

Luke 6:12-26

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[0 : 0 0] In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. And when day came, he called his disciples, and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles.

Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon, who was called the Zealot, and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

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 he 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.

[1 : 2 6] 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.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, good morning.

When Holy Trinity got underway, it launched with 37 non-indigenously urban Anglos from the suburbs.

And when people asked me, what do you love about your church? My answer was simple and clear. It's earnest commitment to be on mission, leaving houses and families and moving for the gospel.

[2 : 4 2] In our middle years, we're 16 years old now, people would ask me, what do you love about your church? And I would say, well, it's creativity.

It's creative force from all congregants. They are a marvel. I am the happiest of pastors watching a people productively engaged in the gospel.

More recently, when people ask me, what do you love about your church? I simply say, well, right now, there's just a little bit of everything in there. And I love it.

And that's the gospel. That collection of disparate, different people finding their way under one head, the Lord Jesus Christ, and in that, finding their way with one another.

Our text gives us the calling of the 12. It's right there in verses 12 through 16. And even there, the opportunistic capitalists like Levi now bedded down with Judas, son of James, and even those named Simon, who was a zealot.

[4 : 16] And beyond the calling of the 12, verses 17 to 20, the larger, what's called by Luke, the great crowd of disciples, the great multitude of people.

And then geographically given markers moving from the south to the north. Those who are assembling under his name in one place, under one word, as far down in the south as the region of Judea and Jerusalem, and working its way even north of where Jesus was at the moment, as far north as Tyre, and stretching all the way to Sidon along the seacoast.

What a family. began to gather. The calling of the 12. The crush of the crowds. Indicative that as the spiritual opposition began to grow in number and strength, so too the anointed one grew in numbers and in strength.

And while they were filled with fury, he was nevertheless multiplying his followers. It moves though, doesn't it, in verse 20?

Away immediately from the calling of the 12 and the crush of the crowds to the content of his message. This is our first look at what Jesus' preaching consisted of.

[5 : 48] at least in the gospel of Luke. This was all you had of Luke's or of the word of Christ. This is your first look at what he said and what he might have sounded like.

There was that offhand fulfillment reference he gave in Nazareth when he proclaimed today this reading has been fulfilled in your ears.

But at every other point, Luke has been content to reveal to us nothing about what Jesus said. The emphasis has been entirely on the effect.

Take a look. Just run through it. He's got intention in mind to have built to this point a moment of anticipation.

Chapter 2 verse 47 And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. Or chapter 4 and verse 22 And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth.

[7 : 11] Or verse 28 When they heard these things all in the synagogue were filled with wrath the effect of his preaching.

Verse 36 of the same chapter And they were all amazed and said to one another What is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits and they come out and reports about him namely about his preaching went into every place in the surrounding region.

Chapter 5 and verse 5 Luke continues with this undertone of effect and Simon answered Master we've toiled all night it took nothing but at your word I will let down the nets or verse 11 And when they had brought their boats to land they left everything and followed him.

What an effect! Verse 15 of chapter 5 But now even more the report about him went abroad and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities.

Verse 26 We have seen extraordinary things today. Verse 28 And Levi left everything and followed him.

[8 : 43] It goes on and on and on. All of those verses highly significant whetting our appetite for well I know the effect of his preaching but what did he say?

What is the content of his message? Well we've come to it. We set our eyes for the first time and in fresh ways upon verses that were the words that captivated the crowds drew in disciples and set the religious establishment of Israel into a fury.

Oh to hear these as those first followers on the level plane 13 words which to this day shake the world with divine power.

Blessed are you who are poor for yours is the kingdom of God.

you could shorten it to six words. Blessed are you who are poor.

[10 : 17] Who are the poor? Who were the poor of Jesus day? God it's almost impossible for us to wrap our minds around it in clean ways but I have seen attempts that some divide the first century Roman world along the following kind of social and economic lines.

the top layer of social stratification in the ancient society would have been the aristocratic families comprising maybe one or two percent of the population.

Moving down the ladder you find Levi's class of merchants and well-to-do capitalists well-off perhaps even artisans maybe another five to seven percent.

The priests certainly in that realm. The bulk of the population probably seventy-five percent. The working class merchants very few of them well-off.

Not lacking worldly goods but not running off at the first sign of thirty-two below. Finally beneath these the untouchables maybe fifteen percent in that day.

[11 : 44] Beggars cripples prostitutes criminals who actually their homes were the hedges outside the city gates.

So you have the landed gentry the working class and then the poor. The working class was by no means rich but they would never have considered themselves in that day as the poor.

It's different in America isn't it? We've decided on psychological grounds from much of what I can tell more than anything else that only the top one percent of us is rich while the other ninety-nine percent get to count ourselves as the poor.

Well regardless of what you think about the one percent it is an affront to the poor. to put the ninety-nine percent together.

What a joke. Got a job? Have any source of income? Have a family who occasionally helps?

[12 : 58] Is there an outside entity that provides grants that allow you to pursue educational goals? Then you're not poor.

Our soft society should get on a plane and walk in some of the slums of the world's great cities and there we will see the poor or closer to home take notice of the sidewalks and the underpasses where people sleep for these are the modern urban day equivalents of the hedges that housed the poor at night in the ancient world.

So to them Jesus says blessed are you who are poor for yours for yours is the kingdom of God.

What accounts for this divine preferential treatment of the poor? I remember being in math class well not really but maybe first or second grade they showed us those greater than signs and less than signs.

I mean the plus and minus was difficult enough for me but now I had to handle variables like greater than or less than. Does God have some deeper love for the poor?

[14 : 47] does he have a greater than love for the poor than the others? I don't think so. I think God according to the scriptures demonstrates himself to be entirely impartial.

It's the impartiality of God though that leads to his preferential treatment of the poor. He's responding in a sense to the partiality that rests in our own hearts toward the rich.

So given his knowledge that we are partial he will execute his impartiality by looking out for the one who has no voice on the stage upon which we walk.

So this last week we were at our dinner table reading through Exodus as we are this year in our home and we came across those words in the law where God warns the people to be very careful in their treatment of the widow and the sojourner lest you demonstrate some partiality against them and they cry out to God and God says if they do I will hear and the consequences for them will be wonderful and the consequences for you and your children will be disastrous God's preferential treatment for the poor grounded in his impartiality as a response to the partial heart of the human who discarded his word that we might advance in our own ways think of it imagine seeing a father on a beach with two children one let's say age 12 another age 2

I mean just imagine can you imagine that even today someone on the beach well I don't know about you I woke up this morning with that little bit of snow again and it's about done me in I know God asked Job the question you know have you seen where I hold the storehouses of snow and it's obvious to me that he does so over the skies of Chicago but if you think just for a moment of the days that are coming when you might be on 57th Street Beach you were to witness a father with a child age 12 and another age 2 you might notice that the 12 year old has a sense of latitude and freedom and that the father has a particular care over the two year old almost following the two year old all around you would be mistaken if you went to that father and said well I see you in the treatment of your children it's obvious you love your two year old more than the twelve year old the father would say are you out of your mind

[18:04] I love them both but the two year old requires my attention and so it is with God and the poor notice the collection of the Beatitudes here Luke brings together in his text they're all rooted in what I guess I would call the physicalities of life I mean look at the ones he chooses and he does choose blessed are you who are poor blessed are you who are hungry blessed are you who weep now that's a striking contrast to Matthew's list Luke intentionally passes over characteristics which might be explained away in spiritual terms there's nothing here about language like meek or pure in heart or peacemakers no poor hungry and ones who have suffered loss to the point of tears now I know that there are some here who would like me to point out that

Matthew adds to the poor the words in spirit but I will not I'm not preaching through Matthew I'm in Luke and besides for the well-being of my own soul I have written in the margins of my own Bible don't ever qualify this away there's something here though that's also equally interesting whatever his words were they don't somehow magically reverse the condition of his listener in other words they don't promise you we would be in trouble to promise more from these words than

Jesus actually gives yes you have the kingdom but you shall laugh you shall be satisfied or at the end of verses 23 your reward is great in heaven there's a future orientation to his preaching so his words to the poor in one sense were incredibly hopeful yours is the kingdom and he immediately follows it with this tonal quality of hang on stay in the game not yet notice your association with me now in poverty is not rewarded necessarily as a consequence of following me says

Jesus but in due time in due time by and by you will be rewarded now if you want to know what you get in this life well it's quite simple he says there you get good company blessed are you when people hate you when they exclude you revile me and spurn your name evil on account of the son of man rejoice in that day that is you could rejoice even now leap for joy even now for behold your reward is great in heaven for so their fathers did to the prophets you're going to be in good company now you're with the prophetic few so to the poor to the hungry to those who weep Jesus says and I say to you yours is the kingdom of God hang in there sing for joy even now you walk with the wonderful few blessed quite woodenly approved by

God so the application it seems is present day rejoicing and leaping there was a day when I saw this some of you were there the slums of Nairobi back room it took us an hour to negotiate the restaurant to allow us even to use the back room because we were prating in over 50 women full blown HIV and we finally commandeered that space man it was hot in that room song dance the turning of mourning to joy fearful for me my daughter arms around them all me waiting for the Purell

[24 : 09] I've seen this day well with that the text takes a harsh turn doesn't it it jarringly moves from this mental image of God's own poorly dressed malnourished unshowered host of blessed ones leaping and dancing to the other side of town where we find a gathering of well dressed fully fed finely accessorized waxed laced ones who have now become the gathering of the eternally excluded I'm sure it's not easy I'm sure it's not hard for you to imagine what the assembly of verses 24 through 26 looks like a man slate gray suit little splash of pink fully accessorized and something that adorns a station in life here thrown forward into an eschatological end it could actually be reaching from the other side and be that which hangs in it's not hard for you to envision 24 to 26 it's not hard for me either from where

I stand row upon row upon row of the blessed and the woe like corn and harvest and all its glory unaware that the eschatological combine of the ages is already in the field and approaching in ways that separate the grain from the chaff from that which will provide a feast and that which is reserved for the fire let us not mock the word of God for Luke does what Mark and Matthew do not do he puts these side by side so that you would see blessed are you who are poor next to but woe to you who are rich blessed are you who are hungry woe to you who are full now blessed are you who weep now woe to you who laugh now there they are on public display with direct correspondence intended now it's not hope for me or for you but it's certainly there

I think if we heard Jesus for ourselves it would be a clear indication that there's hope for some but not for most I mean Levi got in I liked that last week didn't you the opportunistic capitalist found his way but but not without repentance in fact his little gathering I'm sure was the consequence of his decision to follow Christ and his desire not to just hang with sinners but to introduce all his friends to the Savior and he blew a big wad that week so that someone would hear from the man who changed his life so there there is hope for some but not for most the teaching almost appears lyrical doesn't it it's poetic it's it's what

Hebrew literature does when it does kind of a contrastive parallels it almost signifies to me that Jesus when he preached you would have thought him to be the Old Testament prophet and the wisdom teacher par excellence stripped down raw exposure he was like a Johnny Cash minimalist on vinyl so you could hear the imperfection and know it was real eternal truths upon which our eternal state hangs!

blessed the rich heritage of ancient promises that are reserved for salvation woes reminiscent of ancient texts that are centered in final judgment Lord have mercy really!

[31 : 12] Lord! have mercy our heavenly father I come to you in hopes that there's not some psychological ploy in play may we not hear this text through that lens rather may we just hear Jesus on the plain calling out to all that any might come and I ask Lord that we would in some measure be able to work this text in reverse and move from the back end to the beginning that having mourned we would dance in Christ's name

Amen