**February 13, 2022 Luke 6:17-26**

***How Deep***

**Scripture:**

*Luke 6:17-26 NRSV*

*(17)He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. (18)They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. (19)And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them. (20)Then he looked up at his disciples and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. (21)"Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. (22)"Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. (23)Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. (24)"But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. (25)"Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. "Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. (26)"Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.*

**Notes:**

1. Jesus pronounces a series of ***blessings***, then a series of ***woes***.
   1. He describes how ***things*** ***are***.
   2. The ***blessed*** are those who sure don’t look that way.
   3. Victims are ***blessed***, we are ***blessed*** for we are victims.
2. These ***blessings*** are pointed at us.
   1. There was only one ***lesson*** that day, only one ***crowd***.
   2. We are not responsible for what ***people*** ***hear***.
3. ***Wealth***.
   1. We live in one of the ***wealthiest*** countries in the world.
   2. Wealth can be either a ***blessing*** or a ***woe***, but it cannot bring us is eternal life.
4. ***Hunger***.
   1. Very few of us know what ***hunger*** feels like.
   2. Food can be a ***blessing*** or a ***woe***, but there are lots of different ways to be hungry.
5. ***Laughing*** and ***Weeping***.
   1. People in a wedding party are so ***happy***, they ***cried***.
   2. In the midst of ***grief***, there was ***laughter***.
   3. Emotions can be a ***blessing*** or a ***woe***, but we are seldom honest about how we are feeling.
6. ***Accepted*** or ***Persecuted***.
   1. We try to keep our ***religion*** to ourselves.
   2. Religious convictions can be a ***blessing*** or a ***woe***.
7. You are blessed, because the ***Savior*** loves you.
   1. Hunger and thirst for ***righteousness***.
   2. Desire ***knowledge*** and ***relationship*** found so deep in God’s word you can go no deeper.
   3. Why should I gain from His reward? He ***loves*** us.

**Script:**

Last week I spoke about our need to go deep, in order to fulfill the call of God in our life. I stated that if we were willing to follow the Lord in faith, He would equip us and supply our need. As I prepared this week I was reminded of the song we sang a few weeks back, ***How Deep The Father's Love For Us***. I am taken to the end of the Gospels and to a teaching moment we should all know by heart.

It is the cross of Jesus. There he hangs, the Son of God, suffering the unimaginable agonies of crucifixion, the most degrading and cruel form of execution the imperial power of that age was able to imagine.

There he hangs, and slowly his life’s blood stains the wood and the ground below. To speak at all while losing breath and life is a hard enough task. Even harder, it would seem, to surpass the urge to sink into a bottomless pit of despair, or perhaps spend your last wind cursing mightily the enemies who have put you there to die a death so horrid.

But Jesus does not curse. According to Luke’s Gospel, he speaks three times, and what he says are words of forgiveness, mercy, hope. First, he speaks about his tormentors. “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.” Then he speaks to a fellow prisoner. “I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” Last of all, he sums up his entire life. “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”

And what is our place in this picture—yours and mine? That is what takes me to the song I mentioned earlier. Hear the words of verse 2:

*Behold the Man upon a cross, My sin upon His shoulders*

*Ashamed I hear my mocking voice, Call out among the scoffers*

*It was my sin that held Him there, Until it was accomplished*

*His dying breath has brought me life, I know that it is finished*

Why would he do such a thing? Why would he give His life for a sinner such as me? The answer is LOVE. He humbled Himself and not only took my sin upon himself and paid my price, but he did it, Humbly, for each of us. It is we who placed him there. It is for us he is nailed to the cross. It is for us this man dies.

So the cross is a revelation of the victim Jesus. And it is revelation of us as victimizers. All of us. With faith comes the realization: I not only am the reason he was crucified, but it was actually me and you who crucified him! We are victimizers of Jesus, and we are victimizers of each other in a hundred ways large and small. But our identity in this broken world does not end here. We are victimizers, yes; but each of us is also a victim. Each of us ends up sometimes on the receiving end of violence, contempt, mistreatment, and even self-loathing. Each of us is a victim.

Now the language of victimhood has become very popular in our time. Some people point out loudly and often with justification that they are victims. They suffer because of their race, they suffer because of their ethnicity, they suffer because of their sexual orientation, they suffer because their economic or social status, and many times they suffer because of the choices one makes in this lifetime.

But they also suffer because that is just how it is; they suffer because of age or handicap or gender. They suffer, so they say, because those in power are too conservative or those who control the media are too liberal. Some recognize their victimhood because a drunk driver killed a person they loved, or because they smoked cigarettes for thirty years. These people—and some of us are among them—these people and many others identify themselves as victims, and often their claims contain a good deal of truth.

This leads us to consider another learning point this morning, found in our sermon passage for today; found in Luke 6:17-26. It’s called the Sermon on the Plain, because that’s where Jesus is at the time. Matthew has a similar account, known as the Sermon on the Mount. But it’s Luke’s version we consider today. Stand with me and share in the reading of this passage this morning.

*(17)He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. (18)They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. (19)And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them. (20)Then he looked up at his disciples and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. (21)"Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. (22)"Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. (23)Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. (24)"But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. (25)"Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. "Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. (26)"Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets. Luke 6:17-26 NRSV*

Surrounded by a vast crowd, Jesus pronounces a series of blessings. Then he pronounces a series of woes. Note carefully what this means. He doesn’t tell anyone to do anything. Instead, he describes how things are. And how things are, according to Jesus, is the inside-out or the upside-down version of how we usually regard them. The poor will be rich, the hungry will be fed, the grieving will one day laugh again.

Who really has it bad? Who really has it good? Who has joy waiting for them? Who can expect sorrow in the future? Our society today has its answers of these questions, and they are pretty much the same answers that we find coming from the contemporaries of Jesus.

We think the ones who have it bad are the poor and the hungry, the sad and the scorned. We think the ones who have it good are the rich and the well-fed, the satisfied and the respectable. Jesus says something different. The blessed are those who sure don’t look that way. Joy is stored up for them.

Actually the “them” here is us, or so it would seem. Jesus says as much. He looks at the faces of the people around him—it is a diverse audience: disciples and strangers, Jews and Gentiles—he looks them in the face and says: Blessed are you if you are this way, but woe to you if you are that way. He’s talking about the people in front of him, and he’s talking about us here this morning. And one thing he tells us is that victims are blessed, and we are blessed insofar as we are victims.

So this teaching moment stands in direct contrast to the other one. At the cross, Jesus is the victim and we are victimizers. Here we are victims; at the hands of another victimizer. These blessings are pointed at us, intended for those who humble themselves and follow Christ.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ represents the up-ending of conventional values. In the days of Jesus and in our own time, the conventional perspective distinguishes clearly between winners and losers, and history is recorded by the winners. But with the Gospel traveling throughout the world, the world starts to change, however slowly. Now the losers have a voice, and history is written differently than it was before.

There was only one lesson that day. There was only one crowd. But there were a myriad of responses, because the poor felt encouraged, but the wealthy felt judged. The hungry went away hopeful, but the well-fed went away worried about the future. And it occurs to me that, every time a preacher steps into a pulpit, there is never just one audience present, or just one sermon preached. You will leave this place today and every one of you will have heard a different sermon. We are responsible for what we say, but we are not responsible for what people hear. Something that I say today will catch your interest, or perhaps something will offend you, or something may make you wonder. I think Jesus knew that, and that is why his teaching was always so provocative.

But I’m wondering what kind of a sermon you need today. Do you need a blessing, or do you need a woe? Do you need a pat on the back, or do I need a kick in the butt? What would Jesus have us take with us from this Plain Sermon of so long ago? I think he would want us to consider four issues. Whether our lives are fractured or whole; whether we are filled with delight or filled with despair, I believe that Jesus would have us one message with four parts…for all of us.

The first message has to do with wealth. We live in one of the wealthiest counties in one of the wealthiest countries in the world. By the world’s standards, we are rich, yet many of us struggle to pay for our living. There is often a wide gap between our needs and our wants, and it fills us with all sorts of frustration, confusion and anxiety.

Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard once wrote: I walked into a spectacular cathedral surrounded by stained glass windows. I watched as the preacher, dressed in silk robes opened a bible with gold edges and read these words: “If anyone wants to be my disciple, let them sell their possessions, give away their money, and come follow me.” And Kierkegaard said “I looked around, and no one else was laughing!”

Wealth can be either a blessing or a woe. It can bring us joy or it can bring us conflict. The thing it cannot bring us is eternal life. And yet we seek financial security as if it can really make us secure. And Jesus says it can’t, but he can.

The second message of this text has to do with hunger. I find it fascinating how we Americans are so fixated on food…including me. If you pick up a magazine or a newspaper you are bound to find the words “Keto”, “Atkins”, “South Beach” or “low carb” or “high protein.” We are obsessed with food. We are supposed to eat to live, but many times we live to eat, and yet very few of us know what hunger feels like. We could sit at a buffet and complain about the flavor of certain dishes, it has too many calories, its too hot, its too cold, its too sweet, its too bitter. Food can be a blessing or a woe. But there are lots of different ways to be hungry.

And then there is the issue of laughing and weeping. I have officiated at weddings, and the people in the wedding party were so happy, they cried. I have officiated at funerals, and in the midst of the family’s sadness and grief, there was laughter. Sometimes, the most heartbroken people walk around with smiles on their faces because they don’t want people to know of their pain. “How are you today?” “Oh, I’m fine.” But they’re not fine. Others have wonderful lives, happy marriages, healthy children and beautiful homes, but they walk around with glum faces. “Are you mad?” “No. its just a poker face.” Emotions can be a blessing or a woe, but we are seldom honest about how we are feeling.

Finally, there is this issue of being accepted or persecuted for what we believe. Some people in Third World countries are persecuted for their faith in Christ. Muslims in France will soon be forbidden to wear religious garments in public. Jews in Nazi Germany were marked with patches and systematically executed…because they were Jews. But in this country, where we boast of our religious freedom, we mostly try to keep our religion to ourselves. Wouldn’t want to offend anyone. Wouldn’t want to be rejected because we are Lutheran, or Catholic, or Baptist. “Religion is a private matter” we say. So we shut up. Religious convictions can be a blessing or a woe. It all depends on if our walk resembles our talk.

I don’t know if all of this is what Jesus had in mind when he delivered that Sermon on the Plain 2000 years ago. What I do know is that he has come to this place, to enter the lives of the humble and the proud, to touch the lives of the weeping and the laughing…he has come to bring us a single message, and it is this: you are blessed, because the Savior loves you. And if that’s all you hear in this sermon, it will be enough.

But here is what I find challenging. When we think of the sacrifice of Christ, how does it make us feel? Does it make us feel fortunate, does it make us feel humbled; does it make us feel empowered, or does it make us feel discouraged? Do we feel a hunger to go deeper, or are we satisfied with the crumbs we find under the table? Do we thirst to understand the deeper truths of what Jesus is talking about, or are we satisfied with a small sip from God’s cup of knowledge? Which blessings are you receiving and are you satisfied with them; or are you wanting to go deeper? How much deeper are you willing to go?

Today we are challenged to hunger and thirst for righteousness; to desire a closer relationship with our Lord and Savior. It requires us to dive deep into the word of God and the teachings available to us. We must dive deeper than we have ever been before. Don’t be satisfied with the easy stuff that lies on the surface; desire the knowledge and relationship that is found so deep into the word of God that you can go no deeper.

Hear the final verse of the song I mentioned earlier:

*I will not boast in anything, No gifts no pow’r no wisdom*

*But I will boast in Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection\*

*Why should I gain from His reward, I cannot give an answer*

*But this I know with all my heart, His wounds have paid my ransom*