

**Sermon: "*Blessed = Weeping*" – Jeremiah 17:5-10; Psalm 1;
Luke 6:17-26
February 13th, 2022 – Epiphany 6C**

The assigned Bible Texts for today from Revised Common Lectionary have a common thread or connection to one another, which is not always the case. Sometimes the way the readings are assigned the connection/thread can be quite loose. But not today.

The Hebrew Scripture (Old Testament) reading, the Psalm, and the Gospel all talk about/describe what it is to be blessed. Unfortunately, the concept of blessing has become quite misunderstood in our popular culture. You see it all over the place on social media (Facebook, twitter, Instagram).

People talk about their most recent accomplishment and end with #blessed.

What they should really be writing is #lucky/fortunate because blessing has nothing to do with personal accomplishments, fame or wealth.

How the bible describes/defines blessed is far different than the way most of us use the word. Jeremiah writes, "**Blessed are those who trust in the Lord...**" Psalm 1 -> people who are blessed are those whose delight is in the law of the Lord. Jesus in today's gospel reading goes even deeper/further from our common understanding.

"Blessed are the poor, the hungry, those who weep, those who are hated..."

Gospel reading from Luke 6:17-26 is part of Jesus Sermon on the Plain, which has similarities to a more familiar Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel.

In the Sermon on the Plain, Jesus is speaking to a large group of people about what it is to be blessed. He has come down the mountain to be with the crowd and share a message of both blessing and woe.

With all the loss our church community has experienced/suffered over the past 2 years, members of our beloved community who have died I'm drawn to what Jesus says in v.21 "***Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh***" - Has it crossed your mind over the last 7-8 months to say to Jesus: "That sounds great, but when? When will we laugh again?" **(PAUSE)**

Jesus' "Sermon on the Plain" begins the same way the Gospel of Luke as a whole begins, by painting a picture of a world turned upside down.

At the start of his ministry, Jesus back in his hometown Synagogue reading from scroll of prophet Isaiah.

The poor would receive good news, the captives would be released, and the blind would see. The crowd turned pretty ugly that day. But here on the plain, level ground/playing field it's a different day with a different crowd. The ones gathered around him are exactly the kind of people Jesus came to proclaim favored by God. And here is Jesus, not high on some mountain talking down to them, as he does in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, but he is right there among them and in the midst of them. He might even be below them - v.20 indicates: ***"Then he looked up at his disciples"***

Even as Jesus is busy healing the crowd's diseases, he literally has to "look up" to see his disciples before he can teach them.

Are they somehow above him? Have they removed themselves from the bustling mass of suffering?

Is this why Jesus has to make sure they really take notice of these poor, sad, discarded folk? "Don't you realize these are the blessed of God," he seems to say, "This is where we should focus our attention because this is who has God's undivided attention. God sees them even when no one else does."

Jesus called them blessed because despite their hardships, they are still loved by God. In God's eyes, they are equal to all the people around them who acted as though they were superior.

In those days (and today as well) people often associated prosperity and health with one's goodness or sinfulness.

If you were good, good things happened. The more God loved you, the better you were treated.

So not only were you suffering because you were hungry or treated unfairly, you were suffering because you thought it meant that God didn't love you.

Most likely, the crowd Jesus is talking to were full of people who were suffering. These aren't the important people of the community. These were the desperate people. He's assuring them they are blessed because God loves them. And no human wielding any worldly power can take away their belovedness and blessedness from them.

It's not hard to imagine this might have been the first time they had ever heard they are loved and blessed.

Being blessed is not about prestige, money, success or even health. To be blessed is to be in relationship with God. We are all blessed. God desires to have that relationship with all of us.

To be blessed is to know that you have God's attention. To know that wherever you go, you will not be alone. To be blessed is to know that you are valued and important simply because God has made you priceless.

And suddenly the separation between the disciples and the crowd is removed.

Everyone is connected because the only possession anyone really has is the blessing of God. I forget this on days when I'm sad anxious and when tears begin to fall for no apparent reason.

I am in such a hurry to want to get to that happy place again – to have joy that I rush past the weeping to get to the laughing.

Instead of trying to "fix" "solve" what's going on, Jesus reminds us the path to healing involves weeping and even while weeping – mourning we are blessed. That is so easy to forget. **(PAUSE)**

Some of us have lost health or lost relationships or lost jobs. Our hurting is personal, it's unique, it's truly ours, it's no one else's. And yet it connects us with one another because we all hurt in some way.

Yet Jesus says blessed are those who weep, he's pointing out that this sadness is also a sign of something deeper, that all of us mourn/weep because the world is so far from God's intended purposes.

We look around, we see injustice, we see exploitation, we see violence, and God's faithful cannot help but mourn... in our case rage

I think that includes all of us, no matter who we voted for, no matter our economic status, our sexual orientation, or our ethnic background, we are all mourning. We hear of cities being occupied – province in a state of emergency - borders closed due to blockades - divisive walls being built and we know this is not how God works. We hear of BIPOC LGBTQ+ friends, brothers and sisters living in fear, and we mourn. We listen to hateful rhetoric coming to us from all sides, and we wonder where is our comfort - our peace to come from? We are brought closer in our shared weeping over this world.

Well, here's the good news. Blessed are those who weep. God hears you. God knows you. God comes close to you. And God will not let you go. We all deserve to weep, but we are all blessed. We are not alone.

How would we look at our neighbors if we saw them as both hurting and blessed? Would we see our brother or sister more than a nuisance, not a threat? Would we hear Jesus say, "Come, you are blessed -> Join me here on the plain" – on level ground/playing field.

There's a brilliant little video that's been around for a while. Starts off with a businessman going about his normal day, except his day isn't going all that well. He's having a bad/rough day.

With each passing minute his day gets worse and frustration level rises. He starts to pull out of the driveway, and almost runs over a child on a bike. He gets to his favorite coffee outlet, but a woman steals his parking place. The person in front of him in line places an order for the entire office building.

When he finally gets to the counter, barista tells him it will be a few minutes because they're waiting for a fresh pot of coffee to brew. Sitting off in the corner, seething - frustration boiling over, someone walks over and hands him a pair of sunglasses and then disappears. Confused, he puts the glasses on and all of sudden little bubbles, like in the Sunday comics, appear above everyone's head -> he is able to read what is really going on in everyone's life.

The woman who cut him off is distracted because her child is sick.

The individual who placed the huge coffee order is worried about a medical diagnosis they just received. The barista behind the counter is struggling with addiction/loneliness. And finally, returning home a bit shaken, he sees the child again with a bubble above his head which says, ***"Just need someone who cares."***

The man gets out of his car and walks over to help the boy fix his bike.

How would we treat each other if we could really see what was in everyone's bubble? Maybe just maybe all the walls and all the distance we place between ourselves and others would disappear.

After all, we worship/follow a God who was not content to look down upon us from some safe haven, light years away. We follow a savior who gets down, right down on the same plain with those in the deepest pain, with those who have nothing left.

He looks up, at us, his followers, and invites us to join him there. He reminds us that this is where God is looking. And by the way, we are not so different. We are hurting, too. We yearn for a world turned upside down.

We all deserve to weep... we all deserve to laugh

And we all are blessed... Thanks Be To God.