

All Saints Service of Remembrance
Oct. 30, 2022
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Luke 6:20-31

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.

²⁷"But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Blessed are those who mourn

"Blessed are those who Mourn, for they will be comforted," is from Matthew 5:4.

Today's reading is from Luke's version of this iconic sermon, which says basically the same thing, just a little differently, "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh."

The small differences in the two versions of this sermon provide a good illustration of how the Bible was written. The word of mouth memories of what was said were told to others, who shared them with others, who eventually wrote them down. Then the authors of the gospels of Luke and Matthew edited the various versions they had available to them into their best guess of what Jesus really said, which was influenced by their own theological biases - the author of Luke cares a lot about social justice, so he wrote "blessed are the poor," while the author of Matthew decided to write, "blessed are the poor in spirit." And then, the gospels were copied and shared and copies were made of copies, and translations made of copies and when the New Testament was being officially formed, other editors took the various versions of the gospels of Matthew and Luke and did their best to come up with a definitive version of each gospel. Then they were translated some more - and translation is never a direct word to word process

because different languages have different grammars and different idiomatic sayings which means the translators have to make theological choices about what was being said. And this is why when we read the Bible in English the different English translations don't agree with one another and different versions of the same story are not exactly the same.

This is why Methodists take the Bible seriously, not literally!

There is really no such thing as a literal version of the Bible.

So it's helpful to take one or two or five steps back from each individual word of any given verse and not get too concerned about whether we're talking about mourning or weeping, or comfort or laughter and look at the overarching themes of the sermon on the Mount or the Plain.

First of all, look at whom Jesus is calling Blessed.

Most of us would not consider ourselves "blessed" when we are:

- Poor
- Hungry
- Weeping or mourning
- Hated
- Excluded
- Reviled
- Or defamed

Generally, when we call ourselves blessed, it's because something good has happened to us. Like, I'm so blessed to have such great children or grandkids. Or I'm so blessed to have an affordable mortgage in this crazy housing market. Usually we call ourselves blessed when we have the things that Jesus is proclaiming Woe about! The authors and editors of Luke write that Jesus declares Woe to:

- The rich
- The well fed
- Those who are laughing now
- Those who are well spoken of...

What the heck Jesus???!!!

I think part of what is going on here is that Jesus often said things that had a fair amount of shock value. Most of Jesus' parables were pretty shocking to their original audience, we've just become used to them.

Another part of what's going on in this strange passage is that the author of Luke has a theology of the Kingdom of God that is woven all through Luke and Acts. This theology can be summarized in the idea that God cares about those who are in need and God is fed up with those who are profiting off of harming others.

Blessed are those who Mourn.

The past few years have been so hard.

So many of us are still mourning what we have lost.

Mourning people who have died.

Mourning the loss of things we used to do.

Mourning the impact of the pandemic on our churches.

Mourning the damage done to relationships by polarizing views.

Mourning our own exhaustion from dealing with one crisis after another, after another, after another.

What I hear Jesus saying in "blessed are those who mourn or weep for they will be comforted or will laugh again," what I hear Jesus saying to us when he calls us "blessed" is that we are not alone in our suffering.

God hears us.

God sees us.

God is with us in our mourning to comfort us and bring us into laughter once again.

And... And...

God also hears the cries of the poor and hungry.

God sees the growing numbers of people on our streets.

God also sees the companies who are making record profits continuing to raise prices on essentials like food and fuel.

God also sees the rich and popular laughing their way to their offshore bank accounts.

But just as we are tempted to channel our woe into righteous rage, Jesus challenges us to love our enemies.

To, "do good to those who hate you,

²⁸ bless those who curse you,
pray for those who abuse you."

This whole passage is deeply unsettling, isn't it!

First Jesus tells us we're blessed when bad things happen to us.

Then Jesus tells us that being rich, popular and well thought of, is a bad thing.

Now Jesus tells us that we need to love the people who are making bad things happen to us??!!!

This is not an easy or comfortable teaching.

It's an apocalypse, in the original Greek meaning of the word apocalypse.

It's a revelation of what it really means to follow Jesus.

- **God is with us**
- **Woe to oppressors**
- **Love our enemies)**

- To trust that God is with us when times are hard.
- To recognize that God is not happy with those who oppress others for gain.
- To be people who practice Love, even in the face of hate.

Authentic faith is not easy. Love is not easy.

But God does not ask us to be perfect. And God promises to be with us - to bless us in the midst of what is hard.

Light a candle for those you have lost. Dissolve an enemy's name in the baptismal font.

For our spiritual practice today, we're going to take some time to mourn the people and things we have lost and to pray for our enemies that we may better love them.

You're invited to come forward to light a candle of remembrance for those whom we have lost in the past few years. There's no limit on how many or if they are a church member or not. You're welcome to write their names on the paper if that's meaningful for you.

You're also invited to write the name or action of an enemy on a piece of dissolving paper and drop it in the baptismal font - the symbol of God's Grace and forgiveness as a prayer for our own ability to respond to injustice in loving ways.