

“Blessed Are They.....”

Texts: Jeremiah 17:5-10

1 Corinthians 15:12-20 (Series C, 6th Sunday in Epiphany) Ps. 1

Luke 6:17-26

Prayer: *Living God, in Christ you make all things new. Transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace, and in the enwall of our lives make known your glory. Through Jesus Christ, our Saviours and Lord. Amen.*

This Sunday we are treated to readings we don't often get to in the season after the Epiphany. So, on this Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany we are confronted by the prophetic and instructive blessings and woes. The Good News / Bad News Sunday.

Jeremiah starts us off with similar wording to Psalm 1 about trust in the Lord. He tells his audience, and us, that those who trust in mere mortals and whose hearts turn away...shall be like a shrub in the desert...in the parched places...uninhabited salt land. Those who trust in the Lord are blessed, and like a tree planted by water have strong roots and nothing to fear, even when heat comes.

In Luke's gospel – Jesus sits on a level place - where a large crowd has gathered and pressed in upon him - and where Jesus has been walking among them - healing their diseases and curing their afflictions.

Jesus is not only portrayed by Luke as announcing who is blessed by God - a list that is somewhat more graphic - and more tangible. He then spoke to his disciples and delivered a set of 4 blessings and a set of 4 woes, two states of being or of life from which to choose.

Blessed are you who are *poor*, for yours is the kingdom of God - woe to you who are *rich*, for you have received your consolation. Blessed are you who are *hungry* now, for you will be filled - woe to you are full now, for you will be hungry. Blessed are you who *weep* now, for you will laugh - woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep.

Blessed are you when people *hate* you and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on the account of the Son of Man, - woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets."

Think about it. What does this list say about our aspirations? About our dreams? About our rushing out to buy lottery tickets so that we might win the big one? About our parties and our attempts to fill our days with diversions and endless entertainments?

And what does it say about the value of our sorrow, our pain, and our hunger? What does this list of blessings and woes say about what God is about? About where God is? About who God is for?

For Jesus, there was something more dangerous than tears. It was the *dangerous deception* that our world is secure, stable, the best of all possible worlds -- don't worry, be happy. Jesus warns of that deception. "*Woe to you that laugh now.*"

Woe if you feel too good, settled too comfortably with the way things are... To hope too soon, to laugh too easily, is self- deception. – God can reverse all our expectations - the expectations that we learn from the world.

The Bible tells me, I need to know that God understands my pain - my poverty - my despair - my sin - my fear; I need to know that God is with me the way that I really am.

And that the image of joy and success, and happiness and prosperity that is portrayed 24/7 on television, that image that I can't make real for myself no matter how hard I work, is a false image, a false image of blessedness.

I need to know that God is beside me - where I live - on the plain - on the level - where I am sick - and in need - where I struggle to do what is right - and where I struggle to keep my faith.

I need to know that I can touch Jesus - and be touched by him - right here and right now; that I don't have to have all the answers - or understand all the mysteries - or be joyfully confident -for him to care for me.

**I will share with you this morning *Two True Stories* to help us put the sermon on the plain in a proper perspective: A woman was talking to me some time ago about her experiences in caring for her ailing mother.

She told me how precious her time with her mother is. How she feels so privileged to be able to be there with her, to see her mother smile what might be one of her last smiles, and to hear her mother say in her quiet, fading, trembling voice - I love you.

She used the word **blessed** as she talked about the opportunity she had to be with her mother, and she described herself as being blessed by the work she is doing for her mother: - blessed in the changing of her mother's diapers - blessed in the wiping off spit from her mother's chin, - blessed in the chance to feed her one spoonful at a time, - blessed in praying for her and holding her as she finally falls asleep at night.

I have a chance she said to love my mother, - a chance to give a little bit back to her that she gave to me. I feel so bless to be able to do this, - so bless to be able to cry over what Mom has lost, - so bless to be able to reach out and touch her and make her days a bit easier.

The promise of Christ in both the sermon on the mount in the Gospel of Matthew, and in the sermon on the plain in the Gospel of Luke, is that there is joy on the other side of grief, laughter on the other side of tears, fulfillment on the other side of hunger, and joyful reward on the other side of the abuse and the ridicule we receive because we cling to God and live in a way that is strange to the world - a way that is opposed to the world's way.

The second story: *Once upon* a time there was a king who had four wives. One day the king got sick and was on his death bed, afraid of being in the afterlife alone. So, he asked his *fourth wife* which he loved the most and bought her diamond, gold and elegant clothing, he asked her would die with me?

And go with me to the afterlife? The fourth wife replied I am sorry I can not do that and walked away.

He also asked his *third wife*, whom he was very proud of and would show her off to neighbouring kingdoms. So, he called on his third wife and asked... would you accompany me to the afterlife: The third wife replied, I love my life too much, I am sorry I can not go with you and when you die, I am going to remarry.

His *second wife* has always been there for him in his time of need, so he asked ... would you accompany me to the afterlife? The second then replied I am sorry that I can not help you out this time but what I can do is arrange your funeral and I will be there at your funeral.

Then a voice called out and said, I will leave with you and follow you wherever you go even if it is to the afterlife. The king looked and it was his *first wife*, but this was the wife that he took care of the least. The king felt embarrassed and said I am sorry I should have taken better care of you and given you more attention when I was Alive.

The moral of this story is that We all have four wives / husbands.

- **Our fourth** wife / husband is our body we like to decorate it with nice jewelry, nice clothing, but in the end ... it can not follow us to the afterlife.
- **The third** wife / husband represents our possessions, we spend so much time trying to gather possessions, but in the end, they cannot follow us to the afterlife. It would be given to other people and divided just as the third wife said she is going to remarry.
- **The second** wife / husband ... our family and friends we love and trust them and they are always there for us in time of need, but the furthest they can go with us is to our funeral and send us off.
- **Our first** wife / husband, represents *Our Soul*, we usually neglect taking care of our Soul...that is what will follow us to the afterlife.
Care of your body.... Keep it healthy.

Enjoy your possessions and the comfort they provide. Cherish your family and friends for the that they offer. But don't forget to take care of you soul, nourish your soul By being alone with God, make time for prayer, take time to meditate on God's word day and night.

Because it is the source of all of our life and our most faithful friend. 'Jesus said: *What good will it profit a person to gain the whole world and loses his / her soul*' Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of God.

Happiness - blessedness - is not found in success, in three square meals a day, in mindless laughter, or in the good opinions that others may have of us.

Blessedness is found surrendering of self to God - in letting go – being in touch with our inner self- in knowing our need and the need of the world around us and in knowing that God really cares about those needs.

Believing that God is really present with us will vindicate all those who cling to him in the midst of crisis, and not to the god of material success, or the god of self-reliance or the god of blind happiness.

Hope in Christ is what Paul is giving us. Jeremiah, the Psalmist, and Jesus all give us the options in how to live life. Nothing is easy but there is always hope. God knows whatever we choose and Jesus Is Risen which is the Very Good News and always within us. **Hope** is hearing the melody of the future – **faith** is dancing to it today.

**❖ Blessed are those who know their need, and who trust in God,
and follow in his ways, for they are like trees planted by streams of water.
Their leaves do not wither - in all that they do they prosper.**

Amen.

February 13, 2022

Let us pray: God of Hope and Healing, as you test our minds and search our hearts, keep us mindful of the choices we make in all that we do. Endow us with the courage to accept and trust Your blessings where we are, and to be spared the woes of those whose hearts turn away. We ask through Jesus, our Risen Christ; and the Holy Spirit, Sanctifier of our Souls; who together with You are One God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Prayer concerns: *Matilda Molyneaux-Piper, Shirley Walker, Hanne Bourgeoise, Sven Berg, Astrid Hylland, Ellen Euclide & Ellen Dahal-Lanteigne, Eriksen, the dire tension between Russia and Ukraine, Protectors at various places in Canada, Covid -19 patients, essential and Frontline workers, Note: of thanks to God as the Covid-19 virus is easing off and more restrictions are being lifted, and finally Families of departed souls in recent weeks and months.*

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- **Blest Are They # 728**
- **Lift Every Voice and Sing # 841 (Black history month)**
- **The Church of Christ, in Every Age # 729**

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Kaylee Kenner-Howell

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

n/a