

February 13, 2022  
Sixth Sunday After the Epiphany  
Luke 6:17-26

Jesus states the blessings and then the woes. It's good news, bad news and we're left in the tension, worried about where we might fall in the equation.

At first glance we should be pretty worried when we hear what Jesus says. He pronounces "woe" upon the rich, the full, the laughing and the well esteemed. And by the world's measure we here in the U.S.A. are pretty wealthy, pretty well fed, pretty happy and entertained, and I'd bet that most folks speak well of us—we're pretty upright and well-behaved Christians after all. And we should be worried about our own attitude toward the blessings because, let's face it, we're none too eager to be poor, hungry, weeping and reviled. It's just not a good look to us.

There is comfort here, however, when you see Christ in these blessings. Remember that Jesus in His incarnation is the ultimate example of becoming poor—giving up the glory and majesty of God to join the poverty of the fallen creation; not even as an earthly king but as the child of a poor peasant couple. Jesus laments and weeps over the crowds who are like sheep without a shepherd, over His own disciples who just can't get over their worldly thinking, over the city of Jerusalem that shall suffer destruction for its rejection of God's Messiah. Jesus hungers in the temptation in the wilderness and at other times of His most-pious fasting. And of course Jesus will be hated and reviled by Jew and Gentile alike as He is railroaded, tortured and crucified.

The comfort is that, by God's grace, you stand baptized into this Christ so, despite yourself, you are made this poor, hungry, weeping and reviled person who receives the blessings

of God's kingdom now and the satisfaction and bliss of your reward in heaven. This is God's gift to you in His Son, Jesus Christ the Lord.

That is indeed wonderful comfort directly from our loving Creator to His fallen creation. Yet still, we live in the tension this same God speaks to us through His prophet Jeremiah:

*“Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD...Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD.”*

The blessings of Christ in your Holy Baptism are there for you always—your baptism is Christ Jesus in His promise to be with you always, even to the end of the age. But the tension is to live in that Baptism which spurns the flesh and the fallen world versus the prompting of that sinful nature that still sticks to you leading you to leave your Baptism in the wings and embrace the fallen world.

One of the lies that Satan foists upon Christ's church is the idea that things have changed since Old Testament times, that back then God was more angry and punishing towards Israel's sins but now that Jesus has come, died and risen again to gain our forgiveness, God somehow has become more tolerant. This leads to folks thinking that, so long as they give a faithful nod to Jesus every now and again, giving an enthusiastic nod to sin in the rest of life doesn't really matter—it's all a wash.

Wrong. Same God Old Testament and New Testament. Right here today you've got blessings and curses in the Old Testament and the same coming straight from the mouth of Jesus in the New Testament. Blessings follow living a life trusting God's promise of Messiah to come in years past, and trusting in those exact same promise fulfilled on this side of the cross. Trusting is trusting, rejecting is rejecting.

The good news is that Jesus is not speaking judgment in these Lukan beatitudes. He is speaking His Word to His disciples, those who are following in faith, and His Words are there to have an effect on them, as they are to have an effect on you. You hear this and you worry that you aren't living up to Christ's standard—that's contrition, the first part of repentance. You see that you are poor in spirit, hungering to be righteous, mournful of your sinful flesh and you are reviled by your own sorry self. This drives you into the arms of Jesus, into His church to be fed by His Gospel Word, filled with His love and forgiveness and made joyful in your salvation guaranteed. The good news abounds!

But these "woes" Jesus speaks are also for you disciples, warnings against the temptations we face each and every day. These make us worry and that's a very good thing. This puts us on guard and helps us see where the flesh is making inroads and winning victories—the places where we may be trying to keep that baptismal washing from reaching.

Those other beatitudes in Matthew are a bit different from these, and I do believe these are two different sermons from Jesus, not two differing takes on the same sermon. In Matthew it's all blessings and those blessings seem to be rather clearly of a spiritual bent. Here Jesus speaks blessings and curses and the language, while it should be taken spiritually it is also very pointedly down to earth. The blessed are simply the poor, hungry, weeping and maligned. The cursed are the rich, full, laughing and respected.

Look at your life. Is your goal to be rich, full, happy and respected? That's most certainly the goals the world preaches. And let's face it, we like to pursue these blessings of the flesh, but in a "Christian" way, don't we? Is...this...wise? Baptized into Christ's death and resurrection, is this the way we are in Christ, seeking to be rich, full, happy and respected? Is this a Christian default mode?

Is not the way of Christ to be giving, sacrificial even? Is not the way of Christ to be loving, seeking the well being of others, willing to suffer discomfort for Christ's sake, willing to suffer rebuke and reviling for the sake of Jesus and the furtherance of His kingdom? Yes, it is! As Christ's sermon continues in next week's Gospel lesson we are going to get exactly that.

So like I said, each one of us should be kind of worried as we read these blessings and woes and examine our lives accordingly. Where are you placing your trust? If you're thinking you can strike a balance between the LORD and the flesh, read Jeremiah again. Listen more closely to Jesus. Striking a balance between trust in the LORD and trust in the world is an attempt to strike a balance between the blessing and the curse—it cannot be done. You get one or the other. You inherit Christ's everlasting kingdom or you receive the world doomed to destruction.

I want to let that thought hang there, disturbing each and every one of us, allowing God's Word to have the effect it will on His disciples.

Now as His disciples, let us seek to live in our Holy Baptism—live in and as the Christ who claimed us there. There is no balance to be made. Let us trust solely in Christ crucified, knowing our goal is the eternal life to which He rose forever.

We do not live for and trust in the world, for those who are rich in the world, full of the world, laugh with the world and loved by the world belong to the world. Those who trust in Christ though it means suffering the loss of the world belong to the Christ who is risen beyond the world. Live in His blessings and yours is the kingdom of heaven.

Amen.