

Knowing Jesus in Epiphany
Shedding Some Light
Luke 6:17-26
6th Sunday of Epiphany (C)
February 17, 2019
Pastor Dea Sharp, Pikes Peak UMC

Luke 6:17-26 (NRSV) Jesus Teaches and Heals

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.

Blessings and Woes

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^[a] 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.

Let’s think back to the first Sunday of the year, to Epiphany Sunday.

When we touched on, (FOR a central theme or image OF Epiphany) LIGHT.

That light could be **us** beginning to “get it” and our own “light bulb” come on. Or recalling that Epiphany begins with the light of that special star leading the wise men to the find Jesus.

The season of Epiphany ends, this year, on the first Sunday of March which is Transfiguration Sunday and we’ll read about the shining radiance, a light of Jesus...the glory of God showing through him.

Today's reading is Luke's version of the beatitudes.

They don't MENTION light, but they do **SHED SOME LIGHT** on what God considers to be the order of things.

When we consider the condition of our lives:

- We're reasonably well off financially aren't we?
- We have security and a lot of material possessions.
- We can eat out and have comforts of our homes and clothing.
- We enjoy life and have things to look forward to.

And, *most of the time*, we're well thought of in our church and neighborhood.

Lookin' good, aren't we?

Yes we are!

Now, let's consider others in our community and the world.

- Are some of them poor, hungry, grieving, left out, and unloved?

We're not naïve! Of course, we *know* there are people enduring those conditions.

NOT lookin' so good, are they?

That's the common, worldly view.

But imagine, just for a moment, that someone came in here and gathered the unfortunates around us, and tells them: "Are you ever lucky! How blessed you are to have such poverty and grief and misery in your lives."

I wonder how long that bearer of the news would last among us.

There'd be outrage and *some* of us would probably proclaim, "That person is crazy!"

Well, that's what Jesus was doing in Luke's words.

And Jesus may have been considered "crazy" by some – but sure not those he called blessed.

Contrary to some people's interpretations of them, the beatitudes are NOT about us.

They're NOT commands for how we should live or what we should do.

Our families would have US committed if we said,

- “I’ve got to go out and get poor”
- “I should weep more”
- “I’m gonna work to be persecuted.”

That’s NOT what Jesus is telling the crowd that day.

That kind of advice would be frustrating to us.

And, while it might sound like something we *could* say, I don’t know anyone **ANYONE** who would set out to do those things!

And besides, would any of those things (being poor, weepy or persecuted) count IF YOU DO THEM ON PURPOSE TO GET BLESSED?

Just doesn’t seem right!

So, when you go home and re-read today’s verses, (‘cause you do that, right?) you won’t find Jesus saying “these are orders.” Nowhere.

Read it again and you’ll see that Jesus is just describing reality; he is NOT telling the disciples, or the crowd OR US to DO anything.

In the light of Epiphany, pardon the pun, WHAT ARE THE Beatitudes for?

If they’re not instructions or guidelines for living...

...if they don't shine any light on how we're *supposed* to behave, what are they good for?

And considering where we are, chronologically, it didn’t take long into Jesus’ ministry for him to start turning the world upside down and as he will continue to do, confound popular wisdom.

Jesus looked to the people that we pity and who seem hopeless, and said:

“Blessed are you who are poor, who are hungry, who weep.

Blessed are you when people hate you, exclude you, revile you, and defame you.”

Then, while folks’ chins were still on the ground, he looked to the others who are a lot like us, who seem to have it made, and said,

“Woe to you who are rich, who are full, and who are laughing. Woe to you when all speak well of you.”

Woe to people like us!

Woe?

WHOA!

What Jesus is really saying is: “Watch out!! Your outward blessedness is in truth a great danger.”

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Another focus for the meaning of the beatitudes could be that they are for THE WORLD; that the beatitudes point out ways to help us live well in the world or at least, to do things to do to make the world a better place.

Perhaps, the world would be a better place when we realize how **good we have things** and as a result want to make the world a better place for everyone.

One commentary I read said that there’s a problem with that thinking.

They said that, “You can only believe that the world will respond kindly to the suggestions in the beatitudes if you *know absolutely* nothing about the world.”

Now, to be clear, Jesus was NO fool.

He *knew* those things.

That’s NOT the LIGHT the beatitudes were being used to shed.

They shine light, but I’ll dare say NOT about the way the world works.

They **aren’t about the world** anymore than they’re telling us how to act.

The beatitudes are about God...

...About who God is...

...about who God blesses...

and what the kingdom of God is like.

The beatitudes point toward what matters to God – especially who is important to God, and what God pays attention to.

And Dear Ones we need a bright light, a spotlight, a flood light for us to recognize those attributes about God and what effect they can have ON US.

BUT: It's up to us.

The idea is that if we look and really see who is and what God considers happy (or blessed) then we'll also be open to where Jesus is leading us and how we'll use the knowledge he's giving us.

Jesus is trying to shake us loose from what we *assume* what will work in the world. He's giving us a different way of seeing and doing.

We are NOT being given a bunch of rules or instructions to follow.

We're being offered a *new vision* FOR our lives ***and the possibilities that will come with that new vision.***

So, what Jesus is offering – shedding new light on – is God.

And, how are we gonna respond?

IF God's nature is really like this; if God has the priorities of the beatitudes, then what could that mean for us?

How could our lives be different?

First, let's understand that by using blessed's and woe's, Jesus isn't glamorizing poverty and suffering or calling us to go slumming or making ourselves sick and weak.

It's deeper than that.

Jesus KNEW that poverty could lead to despair and suicide, to crime and violence.

BUT: he also knew, - and this is where we need to "see the light" and learn...Jesus knew that having **need** can lead us to God.

Haven't we ALL experienced, maybe not physical hunger but different levels of despair with our health or finances, with despair for our children or our church that spurred us on to seek God? I know I have.

Jesus listed the "woe's" because he knew that most people, like us, would have a hard time imagining that "being poor" could help us.

And Jesus also knew that being full: full belly, full wallet, full OF good public opinion - is what a lot of us **really** seek.

But, most of all, he knew that purchasing *stuff* and having to buy insurance **for** the stuff; that having a savings account for retirement or rainy days would lead us to *think* that we're safe and secure and in control of our lives.

It's TOO easy for us to think WE'RE able to provide everything we need.

With all our resources and abilities, think about this, with ALL THOSE things, we're in danger of forgetting that we need anything...especially of our need for a savior. And if we forget THAT, we aren't letting God fully into our hearts.

So, Jesus, in the beatitudes – the blessed's and the woe's - invites us to join the spirit of the poor he was talking to long ago....that he's talking about TODAY. The have-nots of the first century didn't have anything to expect from the world...but they could expect *everything* from God.

So think about this LIGHT SHEDDING IDEA: It's **so much easier to** welcome God into our lives when we know our sin and acknowledge our spiritual bankruptcy.

It's when we're that kind of poor – empty of the notion that we can do "it" (whatever "it" is) by ourselves...then we're empty enough to know our absolute need for what Christ has for us...IS for us...

...and how blessed, how enviable, how fortunate we are (and the people we share this SPOT LIGHT with WILL BE) to understand our urgent need for the *everything* that only God can provide and that we can simply ask God for.

I've been praying about pray-ers for this church and Family of Faith.

Pray-ers who will commit to focused time to walk around our building and parking lot; to hold our directory of members; to sit and make the ministries and small groups and your pastor a specific prayer focus *regularly*.

I've been praying that as each of us opens up to our neediness, that Jesus can show us the way to look toward God, to turn to God for help in our lives and in our attitudes and in our values.

It's my faith-filled belief that when we can recognize our need we can begin to learn where God leads us.

And God is limitless so where God leads us is limitless, too.

I truly believe that!

And pray that you'll embrace that with me.

Let's pray and seek God with a sense of helplessness that brings us before God just as we are but, like I said last Sunday, where God won't leave us.

God's power can transform us and energize us and fill us – even more – with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to be the WHO Jesus calls us, as disciples, to be. And oh what “blessed” people we will be!

Let's pray:

God, help us to empty ourselves enough to know that You will make us blessed. Empower us to walk in a manner worthy of the calling You have given us. Help us in all our interactions with one another to have humble and gentle hearts. Grant us patience for one another, bearing with one another in love. We praise You for our Savior who has shed some light on who You are.

Amen!