

Epiphany 6 / February 15, 2025

Luke 6:17-23

*“And He lifted up His eyes on His disciples, and said: ‘Blessed are you...’”*

Blessed are you

How blessed are you? What do you consider blessing? These are important questions as we consider Jesus’ words in our gospel, traditionally called the “Sermon on the Plain,” similar in words and substance to the “Sermon on the Mount,” different in that four blessings are contrasted with four woes. Jesus says blessed are those who are poor, who are hungry, who weep and who are hated on account of Himself. On the other hand, He says woe to those who are rich, well fed, those who laugh and are well spoken of by people. Most people in the world would reverse things, counting as blessings the latter and woes the former. If you were looking for friends on social media, you would get more positive responses if you presented yourself as rich, athletic, happy and having a magnetic personality than if you were poor, hungry, sad and unpopular. What humans despise, God honours. What humans consider worthless, God counts as of greatest value. Humans look at the outward appearance. God looks at the heart.

Jesus told a parable about a rich man and a poor, starving man who begged for his food, whom everyone ignored except for the dogs who licked his wounds. The rich man lived in luxury, entertained guests who were happy to recline at his table, eat his food and drink his wine. No one was more blessed than the rich man. None more cursed than the poor man Lazarus, who lay outside the gate hoping for a scrap from the rich man’s table. But when death called, it was Lazarus who was blessed to recline in paradise with father Abraham, while the rich man languished in Hades. Blessedness is the love of God, received through knowing Christ our Saviour. The blessings of which Jesus speaks are not primarily of the body, but of the spirit. Whether we are rich or poor, fed or hungry, happy or sad, popular or hated, what matters is that we see our spiritual poverty, hunger for God’s righteous and receive His favour and forgiveness through faith in Christ our Saviour. Whether rich or poor, happy or sad, those truly blessed are those who believe in Him as their God and Saviour.

Jesus made people happy. Twice He fed people with bread and fish. Once He refreshed people with finest of wine. Jesus helped people out financially. Once He paid Peter’s temple tax. Twice He told the disciples where to drop their nets for a

huge catch of fish. He spoke well of John the Baptist, saying no one greater had been of woman. He told the parents of a child who had died not to weep for, from His perspective, she was just sleeping. Clearly His words of blessing and woe have a deeper meaning than the surface suggests. The poor are blessed not because they are poor, but because theirs is the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is theirs, not because they are poor. It is theirs, because Christ gives it to them through faith in Him as their God and Saviour. The greatest poverty is of the human spirit in relation to God. We need God to give us relationship with Himself. God gives us relationship with Himself through faith in Christ as Saviour. We need God to enrich our spirits with His grace in forgiveness, received through faith in Christ Jesus. God gives the riches of His grace in Christ Jesus to all who see the poverty of their sins and come to Him for His grace in Christ Jesus.

God gives the riches of His grace in Christ Jesus through the hearing of the word, the water of holy baptism, the bread and wine of holy communion. He draws near to us in these means of grace. He draws us near to Himself as we make use of them in hearing, eating and drinking. These are not simply marks or signs of the church, they are the means through which God feeds our hungry souls, nourishes our faith and sustains our spirits. Using these things is not merely responding to Christ's ordinance to show we are Christians. Using them is accepting His gracious invitation to dine in His house and feast at His table. Spiritually, we are all poor Lazarus; hungry, sad, wounded and alone. Jesus is the rich man. But unlike the rich man in His parable, Jesus comes out to seek us. He bids us to enter His house. He draws us in, so He may clean our wounds, heal our spirits, give us laughter and fill us with His feast. We respond to His call not simply out of obedience, not because it would be rude not to come. We respond, because we need His grace and favour. Those who see their poverty and feel their hunger are blessed when they see their need for Jesus. He feeds our spirits, nourishes our faith and fill us with His grace. In Him we are blessed.

Singer Billy Joel had a hit song in which he sang, "I'd rather laugh with the sinners than cry with the saints, the sinners are much more fun." Jesus said, "*Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.*" Jesus said the mourning of the saints leads to eternal laughter, while the laughter of the godless ends in eternal sadness. Again, in and of itself there is nothing blessed in weeping, mourning and sadness. These are the effects of sin. They are signs of the broken relationship between humans and our Creator. In the new heaven and on the new earth there will be no more weeping, sadness and mourning. They will be gone because God will make His

dwelling with humans and the earth will become the home of His righteousness. God will wipe every tear from our eyes, because Jesus in the kindness of His love, sacrificed Himself on the cross to atone for human sin and to take its guilt away from the hearts of those who believe in Him as Saviour and receive baptism into His death and resurrection. Weeping, mourning, crying and pain show us our sinful condition. They are constant reminders of our need for Jesus to forgive our sins and heal our wounds. They remind us that one day God will wipe every tear from our eyes and bring us into the joy and gladness of eternal life in His presence. Those who weep for their sins are blessed, because they have the gladness of forgiveness in time. In eternity their laughter will never end.

Jesus said, *“Blessed are you when people hate you and exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man.”* In several places in the gospels Jesus speaks about the necessity of identifying ourselves as believers and the temptation of being embarrassed because of Him. A few chapters following our text Jesus says, *“Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in His glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.”* How would you feel if you had a friend who only associated with you when you were alone together and who would pretend not to know you when other more popular people were around? You would certainly question their feelings toward you. Jesus never said that following Him would bring us wealth, fill our stomachs, make us happy and popular. On the contrary, He said following Him would put us on the outside, make us foolish according to the wisdom of the world and outdated in terms of its moral standards, or lack thereof. The world, its thoughts, opinions and desires will pass away, but the one who stands in the Lord and in His righteousness, will endure forever and have the blessedness and joy of life in His presence in eternity.

How blessed are you? No matter our life situation, no matter what things we must deal with, no matter what we are up against, we are blessed, because Christ is in our lives. The blessing above all blessings is Christ in our lives. In Him every blessing in time is a foretaste of the greatest blessings to come. In Him every sadness, grief, pain, injury and sorrow, even death with all its sorrows, are but a momentary burden in comparison to the glory to be revealed to us and in us at His return. In 2 Corinthians Paul encourages us to bear the burdens of life in view of the blessing of Christ in our lives. He writes, *“We do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond*

*all comparison.*” Blessed are you when you suffer reproach for the sake of Christ. Your reward is Christ in heaven. Blessed are you when you weep. You have eternal consolation in Christ in heaven where your joy will never end. Blessed are you when you hunger for God. He who now fills you through word and sacrament will fill you to the full in the great banquet of life when Christ returns. Blessed are you when you suffer reproach for the sake of Christ. Sharing His reproach is testimony we will share His glory. Jesus bless us with His grace and favour in time and for eternity! In His Name. Amen