

Sunday, February 13, 2022 – “Blessed by Jesus”  
– Bible Study & Reflection on Luke 6:17-26

Dear Members & Friends:

I invite you to read the following passage from Luke 6:17-26 (*Common English Bible*).

<sup>17</sup> Jesus came down from the mountain with them and stood on a large area of level ground. A great company of his disciples and a huge crowd of people from all around Judea and Jerusalem and the area around Tyre and Sidon joined him there. <sup>18</sup> They came to hear him and to be healed from their diseases, and those bothered by unclean spirits were healed. <sup>19</sup> The whole crowd wanted to touch him, because power was going out from him and he was healing everyone.

<sup>20</sup> Jesus raised his eyes to his disciples and said:

“Happy are you who are poor,  
because God’s kingdom is yours.

<sup>21</sup> Happy are you who hunger now,  
because you will be satisfied.

Happy are you who weep now,  
because you will laugh.

<sup>22</sup> Happy are you when people hate you, reject you, insult you, and condemn your name as evil because of the Human One. <sup>23</sup> Rejoice when that happens! Leap for joy because you have a great reward in heaven. Their ancestors did the same things to the prophets.

<sup>24</sup> But how terrible for you who are rich,  
because you have already received your comfort.

<sup>25</sup> How terrible for you who have plenty now,  
because you will be hungry.

How terrible for you who laugh now,  
because you will mourn and weep.

<sup>26</sup> How terrible for you when all speak well of you.  
Their ancestors did the same things to the false prophets.

A couple Sundays ago, we noted the fierce negative reaction that Jesus received when he preached at his hometown synagogue (Luke 4). Now Jesus appears to have at last found a more receptive audience for his preaching. Great crowds are following after him (Luke 6:17). Luke implies that the crowds clamor after him because of the mighty works of healing that Jesus performs.

But then, just like he did in Nazareth, Jesus begins to preach. Jesus comes down on a level place, coming down to their level, speaking in language they could understand. The sermon begins with a series of blessings pronounced upon those who have received mostly curses from life and the world. Jesus begins his Sermon on the Plain with good news for those who have mostly received bad news their whole life. Then the sermon makes a turn, and Jesus pronounces a series of curses and warnings to those whom the world considers to be most blessed during their lives with good news. These folk that Jesus curses are the VIPS, the power brokers, the Who’s Who of society.

In the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:17-49), Jesus identifies specifically those who are blessed. The blessings sound familiar to us because they are the blessings that began his “Sermon on the Mount” in Matthew 5:1-7:29. Indeed, the same blessings are in Luke’s version of Jesus’ Sermon on the Plain. But when we compare these two versions of the sermon, we immediately note

some interesting dissimilarities: Luke's rendition is briefer, edgier, with a sharp contrasting of "you" who are blessed and "you" who are cursed. In Luke, Jesus addresses his followers. In Matthew, Jesus appears to address the "multitudes," and his disciples listen in on his words to the crowd. Matthew's sermon is noted for its sublime language; Luke's version of the sermon is a straightforward announcement of the nature of Jesus' reign (compare with Luke 4:14-30).

Surely Jesus means for his listeners to ask ourselves the question that comes to our mind whenever we hear a sermon, "Where do I fit in? Am I among the blessed or the cursed? First, Jesus speaks directly to his disciples (Luke 6:20) who are among a "great company of his disciples and a huge crowd of people from all around Judea and Jerusalem and the area around Tyre and Sidon" (Luke 6:17). Scholars have debated whether these words are meant for the crowds or just for the inner circle, the Twelve. However, by the point we get to verse 27, we find ourselves among "you who are willing to hear." Jesus' sermon becomes an address of blessings and curses for everybody. And yet, everybody is not dealt with equally by God, at least in the Sermon on the Plain. There's good news for some, bad news for others. All must reckon with Jesus and his blessings and curses.

Perhaps we should restrain ourselves from asking too quickly, "Where am I in this division of the blessed and the cursed?" Maybe we first should ask, "Who is this God who both blesses and curses, and what does it tell us about God to know whom God blesses and curses?" What if we are blessed or cursed depending upon how we respond the poor, the hungry, the grieving? What if the times I share my money and my food with those in need end up being the times when my soul is in line with God's intentions? Could that be both a time and a state which defines true happiness, fulfillment, satisfaction, blessing?

If that's the case, what about God's curses? Perhaps it's challenging for most people to conceive of Jesus as one who cursed certain people. It appears from this Sermon on the Plain that Jesus, God's great blessing to humanity, is also at the same time God's judgment upon humanity. Blessed or cursed? Each person must make the call.

But before we condemn Jesus for his condemnation of the rich and satisfied, let's admit that it's hard to see how the poor can be blessed without judgment upon the rich. Think of it, in the U.S. people living below the poverty line (say \$19,000 annually) are considered middle class or even well-to-do in Third World countries. I guess that, according to Jesus' Sermon on the Plain, I'm cursed or certainly need to pay attention to those God favors. Later in Luke's Gospel, Jesus says, "From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded" (Luke 12:48b).

In my opinion, nobody will ever be as poor as crucified Jesus, and yet all those who are poor may cling to his impoverishment as their hope. The poor find a place close to Jesus, because he bypassed the rich and has come and stood with them in his poverty.

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray, "Thy kingdom come, they will be done" (Luke 11:2-4; Matthew 6:9-13, *KJV*). In his Sermon on the Plain, Jesus gives shape and form to that Realm of God. Jesus' sermon is an attack upon many of his hearers and the way they have constructed their lives and the realms that they are serving. Did not Jesus lament, "It's very hard for the wealthy to enter God's kingdom!"? And the same time, in that memorable episode

of calling a wealthy man to enter his realm of the blessed poor, Jesus also said, "What is impossible for humans is possible for God" (Luke 18:24, 27).

So maybe it's true. Maybe those times when I'm cursed by my own selfishness or self-interest and I'm given the opportunity to move beyond my own immediate needs by sharing what I can whenever I can, maybe my soul moves from a state of being cursed to a state of being blessed in the act of blessing others. Only God can make that possible.

Abundant Blessings,

Pastor Greg Rupright