

Sermon for Sunday, February 17, 2019

**Plain View**

Our text this morning begins by saying “he came down with them” which begs the question—where is Jesus coming from?

In the previous story, after a long night of prayer, Jesus called 12 people to be his disciples—these 12 would now travel everywhere together, Jesus would be their Rabbi and they would be his followers. There was an excitement and anticipation as to what Jesus was going to do and what his ministry was going to look like. Once the 12 had been called they followed Jesus down the mountain where they were greeted on the plain by a great crowd of even more followers as well as people who had traveled long distances to not only hear Jesus, but came filled with hope of being healed by him. Luke paints the picture saying “all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.” It’s in the midst of this chaos that Jesus looked up and delivered his first teaching to this newly formed band of disciples. A teaching which contained four blessings, followed by four woes.

Now if these beatitudes sound different to you or if you’ve never heard the woe statements before, you’re not alone—because there are two versions of the beatitudes, one is found in Matthew and the other is here in Luke, and I think there’s a reason why one is more popular than the other, because Luke’s statements can be hard to hear and even more difficult to process. But tucked within these blessings and woes are not only messages of blessing and warning but also good news of what God’s kingdom looks like and what it means to be Jesus disciple.

First, in Matthew’s account of this story, Jesus went up on a mountain side sat down and delivered the beatitudes as part of the Sermon on the Mount. But for Luke, Jesus comes down the mountain and standing in the midst of a huge crowd of people, delivers this sermon. The physical action of coming down the mountain is significant. There’s an echo from the book of Exodus, when Moses went up Mount Sinai to receive the law from God who then returned to the people in order to teach them what it means to live in relationship with God.

For Luke, Jesus, God in human flesh, comes down the mountain, stands in the middle of the people and begins to teach:

Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.

Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man.

Luke’s beatitudes sound different than Matthew’s. In Matthews version we hear blessed are the poor in Spirit. But for Luke, there’s a concrete; blessed are you who are poor.

In this context, “blessed” can be translation as favored, as in, “favored are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” “favored are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled”...throughout Luke’s gospel there are stories where it appears as though God “favors” the poor—examples of this can be seen in the Shepherds—people who because of their work which required them to stay out in the fields tending their sheep, were considered ritually impure--But they were the first to hear the good news that God had come near and to them, a child had been born.

This pattern of God favoring the poor occurs time and time again throughout Luke’s gospel.

Which might help explain why Luke includes the four “woe” statements—one woe for every blessing, so we hear, Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” and “woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.”

In these simple lines, Jesus reveals that the sermon on the plain isn’t only about a physical location, but reveals what God’s kingdom truly looks like; those who have been lowered in societies eyes whether due to economic misfortune, a health issue or choices made in life, are being raised up, while those who have been elevated in the eyes of society are being brought down—It’s important to notice that those who were high up

aren't brought down lower than those being raised up—instead everyone is brought to the same level, to the same plain.

And yet, this message can be hard to hear because when we're honest, as a society we've made an art of elevating people. Standing in line at just about any store we see magazines splashed with pictures of musicians we enjoy listening to, actors we long to look like, sports stars we look up to and memorize their stats for, and royalty we love to follow and dream of being. There are people who have been elevated to near godlike status—and there's a reason why when we come face to face with those who have been elevated we are at a loss for words and we "fan girl" or "fan boy" out...

But just as we elevate some we also lower groups of people...Luke even points this out later on in chapter 18 where he tells a parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. The Pharisee stands in the temple praying "God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector." And yet, in Luke fashion, the story continues that it is the despised tax collector, who is looked down on in the eyes of society, but is the one who beats his chest and cries out to God...

It sounds like a funny, hyperbolic story but I think when we're honest with ourselves, there's some truth. Throughout Luke's gospel, and here in the beatitudes, we're called to look at our own biases and to acknowledge that in God's kingdom the low are lifted up and the high are brought down—not out of an injustice but in the establishment of justice and in the recognition that in God's kingdom there is true equity. Every time someone is baptized here at Ladue Chapel we hand them a white t-shirt—while sometimes it's seen as advertising for the church because the words "I was baptized at Ladue Chapel" are typically printed on it—it also serves as a reminder. That through the waters of our baptisms, everyone, regardless of our social standing or the success of our career, regardless of the choices we've made or the unexpected twists and turns of life, everyone stands on the same plain.

This also has implication for how we understand God's love. Part of the reason why our society elevates some over others, is that somewhere, deeply seated in us, is a belief that there isn't enough. We strive to achieve, to earn a great education, to get a good job, to buy the house, to wear the best clothes, to take the next step up on the rung of society because there isn't enough...

But God's kingdom tells us a different story, a story that says; not only is there enough, but there is such an abundance that all are welcome.

As Jesus' disciples we are called to live in the reality of God's abundance. But this is hard...

And I like to think that for the 12 newly called disciples—maybe the words of the beatitudes were hard for them to hear too and that maybe there's a reason why, even after following Jesus closely for three years, they still didn't fully understand or comprehend what Jesus was up to.

Because Jesus' words, while providing comfort on the one hand can provoke, offend and challenge on the other.

And yet, we know that these words are spoken by the God who knows us, loves us and calls us by name—which means that even in the challenge, there is good news—that God's kingdom is so radically different than the systems and structures we are in, it takes constant work and sometimes some challenging words to remember that God's kingdom isn't one of scarcity where only a few make it, but one where all are invited. It's only on the plain, standing shoulder to shoulder with all of God's people where equity is achieved that we catch the full view of God's kingdom and as Christ's disciples **this, this** is the good news we are called to proclaim with our words and actions each day.

In the name of the father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

After hearing the good news of the gospel we are invited to offer ourselves to God by bringing forth our tithes and offering.

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