

Sermon

Epiphany 6C February 16, 2025

Luke 6:17-26

Today we have the beginning of the Sermon on the Plain, which really isn't a sermon as much as it is a collection of sayings. This particular scene comes immediately after Jesus chooses the twelve apostles and a few chapters before sending them out on their mission to proclaim the good news and heal people. With his choosing the twelve by name, Jesus elevates them to a place where they will pay more attention. They are no longer just disciples, they are in a place where they might be called on to lead in Jesus name. But that's down the road a little bit.

For now, they watch and learn. This is more than Jesus saying, "Watch and listen to how I want you to do things." This is Jesus living his life in complete faithfulness to God and expecting his followers to do likewise, without this devolving into a seminar on discipleship. The apostles learn faithfulness because Jesus is faithful.

From almost the beginning of Luke's gospel he proclaims the reversal that the coming of God's kingdom will bring. From the *Magnificat* in which the mighty are cast down and the lowly raised up to the *Benedictus* in which the oppressed are set free, from the Son of God being born in a manger and first announced to the lowest of society to the inclusion of foreigners and aliens, and so many other examples, Luke presents us with an image of God's kingdom that reverses and throws down the kingdoms of men. And the Beatitudes are one more example of this.

Blessed are you who are poor, hungry, weeping, and hated on account of my name. Woe to you who are rich, full, laughing, and fawned over by others.

This reversal that God brings and Jesus proclaims is not meant for some future time or a far away utopia. This reversal that God brings and Jesus proclaims is meant for now. Remember when Jesus sat in the synagogue and read from Isaiah? "He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free." What did Jesus say about that? He didn't say, "This is what God has in mind for someday." He said, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled." Not someday, but *TODAY*.

The blessings and woes of Jesus are statements of fact and a result of God's kingdom being made manifest in the world. They are not "If/Then" statements or lists of

behaviors to follow or avoid. They are factual statements about God's kingdom. Those who are poor, hungry, sorrowful, and hated will be comforted, fed, and loved. Those who are rich, full, laughing, and praised will experience the opposite. Not as a punishment, but as reversal and sharing.

We will see another example of this reversal in Luke with Lazarus and the rich man who both die and find themselves in very different places. But again, that's a future reversal. What would these blessings and woes look like if the kingdom of God were here today? That really isn't too hard to imagine.

We are inundated with poor, hungry, and weeping people. There are those who need to work two or three jobs just to survive. This past January, the Food Pantry served 804 individuals in 325 households, and those numbers are sure to increase. Recent cuts to medical research, aid programs, education programs, and others have people in tears.

But when we start talking about taxing the wealthy to help those in need, or creating social programs to educate and assist others, people are suddenly concerned with whether they have enough. "Looking out for Number One" is the name of the game, even if it comes at the expense of the most vulnerable.

But what if we began living into Jesus' proclamation that the kingdom of God is very near us? What if we began living as if it were here today? What if we began living into the words of the Beatitudes? Not just us in this room, but everyone who claimed to follow Christ.

What would happen is that the poor would be lifted up, the hungry fed, the weeping could laugh. And those who are rich would have less. They might be a little hungry. They would probably cry and gnash their teeth at the unfairness of it all. Roles would be reversed. But God's kingdom of equality and justice for all would be realized in the here and now, today.

Until we repent of the sin of selfishness and begin to live with an understanding that when one suffers all suffer, the kingdom of God on earth is unattainable. Until then, though, we need to keep spreading the gospel message of love and mercy. We need to keep publicly pointing out instances of suffering, abuse, and injustices. Doing that – living and preaching the actual message of Christ – may get us in trouble with certain people, and it may cause some people to hate us, but we will be

in good company. After all, according to Jesus, that is how the prophets of God were treated. And according to scripture, that is what got Jesus killed.

Like the twelve before us, we have been called by name. Like the twelve before us, we have been asked to choose between working to establish the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven or working to maintain systems that actively oppose the kingdom of God.

Choose this day whom you will follow.

Amen.