

6th Sunday of Ordinary Time – Yr C

February 16-17, 2019 by Kevin Williams

Luke 6: 17, 20-26

The words we hear in today's gospel are sometimes called the Sermon on the Plain. They are Luke's version of the Beatitudes. They are similar to Matthew's Sermon on the Mount, but with some striking differences.

In Matthew's version, Jesus tells the people the various ways they can experience God's blessing. Luke, on the other hand, gets more pointed. In his version, we hear Jesus telling the people how they can not only experience blessings, but also how they sometimes live in ways that can bring them deep sadness, or woes, as we hear it said in the gospel.

In other words, the way we choose to live will have great bearing on when we will experience joy. If we choose to live for the world's pleasures and nothing else, we will receive all of our joy in this world. But if we choose to live for the things of heaven, we will find joy for eternity.

Let's go a little deeper into that. When Jesus said, Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation, the word He uses for have is the word that is used for being paid in full. In other words, if a person chooses to live for money, Jesus is telling them that they will find all their joy in this life, but that there will be nothing left after this life. Does that mean that Jesus is saying we can't have money? Not exactly. What it boils down to is the attitude a person has toward their money. Here's what I mean. If a person has money and that drives all their decisions, their money is controlling them. Jesus is saying woe to that person. But if a person has money and they treat it as a tool to be used for good, they are in control of their money, not the other way around. That person can still experience God's blessing.

Unfortunately, having wealth often causes people to live for themselves. Somehow, it makes it more difficult for people to live for others. I came across an old legend that illustrates this.

Here's how it goes: One day, Moses is sitting outside his home, looking very sad. The Lord happened by and asked him, "Moses, why are you so sad?" Moses said, "it's your people, Lord." "What about my people?" asked the Lord. Moses replied, "they need better food, better clothes, and better shelter." The Lord said, "We can change

that.” Within months, the people had better food, better clothes, and better shelter. A few months later Moses was sitting outside his home, looking very sad again. The Lord happened by and said, “What’s wrong Moses? Why are you so sad?” Moses said, “It’s your people, Lord. They are enjoying themselves so much that they no longer have time for the disabled, the lonely, and the elderly. And what’s more, they no longer sit together outside under the stars at night, talking to one another about how good and merciful You are.” The Lord said, “That’s not good Moses. What do you think we should do?” Moses said, “I think we should make them poor again, as they used to be. They seemed to be happier then.” I think we can see in that story the truth that when we are too comfortable, we have a tendency to get lazy, just thinking about ourselves. I think that’s why Jesus was encouraging the people to keep their lives simple.

Now, there are a couple of things that are good to keep in mind as we ponder all of this. First, when Jesus said these things to the people, He was shattering their preconceived notions about wealth and comfort. They had always equated wealth with God’s blessings. Jesus was telling them something that turned upside down what they

had always believed. When He told them: Blessed are the poor, for the kingdom of God is yours, that was a shock to the system.

The second thing to keep in mind was how Jesus related personally to the Beatitudes. You see, Jesus spoke from experience when He spoke about these blessings. Here's what I mean. When Jesus said that the poor, the hungry, the sorrowful, and the persecuted were blessed, He wasn't just presenting some pie-in-the-sky way of living that was meaningless. Jesus knew what it meant to be poor and yet to be assured of the kingdom of heaven. He had nowhere to lay His head, but it wasn't because He didn't have other options. Jesus wanted to choose a life of simplicity because His heart was set on higher riches. He deliberately chose to pray throughout the night and to fast for forty days and nights because He wanted His soul to be filled with His Father's love.

He mourned his disciples unbelief and Jerusalem's rejection of Him because the great desire of His heart was to give them everything He had received from His Father. Finally, He knew that, like the prophets, He would be hated, reviled, and persecuted, but not because He was obnoxious, but because His words struck like a rock

against the hardness of sin in people's hearts. But, like the prophets, He couldn't help but speak out. That's how great His love was, and is, for His people.

Jesus didn't come to earth to be poor, hated and sad. He came to earth to reveal and share the kingdom of God with a fallen people, a people who, while fallen, He still wanted to redeem. Likewise, He doesn't call us to be poor, hated, or sad. No, He offers us an experience of His Father's love that is so great that everything else pales in comparison. He offers us a kingdom so magnificent that we should be willing to endure hardship for the sake of embracing this kingdom and spreading its message into the world.

There is a way to summarize all of this and it comes from today's first reading from Jeremiah. I'll paraphrase what Jeremiah says.

Cursed is the one who puts all their trust in human beings; but Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord. That's about as simple as you can put it. Amen.