

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Sixth Sunday after Epiphany - Year C

102nd Sunday of Pandemic - Online Worship Only

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Jeremiah 17:5-10

Psalm 1

I Corinthians 15:12-20

Luke 6:17-26

02/13/2022

### **Gospel**

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke:

17[Jesus] came down with [the twelve] and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. 18They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. 19And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them. 20Then he looked up at his disciples and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. 21"Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. 22"Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. 23Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. 24"But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. 25"Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. "Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep.

26“Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.”

The Gospel of Our Lord.

### **Prayer**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

### **Life and Death**

Good morning! What did you think of that Gospel reading? Pretty challenging, right? I have a love/hate relationship with our text. On the one hand, I love the way it challenges me to be a better person, on the other, I hate how it shows me the ways I fail. If our lesson seems familiar, that’s because it’s one of the more famous ones. You may recognize it by its name, the Beatitudes. It shows up in two Gospels, here in Luke, and in Matthew 5:3-12, and while it is very similar, it differs in one very important way. In Luke we read “*Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.*” But in Matthew it says “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*”<sup>1</sup> That little addition of “in spirit” really changes the way the text can be understood. Usually when you hear this text it’s preached in a way that lets us wiggle out of that uncomfortable feeling. Preachers can easily slide into a sermon that lessens the impact and challenge of the Luke text. That’s what was on my mind when I opened my copy of *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*. The section on our lesson was titled “*A way of life, and a way of death.*”<sup>2</sup> Well.. that’s a much different message than what I normally hear. It’s more than just a title. We find it in the *Didache*, an anonymous Christian text written in the first or

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 5:3 NRSV

<sup>2</sup> Just, Arthur A. *Luke. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament III*. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2003. p. 103.

second century. The book is essentially our first catechism, or teaching. It says that *“there are two ways, one of life, and one of death. Between the two there is a great difference.”*<sup>3</sup>

R. Alan Culpepper points out a detail that was right in front of me, but that I always missed. *“When Jesus speaks, he speaks specifically to his disciples. What follows is the standard for which every disciple should strive.”*<sup>4</sup> That’s right, Jesus is speaking directly to you and me. Which means that I think we should take seriously the challenge put forth in this Gospel reading. If what Jesus says is true, that *“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. 21“Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. “Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. 22“Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man.”* And oppositely, that *4“But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. 25“Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. “Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. 26“Woe to you when all speak well of you...”* how does that change how God is calling us to live our lives?

We often forget how challenging and counter-cultural the Bible truly is. Anything that has to do with the church or mainstream Christianity is seen as pedestrian. It’s so well known that it’s dismissed. But when you stop to look closely at what Jesus is saying, it turns the world upside down! Culpepper writes that *“Jesus’ teachings are so scandalous because they overturn every conventional expectation... So scandalous is Jesus’ message that revisionist interpretations began as early as Matthew’s*

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 104.

<sup>4</sup> Keck, Leander E. *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*. Volume 8. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2015. p. 117.

*change of the ‘poor’ to the ‘poor in spirit’... God has a preferential love for the poor not because they are necessarily better than others, morally or religiously, but simply they are poor and living in an inhuman situation that is contrary to God’s will.”<sup>5</sup>*

Which brings me to something that has always bothered me. Have you noticed that Jesus says “blessed are the poor...” and not “blessed are the hard working poor,” or “blessed are the deserving poor”? Jesus doesn’t make a distinction... So why do we so often do the same? How often do we debate and argue over programs and solutions for those who suffer? We try to make distinctions, so that “the right” suffering group gets it... We don’t want the “bad” ones to get help! St. Paul writes that “... *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*”<sup>6</sup> We are not better than anyone else, and everyone deserves the help. The poor are a reflection of our own sin; regardless of who they are, it’s a reflection of humanity’s inability to care for each other in the way that God has called on us to do.

So what do we do? Well... I’m not really sure. I’m not a fan of pointing out a problem and not offering a solution, especially in a sermon. What I can offer is a different way of looking at the text. I am incredibly fortunate, I have never truly wanted for anything in my whole life. I also have very expensive taste, and have been known to indulge in “retail therapy.” But you know, after I get all my new and fancy stuff... I don’t really feel any better. Something is still missing. It’s as if the second section in our Gospel reading is less of a threat regarding eternal life and more of a reality of the condition someone will find themselves in if they put all their effort into material and temporal pleasure.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. pp. 118-119.

<sup>6</sup> Romans 3:23 NRSV

What would it feel like to live a life of wealth, gluttony and apathy? What would it be like to reach our death bed only to realize that we had missed the point the whole time? That we had been blind to the suffering of those around us... suffering that WE could have changed? No... Jesus calls us to walk a different path. And what might that path be? Well, you'll just have to tune in next week to find out... Amen.