

Sixth Sunday After Epiphany
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
Pastor Jason Glombicki
February 17th, 2019

Today's Gospel reading is Jesus's most famous sermon. If you've heard this sermon before, you might question your memory or today's translation because it sounded a bit different. But, this is not the Matthean version of the "Sermon on the Mount" that says "Blessed are the poor... in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." No, Luke doesn't sugar coat reality. Luke's retelling of the beatitudes is geographically among the people and symbolically given from the place of suffering, misery, and despair. Luke's version of this sermon is not metaphorical, symbolic, or spiritualized in content. With down-to-earth realism, he states "Blessed are you who are poor." And, frankly, this isn't anything new from Luke.

Up to this point, Luke hasn't minced words. We heard Mary, mother of Jesus, sing the Magnificat remind us that the God of her Jewish ancestors looks with favor on the poor, upsets the powerful, feeds the hungry, dismisses the priorities of the wealthy, and will continue this work in her life and for all generations (Luke 1:46-55). We've also heard Jesus proclaim in the synagogue that he came to bring good news to the outsiders and the people of low social status, and that he promotes an economic and social strategy that erases all debt and frees those who are captive to others (Luke 4:18-21).

So too, this story is a controversial story. It's a story that will upset. It's a story filled with a vision that will be the death of Jesus. But for now, Jesus openly and freely preaches about an alternative reality. It's not a reality for "another life." It's not a "thought exercise" or entertainment. Instead, it's an alternative reality that is so close that we can feel it, see it, and experience it. In today's portion of Jesus's sermon, Jesus isn't telling us *how* we can help transform this reality into the new reality – that's for next Sunday. Instead, this week, Jesus showed us who has an easier time living in and striving for that alternative reality.

You see, God's vision is for all. Yet, some of us, probably most of us in this room, we are going to have a bit harder time. It's not that we are bad people, but, rather, as we just confessed during today's baptism, most of us have bought into the systems of oppression that undermine God's purposes. You and I seek success and financial stability, we get caught up in social media and other things that don't matter, we yearn for what the world has labeled the "good life" that includes a big house, well-behaved children, respectable employment, and a white picket fence. We've bought into the lie that the more we have, the better we'll be. You and I, we are caught in a system of lies.

And today, Jesus made clear that although people of faith might board a plane to the same destination, some of us will have an easier time getting there. The poor and hungry have priority access with all the delicious amenities, while the successful and content are crammed back by the toilets simply struggling to get to the destination with some sanity.

For those of us with bellies and banks full, we don't get it. We don't understand why all of the sudden *this* flight has something different going on. What's wrong with laughter and people who speak well of us? What's wrong with extra dough in the bank and our stomachs? After all, Jesus laughed and dined, and we didn't see him get the "woe, woe, woe."

You see, Jesus's problem is not with the wealth, food, laughter, or popularity. The potential pitfall with these things is that we lose our focus. Instead of being compelled to seek God's vision for the world, we're too occupied and content. In our comfort, we are idle and oblivious. It's not that Jesus is glorifying poverty, hunger, sorrow, and rejection. But Jesus is clear about what are blessings and woes. Or in other words, Jesus is clear about what brings peace and satisfaction, and where we should be warned to change course.

So, here's another way to hear the beginning of Jesus's sermon:

Blessed are you all that are not distracted by stock markets and property ownership, for you will see God's works more clearly.

Satisfaction is for you all who yearn for a change that brings you healthy and nutritious food, for you will seek that which fills you with life.

Peace comes to all of you who lament and grieve over a world filled with loss and imperfection, for you will strive to see God in the dark, lonely, and unexpected places.

Blessed are all of you who are rejected and shamed, for you will seek ways to welcome, support, and love all people.

Woe to all of you who live in the western world with your wealth and its many distractions, for you are so inattentive that you will miss God's works.

Be careful, all of you who eat well and feel healthy, for you are likely to be devastated when you finally realize that every one of us will die.

Watch out, all of you that laugh without a care in the world, for you will forget what is important and will find yourself confused and alone.

Woe to all of you who are favored and envied by others, for the chances are good that you've prioritized that which is destructive and misaligned with God's vision.

If that didn't make sense, here's my abridged version:

Peace on all who struggle, for you will seek to create God's reality on earth.

Be careful, all of you who are comfortable, for you are most likely to be distracted and miss God's life-giving reality.

You see, in this first part of Jesus's sermon, he's reminding us that the journey ahead is going to be hard for most of us. It's going to feel like everything is turned upside down. It's going to produce resistance. For, God's vision is like nails on the chalkboard of our culture's priorities.

So, today, we have God's loving reminder to be careful when we find ourselves in the pit of privilege. When we hear that homeless youth need a place to sleep in our community, don't let the comfort of our homes turn us away from acting for God's vision. When we hear that people are fleeing other countries in fear for their lives, don't let our security blind us from God's vision. When we hear that families struggle to buy food and heat, don't let our financial success eliminate

programs and prioritize our wants over someone's needs. When we hear of another shooting, don't let the frequency and the distance dampen your resolve to work for legislation that brings life to all of God's children.

Friends, today's sermon is a warning for our journey ahead. God's vision is a reversal of this world's priorities, and Luke is not going to give us an easy way out. Yet, our God is not a "gotcha" kind of God. Our God is one who honestly and frequently reminds us that we have been loved unconditionally. And in response to that love, we have an opportunity to be careful with the potholes ahead. For, our selfishness can get us hooked on things that don't matter. But, every week, in the waters of baptism we see God's vision for the world; at this meal, we are strengthened to give God's vision a chance. Each week, we're empowered to try again – to look with eyes wide open, to see God's presence anew, and to participate in God's vision. So, watch out for the woes, and behold the blessings, for that, my friends, is today's gift. Amen.