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Epiphany 6 C
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“Woe to You!”

TEXT: Luke 6:17-26

And 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 and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. And those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all. And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. “Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. “Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. “Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets. “But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. “Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry. “Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. “Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets. (ESV)

Introduction

As we’ve journeyed through Epiphany, we’ve heard about many miracles Jesus used to reveal himself to his people. His baptism in the Jordan River. His miraculous appearance to Paul on the Road to Damascus. His disappearing through the crowd at Nazareth. The miraculous catch of fish. And next week, the transfiguration of our Lord on the mountain.

But this morning’s Gospel starts out mundane in comparison. “And he healed diseases and cured people of unclean spirits.” Then the great “Sermon on the Plain.” Even the name seems less interesting: would you rather hear Jesus preach: in Colorado or in Kansas?

What are we to learn from this? Well, we learn that Jesus could sound like a Lutheran when he wanted to. He loved paradoxes – he loved making common sense uncommon.

I. Who is Blessed and who is Not?

“Blessed” in English, or “makarioi” in Greek, comes up several times in our lesson this morning. It doesn’t mean “happy” or “filled with pleasure” or “smiley.” Its meaning is closer to “fortunate,” or “free from normal cares and worries.” You might even say “lucky”:

The poor are lucky
The hungry are lucky
The weeping are lucky

On the other hand, there are those who are “not so lucky”. They are in “woe” – “ou-I” in Greek. This is the Greek equivalent of Homer Simpsons’ “D’OH!”:

If you’re rich, D’OH!
If you’re filled up to the brim, D’OH!
If you’re laughing, D’OH!

This is not normal. This goes against all common sense. What could be more unfortunate than being poor? Than having something to cry about? Than not being able to feed your family? Let’s consider these paradoxes in more detail:

A) POOR vs. RICH

Fortunate are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God
Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation

The Kingdom of God and consolation fit beautifully together. The Kingdom of God in Luke’s Gospel is synonymous for Christ. Jesus *is* the Kingdom of God. And he promised that he would send the Comforter – the one who brings consolation. That Comforter, the Holy Spirit, would bind that kingdom, the body of Christ, together. The Holy Spirit would be the one who brings people into the kingdom of God in baptism. He would be the one who brings people into Christ. The Spirit who draws people to confess his name, to confess that Christ is here with us, where his Gospel is taught and proclaimed and preached.

The poor have nothing of their own in which to trust. Money can’t bring them release from the cares and concerns of life. It’s easier for them to trust God because they have less other things to trust.

The rich need reasons to believe – they are already “blessed.” That’s why Jesus said it was so hard for the rich to enter communion with him. It was “easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle” (Luke 18:24-25). The riches of the rich can easily become their Holy Spirit, Christ, and God.

B) Hungry and Weeping VS. Filled and Laughing

The same goes for the hungry and the laughing. You who are hungry NOW WILL be satisfied. You have to THINK about where food comes from. Who ultimately provides it. And what a blessing it is when it comes.

You who are filled NOW don’t have to think about food. It just shows up on your table. It’s easy to see yourself as the bread winner, rather than as a bread receiver from God. Those who are filled now will later be the hungry ones.

You who are weeping now know the hardships of life. And therefore you know sin better than anyone. One of my favorite verses from the Old Testament is found in the book of Ecclesiastes: “*Sorrow is better than laughter, and a sad face is good for the heart*” (Eccl.

7:3). That may seem morbid, and maybe it is. But it's also what Jesus is saying here in the "Sermon on the Plain." Those who are wearing a sad face have to think about where happiness might come from. You QUEST for happiness, search it out, and don't rest until it comes.

You who laugh now, can't understand sorrow. You can't understand why EVERYONE isn't happy all the time! And consequently, you tend to ignore or downplay sin and its horrible effects. You get tricked into thinking everything's okay when everything is far from okay.

ILLUS: That's why, I think, it's incredibly hard to be a Lutheran in the richer parts of Southern California. Everything is so perfect! Palm trees, warm weather all the time, good roads and beautiful planned communities. How do you explain to a southern Californian about sin?

II. Those Who Reach for Christ are Blessed

Which leads to the real point:

THE ONES WHO HAVE NOTHING ARE BLESSED, FOR THEY ARE THE MOST LIKELY TO PLACE THEIR FAITH IN CHRIST AND BE SAVED.

Poverty in itself is not a blessing. Hunger is not in itself lucky. Sorrow is not in itself happiness. But those things cause us to seek out a Savior and understand the depth of our need for him. The Holy Spirit uses those things to draw us to Christ, to bring us into the Kingdom of God.

And so Christ's name becomes our own. Because of that people may hate us, exclude us, revile us and push us away and out of their lives because we wear Christ's name.

Those who are rich, who are filled, who are laughing, often want some kind of proof. They want cured diseases and cast out spirits as proof. They need a real illustration that their laughter, their food, and their riches are worth nothing. They need to be convinced somehow that they actually AREN'T blessed, but rather under a WOE!

That's when it's worth noting one of only two times the word "blessed" is used in John's Gospel, right at the end:

Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; *blessed* are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:29)

Don't look at the miracles and supernatural signs; your riches or your poverty, your laughter or your sorrow. Look only at Christ and cling to his name, the name he has given to you. Forsake everything else for that one name, and great will be your riches and your laughter in heaven. Amen.