

Sixth Sunday After Epiphany February 17 2019

Luke 6:17-26

It's only the 6th chapter of the Gospel of Luke, but Jesus has been busy. Baptized and full of the Holy Spirit who came down upon him, he has sent away the tempter in the wilderness. Filled with the power of the Holy Spirit he announces what he has come to do, bring good news to the poor. Release to the captives. A proclamation that is not just for the in crowd of religious Jews but is for everyone.

He has called disciples, those who are the unlikely, including a sinful fisherman or two. He has transformed them and given them a calling; to catch people.

He has healed many, Simon's mother in law, a leper, a paralytic. He has challenged the reasons for the religious practices of the day, especially those around the Sabbath. Stretching people to consider what God cares about more, the outer ceremony or the inner intent.

Finally, just prior to our reading, Jesus went up the mountain, to spend the entire night in prayer with God and to choose the twelve of his disciples who he would send out; to proclaim and teach and heal.

Then, he came down the mountain. This is worth noting because in the Gospel of Matthew the section of teachings and sayings that Luke is about to recount, takes place on the mountain. Now, in Jewish tradition and culture, high places are holy places. Mountains are considered places to go and meet God. Whether it was the simple idea that by going up the mountain you are physically closer to God, the fact that up that high you

literally saw the world differently, or the beauty of high places that are in themselves awe inspiring we don't know why this association came to be. But it is apparent throughout scripture. It was on the mountain that the prophet Elijah heard the still small voice of God, it was on the mountain that Moses received the 10 Commandments, it was on the mountain that Abraham was prepared to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac.

But in Luke, Jesus came down. Down from the place where God was onto this plain where regular life happened. Where this "great multitude of people" was waiting for him, needing him and what he offered. They were waiting to listen to what he had to say. To be healed of their diseases. To be restored to health from all those things that troubled them; the unclean spirits of addictions, of anxiety. Those things that crowded them in until they could not be at peace. They came, because Jesus could heal them.

Everyone in this great multitude was trying to touch him, the word here is something more like latch onto him, not the quick contact of "tag-you're-it" but the clinging of the drowning person to the life preserver. They latch on because there was power that went out from Jesus when you latched onto him. A touch that changed what was. That brought about wholeness.

Note also who is in the crowd; the people of Judea and Jerusalem (Jews) and those from the coast of Tyre and Sidon- 300 miles away- a journey of 15 days or more- and a land of Gentiles, non-Jews. And Jesus healed them. Regardless of religion. Regardless of distance traveled. Jesus healed all of them.

Then he lifts his eyes from this work of healing and restoration and looks at his disciples and speaks. Looks at us and speaks. Words of blessings and woes.

What then do we learn about God, about ourselves as followers of Jesus in this text?

I have heard too many sermons on this text that take the easy route. Sermons that thunder the good news of God's preferential option for the poor. For those who are the ptochos- the destitute. The ones lying cold on the street corner, curled up to stay warm. Sermons that point a finger of accusation at the rich, the full, the laughing, all while the preachers wait to be hated, reviled, and defamed so that they might be assured of the fact that they are a true prophet. But the God I meet in this text does not let us off the hook that easy. No, this text has some clear teachings about who God is, but it also provides us plenty to consider, to ponder, to pray about.

One thing is very clear and is a constant theme in this Gospel. God in Jesus Christ came down. God always comes down to us. We are not expected to climb the mountain to some God up in the sky far distant from us and our every day lives. Nope, God in Jesus has come down to us; this great multitude of people clinging to the surface of this big blue orb spinning in space.

God is the one who moves and acts; to teach us about the Kingdom- note the multitude came to listen, to learn. And to be healed: of all those things that trouble us. How does that learning and healing happen? By coming into contact with Jesus. When we hear God's Word, share in the Supper- receiving the very Body and Blood of Jesus. When we pray...Jesus, Son

of David, have mercy on me a sinner. When we spend time in scripture and in the embodied Christ of a faith community we come in contact with Jesus and can receive all that the crowd sought.

Another thing is clear, God in Jesus has acted already, has brought the kingdom already (see in the text, he tells the destitute, it's yours already...now) not in some distant future. In Jesus the reign of God has come and with that comes blessing and woe.

The Blessing is not some ritual action of favor upon the chosen, it is an awareness of the good fortune of being included in God's activity on earth. Included, so that the poor already inherit the Kingdom. So that those who are hungry now, know that they will be filled. That those who cannot see beyond this moment because of the tears of sorrow now, will know that they will laugh again.

The blessing is that God in Jesus has come to them and they know that now, in the midst of the reality of their need, God has acted. This is not just some eschatological, end times, pie in the sky by and by. The kingdom of God has come in Jesus, and his life and teaching shows us what that kingdom will look like and be like.

The Woes. Now, most folks avoid looking at these too carefully, well those don't apply to me. Or will use them as a cudgel to beat other people over the head. That's too easy. So, what do we do with them?

It is interesting that the word used for woe can be both an expression of admonition and of grief. Of warning and regret.

The warning is to those who are rich. Who are fully resourced. Guess what, it literally does not get any better than that. If your assurance lies there, you have no hope for the future. Which, when I look at my house, and my bank account, and my woodshop full of tools, and my wall of books. It does wrench a cry of grief and regret. Woe is me, for where I have trusted in this and not the one who has come down from heaven, Jesus. The one who came to bring relief to the poor, the destitute, those without the stuff. Woe to me for I am a part of his earthly body and should be sharing from my abundance with those who are poor. So that they might have the resources they need. So that I might be a means by which God provides them daily bread. By which God fills them.

The woe is not so much a condemnation as a warning, this is what will happen if you go this way.

The warning is to all of us who are secure, sure that all is right in the world as we laugh with full bellies. Woe to you, for there will be a time when the reality of death and loss will hit you. When times will be tight and your stomach will growl. It is a warning, not to rest on these things as signs of God's favor on us but to be aware that the reality of this sinful world is that times will change.

We who are fully resourced now, will one day be the ones in want. We who are happy now, will mourn. We who are well spoken of now, will face criticism from all sides on account of Jesus.

And when these woes work to show us the reality of our situation. We cry out, What then are we to do?! Nothing. There is nothing we can do but follow the example of the crowds. Come to the foot of the mountain, in all

our brokenness, our desire to learn, to be healed. And wait. Wait on the God in Jesus who comes down to us. Wait, to listen and learn. Wait to be freed from all that presses in on us. Wait.

Because it is only with the help of Jesus, who has come down to us, that we can be freed from our bondage to stuff. That we who are well resourced can see clearly that these things, while nice, will not save us. That there are those who are hungry...now! Who are without shelter...now! Who are destitute...now! That we might be the means by which Jesus will fulfill the promise that they will be filled, not just in the great by and by but now. That they will laugh, not just in some distant future, but through the tears of sorrow as they are surrounded by the community of faith that is the church, now.

And in this is our blessing. For whether we are the ones being filled, being assured of our place in God's kingdom, or if we are the ones who have been warned and stirred to share of our own resources, our own joy we are all aware of the good fortune we have to be included in God's activity here on earth. It is in both blessing and warning that we are saved.

As we go out this week, I would invite you to look at those around you. Where might you be a means of filling someone who lacks? Where might you be a means of bringing comfort to those who mourn? Where might you be the hands and feet of Christ to bring to someone in need blessing?

And let us join together in this sung prayer, that Jesus Christ would come down to us and guide our ways.

