avoid concerning themselves with those who are suffering, may tell them to take heart and know that they are loved by God. It is implied that that should be enough to bring them comfort. The rich of this world will continue to obtain the benefits of their wealth, for this is how the world works.

I believe that people are looking for healing and purpose. People with wealth want to know that what they are doing is making a difference in the world with their good fortunes. I understand why they get tired of being blamed for exploiting others for their own personal benefit. Who wouldn't.

I don't think people really enjoy being poor, sad, or hungry. They really would like their circumstances to be changed. Mostly I think people would like to be able to pay for their children's college, have good medical care, retire with dignity and own a home. People don't have to be ultra rich or must depend upon public programs to have this quality of life. With Jesus there is enough in God's kingdom to go around.

There are churches that strive to present proper orthodoxy which is right thinking and knowing. The idea is that with a strong grasp of Christian doctrine the church will be doing God's will on earth as it is in heaven. Action is not emphasized in these churches, but it is implied only after careful and deliberate teaching on how to think properly about God.

There are other churches that are more focused on proper actions also known as orthopraxis. These types of churches place more emphasis on acting rather than thinking. It is through proper action that God's kingdom will be expressed and experienced on earth. Thinking and teaching Christian doctrine is not that important, action is the main thing that counts.

I think if a church only focuses on either orthodoxy or orthopraxis, then they will not be fulfilling God's will on earth. **It takes a balance of both orthodoxy and orthopraxis to be what the church Jesus is calling it to be.** By both knowing God's will by teaching and then acting on those well-informed beliefs, the church becomes creditable and a place where healing takes place, and people will have a purpose for their lives.

St. Mark's I believe is a balanced church. We have bible studies and other resources to know proper doctrine and we are a church of action. **It was in the original charter that outreach would be a priority.** There has been a long tradition of funding outreach and since COVID-19 St. Mark's had to get creative on maintaining this important value.

Yesterday, I was at a ramp built in which several different churches joined in a combined effort to build a ramp so that a couple can have access to their home. I was talking to the couple's son, and he told me that he grew up in that house and he was so happy to know that his parents can continue to live there, even while their mobility continues to decline. Access Plus provides these ramps for those who cannot afford to hire someone or a company to build the ramp. By a generous yearly grant all the materials that are used are provided. By building ramps, we are an example of how the kingdom of God is in action that is informed by the theology that God cares about those who are disabled. This and family and others have experienced the love of Christ without any thing being given in exchange for what we did.

We host Worship Services for our neighbors and lead bible studies. There is a group of dedicated people who spend a couple of hours once a month distributing food for those who are less fortunate. **There is another group of dedicated ladies who volunteer at Timmons Ministries giving the poor back some of their dignity.** St. Mark's has a long- and well-established Thanksgiving Meal distribution history that is so strong that the location that we serve these meals was overwhelmed last year and suggested that we take the year off. **The leadership of this church respectfully said no, St. Mark's is still committed, and we will get it done without being difficult or demanding.** Every year we host the Fall Festival as a celebration for our community. **This is another way we share the love of Christ with the unconditional spirit of love.** We continue to fund two missionaries, one of which grew up in this very church. **Lives are being touch well beyond our national borders through our action and prayers.**

This is what Jesus is seeing. What are you seeing?

HOW CAN WE ALL LIVE THIS OUT TOGETHER?

The world will continue to seek healing where it can find it, and the church will do what it can, with God's help, to enact Jesus's blessings to reverse the causes of harm and death. **The poor, hungry, and sorrowful will have their needs fulfilled when everyone, including the wealthy and happy, choose to follow Jesus.**

When this transformation occurs, all of us need to be prepared to be treated differently.

When God is making changes in the world there are other forces that will work to prevent it. These forces of fear, hostility, and anger often seek to prevent healing rather than promoting it. **To use the same tools of the world to push back in protest will only escalate the resistance for God's kingdom to become real for others.**

We the church may look at these experiences of resistance as growing pains. **St. Mark's can take these potentially painful and demanding experiences of persecution that are inflicted upon us and lean into being God's kingdom.** We know that being healed by Jesus' love and mercy we will receive our own reward that is great in heaven.

Jesus is watching and empowering all of us to make this happen.

Let's bring that faith to life.

5

WE

CITATION

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