

## Sermon Text – Sunday, February 13, 2022 – Pastor Paula Kraus

**OT Reading: Jeremiah 15:5-10, Epistle Reading: I Corinthians 15:12-20,  
Responsive Reading: Gospel of Luke 6:17-26 “A Message of Hope”**

What we just read from Luke sounds very similar to the Beatitudes from Matthew chapter five – from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Could Luke just have taken Jesus’ words and rearranged them maybe leaving some out? Possibly, but if Luke did that there was a definite purpose. I would rather think that this is another different sermon from Jesus, at another time in another place. This is what we traditionally call Jesus’ Sermon on the Plain. But it is not the setting that is important it's Jesus’ words and how he uses them.

Notice our reading begins with Luke writing that Jesus came down – down from the mountain – with his disciples and stood on a level place. From those few words you can gather a lot. Jesus was now on the same level with the crowds, not looking down on them but looking at them. You might say that Jesus ‘leveled’ with the people and spoke to them about ‘plain’ living. Jesus, at that moment and in that setting, is not a miracle worker or a prophet he is Jesus the man teaching those who would hear him about wonderful things they can experience. Jesus’ words are important.

However, before Jesus spoke, he healed, the scripture tells us that there were people from all around even from as far away as Sidon and Tyre. They were not all Jewish people; they were people from all walks of life and with all types of troubles. They came with all their baggage, diseases, and unclean spirits. Jesus healed all of them – all of them in a sort of communal healing. Jesus healed not only physically but emotionally and spiritually as well.

Then, after Jesus healed them and they were able to listen, Jesus spoke. Each blessing Jesus matches with a woe, unlike Matthew’s beatitudes where he mentions no woes. Blessed are you who are poor is countered with woe to you who are rich; blessed are you who are hungry now is countered with woe to you who are full now; blessed are you who weep now is countered with woe to you who are laughing now; and blessed are you when people hate, exclude, and revile you is countered with woe to you when all speak well of you.

If that weren’t enough, you must pay attention to the verb tense used – you who are or are now – represents present tense not some future state. But then here Luke expresses the blessings and curses in a future tense – you will, and you will be. The hungry will be filled, the full will be hungry, those weeping will laugh and those laughing will mourn and weep. Jesus is telling the people that their

current state will change. Through Jesus, God is doing something new, and Jesus' presence will overturn the status-quo.

A close study of Luke's Gospel shows that, for Luke, Jesus' ministry was to the poor, oppressed, and marginalized. Jesus' first teaching in the synagogue after his baptism was from Isaiah 61 – "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18&19). That should make us realize that in this Sermon on the Plain, when Jesus says "Blessed are you who are poor" he is referring to the impoverished financially, not merely spiritually impoverished. That would have been most if not all the people present to hear him and receive healing by him on that day. Jesus was himself from a poor family and his followers were poor as well. Jesus was from a poor region and as he traveled healing the sick and teaching, he encountered people who faced oppression and figurative as well as literal imprisonment – they are the ones to receive the good news Jesus brings.

The words Jesus speaks to the poor, the hungry, and the marginalized may have felt to some that Jesus is telling them to be satisfied where they are and consider their plight a blessing. And isn't that just what the Roman occupiers wanted them to hear, accept your lot because those with the power know what you need better than you. BUT, Jesus, in this sermon, is counter cultural. Jesus speaks to the privileged as well. Woe to you who are rich, who have plenty, and woe to you who are praised and elevated in the community – there will be a reckoning. Jesus once again turns the tables [as he does in the temple]. With these words Jesus is upsetting the traditional formula for life, resisting, and defying the many cultural and political forces western society employs to define normal. Jesus is telling us that no matter who we are, how rich or poor or successful or oppressed we think we are, we cannot be confident that our worth or the meaning of our lives depends on our position in society. To quote an old friend, "This too shall pass."

Looking at this scripture – the blessings belong to those who must rely on God for their very existence and those who choose to rely on God. Woes are for those who put their hopes in things of the world for their existence, their money, and their status – those things will fade away, only God is eternal. There are many forces in our culture that tell us God blesses the successful, there is a commercial that proclaims "fortune favors the brave" but are these things reality or just what we want to tell ourselves to justify our lifestyles. Certainly, it is true that God may bless a successful person, success however is not the foundation for blessing. Jesus tells us – blessed are you who are poor. Certainly, the brave

can find fortune – anyone can seek and find fortune but that is not because they are blessed by God – even those who experience misfortune find blessings from God. This scripture is a stark reminder to us that both hard times and good times will reverse. They WILL BE reversed; on that we can surely rely.

From here let's look at what the other scriptures we read this morning might be saying in comparison to Jesus' sermon on the plain. Jeremiah tells us that those who turn away from the Lord will live in the wilderness but that trusting in the Lord is like a tree planted by waters – strong, secure, and not anxious. And from Paul's letter to the Corinthians, we question who it is we worship and why. Do we worship Christ only for what we might gain in this life? No, we hope for the future because Christ defeated death in his resurrection, that is why we worship and why we come to this table of remembrance every week – not for what we can gain in this life but for God's promise of eternity. Whatever your lot is in this life it is not permanent, things WILL change.

For some this is a message of hope, for others who have placed their trust in building more barns rather than building up the body of Christ – well not so much. When Jesus says the poor are blessed, it is not poverty that is the blessing but the fact that the poor must trust in more than physical things for their lives. The ability to trust God is the blessing. Those who are poor, hungry, or oppressed find their strength through relationships with each other and God. Jesus indicates, in this passage, that these earthly things are not what bring the blessing – it is looking toward God and relying on relationship within the community that blesses. All too often people with financial means or status rely on their own power for blessing, woe to those whose hope is on the things that wither.

So, what does this mean for us, you, and I as we struggle in this world and worship together in this community of believers? First, I think it says, don't think too highly of yourself lest you too should fall. This is a message to each of us for we are both the sinners and the saved. We can never get it right on our own or be completely secure in our own power or status. We can however be secure that it is our faith in God and God's promise of justice for all creation that brings us hope. We can be secure that fellowship and worshipping together strengthens our faith.

This is after all a message of hope – hope that things will change, hope that even though there is poverty today, that will change. Hope that even though people are starving today, that will change and hope that however much we might struggle or feel depressed and anxious things will change. Jesus has come to overturn what the world considers normal and to turn the tables.

Does that mean that we can just wait in our sanctuaries and worship spaces waiting for Christ to come and change things? Jesus' message to us is not very subtle although shrouded in blessings and woes. The body of Christ is God's instrument in transforming woes to blessings. We can make what will be happen now, we can do what Jesus does in bringing the good news to the poor, the weak, the marginalized and the oppressed. When it comes to it, that is the purpose of the church – not to only sit and sing praises or hear scripture – the church is to act out God's promises and be Christ to a world that now more than ever needs Christ.

The church must become Christ-centered and approach the world in a counter-cultural fashion. Not conforming to what the world thinks the church should be like, not “minding our own business” but sticking our nose into things that would concern Jesus. Things like poverty, hunger, oppression, and hate. The church must turn the tables on what is worldly and reconsider what it means to be Christian in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This church claims its mission is “to honor God, share the love of Christ, and change lives ministering grace and peace.” These are action statements; Jesus did not sit around the boardroom with his disciples claiming to love the community while making plans and going over financial statements. Jesus changed lives by meeting people on the level plain, speaking to and with them, and acting to meet their needs. Church – how are we changing lives, how are we bringing a message of hope into our community? Just a few things to think about.