

Pastor Jon' s Sermon from Sunday, February 13.

“Blessings and Warnings”

Text: Luke 6:17-26

How do you determine your priorities in life? How do you choose how to spend your time? How does the church set priorities for its mission? Well today in our Gospel, in what is known as Jesus' Sermon on the Plain, Jesus shares his priorities for the community that follows him.

Jesus does this in the form of blessings and woes. The people who are blessed or to be honored in Jesus' Kingdom are not whom you would expect. When we call someone blessed in America, we usually think of people who appear to have it all together. They have wealth, or power, good looks, status, or a family that doesn't seem to have any problems... which doesn't exist by the way. Instead, Jesus lifts up the poor, hungry, grieving, and the excluded (on account of Jesus) as those who are to be considered blessed, and therefore are the priorities for his mission. Jesus radically challenges the dominant tradition of what God's presence and blessings look like. The cross will also challenge the ideal that God is only present in shows of strength and power. God's presence can be found in failure and weakness.

If you think about it, some or all of the disciples in the crowd would know poverty, hunger, and grief as they left everything behind to follow Jesus. We know Simon Peter had a mother-in-law, which would mean he left his wife behind to follow Jesus. In addition, most people in the crowds lived under the oppressive Roman Occupation, which wasn't a fair playing field for all. After choosing to follow Jesus, the disciples didn't have an income or daily work anymore. They lost their identity... but were gaining a new one as a disciple. They went from a paying job to becoming students again... students of Jesus' kingdom values.

Compared to Matthew's version of this text, known as the beatitudes, in the Sermon on the Mount, Luke has Jesus teaching from the plain... the level ground. Luke is known as a more economic Gospel. Jesus stands with the people, not above them like in Matthew, writing to a more privileged Jewish audience. In Matthew, Jesus says for the

first beatitude, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.” whereas Luke says, “Blessed are the poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” Matthew looks at things from a more spiritual perspective. Whereas, when Luke says poor, he means poor... poverty.

Each blessing in our Gospel for today comes with a promise. For the poor, Jesus says yours is the kingdom of God. For the hungry, now you will be filled. For those who weep now, you will laugh again. For those who are hated and excluded for following Jesus, rejoice, your reward is great in heaven. The blessing we can connect with most is mourning. I did two funerals this weekend and saw many hurting people and lots of tears. In Jesus’ kingdom, you are honored.

But then Luke has something that Matthew doesn’t have in the beatitudes. These are called the woes. The best way I can describe the woes is as warnings.

How many of you find yourself sharing little warnings with loved ones? Like Sue Steffan’s family in the hospital the other night as they held vigil for her husband Jim in the ICU. I heard one of the kids say to Sue, you need to eat something. Or like the other night when all the snow melt ended up on our driveway and created a skating rink. We warned the kids to be careful when coming and going... it is slippery. Or when it snows, we tell our teenage drivers to take it easy. We know what could happen if our loved ones won’t head the warning. But we offer the warning because we love them and want to keep them safe. Jesus warns us and doesn’t want us to get too comfortable.

In the woes, Jesus is warning his followers to consider their priorities. If their priority is wealth, beware, because you have already received your consolation. There is a false sense of security in wealth. It can come and go. Then related to hunger. If you are full now, you will get hungry again. And if we are laughing now, we know that tomorrow can bring mourning and weeping. Nothing is guaranteed. Each good day we have is something to be cherished.

These woes should make us squirm a bit because we have wealth and are full. They should cause us to check our priorities. The good news

here is in learning what Jesus priorities are and in the warning not to get too comfortable. With warnings, there is time to change. There is time to use our blessings generously.

It is about where you put your ultimate trust. Do you place your trust in God or in earthly goods? If we are honest, earthly goods. But thanks be to God for the grace we receive in Jesus on the cross and in the resurrection.

Amen