

Sermon: More Blessing Than Woe
Job 19:23-27a, Luke 6:20-31

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Job 19:23-27a

O that my words were written down! O that they were inscribed in a book! O that with an iron pen and we lead they were engraved on a rock forever! For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God, who I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.

Luke 6:20-31

Then he looked up at his disciples and said: "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. Rejoice 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.

"But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. "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. "Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

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

Sermon

It is the month of November and many folks take time each day during this month to “count their blessings” or express their thankfulness. Some do this by journaling and some by posting their gratitude on facebook or other social media. Just a sample post from my facebook feed this morning, “A Month of Thanks - Today I am thankful for good beer and good books, in no particular order.” So I wonder what things you might post for your Month of Thanks. Maybe just thinking back over the first 5 days of the month and what you might be thankful for each of those days?

Did you think of a few things? I wonder how many of you would have posted, “Today I am thankful that I am poor.” or “I am thankful that I am hungry.” or “that I am crying.” or “Thank you that I have no friends because they all think Christianity is a joke.” Did anyone have one of those in their thoughts for A Month of Thankfulness?

No, maybe you were happier to be thankful for the abundance in your life, the riches, or for the ability to laugh, even if it means you are laughing at someone else. Maybe you're thankful for the wonderful food that you have to eat or that people respect and think well of you. Those would all fit better on my list of thanksgivings.

But here in Luke's Gospel, Jesus speaks to a great crowd of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon, the great sermon on the plain. And he opens his sermon by turning the concept of blessings and woes on its head. If you are hungry or poor, weeping or rejected - then you are blessed. But if you are rich or full, laughing or well thought of, woe to you.

Jesus has encountered this great multitude of people who have gathered because they have heard about the miracles of healing that Jesus has been doing. They were all surrounding Jesus in a mob, trying to touch him so that they might be healed. Completely engulfed by the crowd, Jesus looks to his disciples and shares these blessings and woes. It is a reminder to them all that being Jesus' disciples is not a path to power or wealth or luxury. In fact, those disciples who try to take advantage of the people who come to be healed and come to hear the good news of the Savior, are to be pitied. But those who take the harder road, walk because they understand their reward to be in heaven.

But what does that all mean for us today? What does it say about our discipleship? I think we can look to the words of Christ that follow to better see how we are called to follow him.

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

That golden rule, do unto others as you would have them do unto you. How often have I flipped the rule around, "Do to me, as you would want me to do for you." Let me receive the benefits of compassion and love - even when I do not return it. But Jesus points to those who are least likely to reciprocate our kindness. He points to our enemies, to those who hate us, to those who would want nothing more than to do us harm, and he says "I want you to love even them." Jesus points to the least and lost that were surrounding them, the poor and hungry and grieving and forgotten, and he tells his disciples, give to them your coat and even your shirt, give to them what they are so desperate to have.

Jesus quote the golden rule in Luke's gospel and invites his disciples to see each person as if they are looking in the mirror, to see yourself in the enemy, in the angry, in the desperate, in the lost. But in the end of Matthew's gospel Jesus takes it one step farther, he says that when you do for the least among you, you do it to me. That is our calling, so see in each person - friend or foe, family or stranger, a person you agree with or someone you strongly disagree with - to see in each person your own face, and the face of Christ.

Woe to us who choose to ignore the world arounds us, but what a blessing when we are able to see Christ in our neighbor. Amen