

February 13, 2022
Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Luke 6:17-26 (Jeremiah 17:5-8; 1 Corinthians 15:12-20)

THE GREAT REVERSAL: FROM WOE TO BLESSED, FROM DEATH TO LIFE

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for meditation today comes from the Gospel according to St Luke, the 6th chapter, which you heard read earlier.

In our text Jesus begins His Sermon on the Plain by speaking *beatitudes*. The word *beatitude* comes from the Latin, meaning *extreme blessedness*. In the Bible the word *blessed* is translated from both the Hebrew and Greek to refer to God's "... *divine favor conveyed to man.*" (Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible, 271) Jesus' beatitudes are a declaration of *blessedness* that believers enjoy resulting from the fact that they are reconciled with the Father for the sake of Jesus' sacrificial death and resurrection. But when I read Jesus' description of *blessedness* in our text, it doesn't sound like divine favor. It sounds like backwards or upside-down thinking.

Jesus says that the *blessed* are the poor, the hungry, and those who weep. (cf: Luke 6:20–21) The *blessed* are those who're hated, excluded, reviled, *and* spurned as evil. (cf: Luke 6:22) Does that sound like *blessedness* to you. And He doesn't stop there. He goes on to proclaim His *woes*, describing those who are cursed. Except the *woes* sound like the things you and I pursue in this life. Jesus says *woe* to the rich, to the well-fed, to those who laugh, and to those who have a good name. (cf: Luke 6:24–26) The ones that Jesus says *woe* to are the people that you and I typically envy. It's backwards thinking! But it's only backwards and upside-down thinking to the sinful and unregenerate man. St Paul writes that:

"¹⁴ The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned." (1 Corinthians 2:14)

Jesus' *blessings* and *woes* are part of a greater theme that runs throughout Holy Scripture that we sometimes refer to as the Gospel theme of the Great Reversal. It's a reversal of what you and I think is truly wisdom. It's the idea that God's strength comes through weakness. Victory comes through defeat. Life comes from dying. It's the idea that God loved all mankind so much that He would send His own Son to suffer and die a horrific death so that poor miserable sinners such as you and me who believe in Him, trusting in Him alone for salvation, might pass through death into eternal life. (cf: John 5:24)

News of Jesus' preaching and miracles has traveled far and wide. St Luke writes that He comes down from a mountain and stands with a great multitude of Jews and Gentiles, who came from far and near to hear him and be healed of their diseases. (Luke 6:17-18) And He healed all of them. (Luke 6:19)

Jesus' miracles are signs point to the fact that He is the Son of God who has power and authority over all creation. His miracles draw attention, but the reason Jesus came to earth was to preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God and win victory over sin, death, and the grave. (cf: Luke 4:43) And while the crowds listen in on His teaching, Jesus speaks directly to His disciples of all times, including you and me, teaching about this Great Reversal, what it means to be **blessed** in the Kingdom of God.

The **blessings** Jesus speaks of are not rewards for good works and deeds. They're not entrance requirements to get into the Kingdom of Heaven. They are a consequence of being a child of Christ. They are **spiritual blessings** freely bestowed upon the baptized believer for the sake of Christ by means of Word and Sacrament. Little Novah is proof of that this morning. She only nine days old. She can do nothing to support herself, let alone save herself from her sin. But in baptismal waters God has saved her:

“... by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on [her] richly through Jesus Christ [her] Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by his grace [she, too, is an heir] according to the hope of eternal life.”
(Titus 3:5–7)

The **woes** in our text are warnings to believers against falling away from faith and into unbelief. Unfortunately, many Christians are tempted by their sinful nature to pursue their own **blessedness** in all the wrong places because you and I look at our **blessings** from a self-centered view instead of a Christ-centered view.

Luke records Jesus' **blessings** then His **woes**. But for the sake of illustrating this Reversal, let's contrast each **blessing** with its corresponding **woe**. Jesus says:

“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” (Luke 6:20)
“But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.” (Luke 6:24)

The poor that Jesus speaks of are not those who lack riches in the eyes of the world. They're those who're **poor in the spirit**, those who recognize their spiritual bankruptcy as they come before God as nothing but beggars. You and I are beggars because there is absolutely nothing we can offer God for His favor. You are **poor in spirit** when you rely on God's gracious gift of mercy for the sake of Jesus' perfect life, His precious blood shed, and His innocent death in your stead. Your **blessed** poverty is His promise that yours is the Kingdom of God. You have true riches in the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

But **woe** to you who, **because of your riches**, believe you don't need a Savior from sin and death. **Woe** to you for being secure in your own **supposed** goodness, thinking you've earned your own salvation, for you have already received your reward.

Next Jesus says:

“Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied.” (Luke 6:21)
“Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry.” (Luke 6:25)

You are truly **blessed** when you hunger for righteousness. When you hunger for Jesus the Bread of life and thirst for His living water of salvation. (cf: John 4:10, 6:35) You are truly **blessed**

when you cling in faith to the One who loved you enough to hang on the cross in pain and thirst – where He hungered and thirsted for you and your salvation.

Jesus fills you to the **full** with His righteousness in Word and Sacrament. (cf: John 10:10) And having His righteousness, by the power of the Holy Spirit, His gifts of grace overflow in your lives, motivating you to love and serve your neighbor with virtuous deeds of care and mercy; gifts of spreading the Gospel through your personal witness and through your financial support Christ's Church.

But **woe** to you who're well fed now with a belly full of self-righteousness and pride, worshipping the spirituality of the world and desiring appetites of the flesh. You may be stuffed to the gills now, but on the Last Day the belly full of the feast of the world will be empty and forsaken.

Jesus next says:

“Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.” (Luke 6:21)

“Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.” (Luke 6:25)

Blessed are you when you weep because of your own sinful wretchedness and the misery and consequences of sin in the world. You weep now but you will laugh, for the source of your joy and happiness is in Christ Jesus who will raise you and Novah and all believers to new life with Him in His heavenly kingdom where He'll wipe every tear from your eyes. (cf: Revelation 21:4) Your **blessedness** might seem like upside down thinking today, but the fullness of God's **blessings** are stored up and waiting in the heavenly places. (cf: Ephesians 1:3) Your full enjoyment will come when you join Christ in His eternal Kingdom.

Jesus wept at the death of His good friend Lazarus. His heart goes out to all who mourn. Society views death as friendly, encouraging abortion, suicide, and euthanasia. But the Bible describes death as our enemy. (cf: 1 Corinthians 15:26) Death is the wages of your sin. (Romans 6:23) But Jesus would not let death have the final word. He bore your sins and the suffering of the world into His own body and shed His blood so that He might comfort and sooth you with his forgiveness and peace. Because He has won victory over death and the grave, you are free to stand up and speak out against evil and injustice in the world, knowing that because He was raised from the dead, you fear not any threat to the body because you too will be raised to new life. (cf Luke 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 15:21)

But **woe** to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. The mantra of the world is: *“Eat, drink, and be merry.”* (Luke 12:19) **Woe** to you who believe that spiritual matters and salvation can wait. **Woe** to you who are self-righteous and unprepared for God's judgment. On that day your laughter will turn to weeping and despair.

Jesus says:

“Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man!” (Luke 6:22)

“Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.” (Luke 6:26)

Blessed are you when you are despised for being a child of Christ Jesus. **Blessed** are you when you are insulted and rejected because you openly live out your faith and proclaim Christ and Him crucified. The world doesn't want to hear it.

“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:18)

The cross of Christ casts its shadow on all who believe and follow Him. Hatred, bitterness, and contempt is the reaction of a sinful world to Christ and His disciples. Jesus never said that life on this side of heaven would be easy. In fact, He said just the opposite. He said:

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it...” (Luke 9:23-25)

The way of the cross and self-denial can be lonely and difficult, but that's what Jesus commands of you. Satan will try to blind you from the true source of happiness and **blessedness**. He desires you glory in the fame and fortune of the world. But you, dear Christian, know that true happiness is found only in Christ, your crucified and risen Savior. Through His prophet Jeremiah, our Lord gives the perfect formula for **blessedness**. He says:

“Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord.” (Jeremiah 17:7)

“Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord.” (Jeremiah 17:5)

Brothers and sisters in Christ, you are **blessed** for the sake of Jesus' bloody suffering and death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. If Christ had not been raised, your faith would be in vain and you'd still be dead in your transgressions. (cf: 1 Corinthians 15:14-17) But in fact, the tomb is empty. Christ **has** been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who've died in the true faith. (cf: 1 Corinthians 15:20) Rejoice and leap for joy, for your reward is great in heaven, not because of what you have done, but because of what Christ has done for you. (cf: Luke 6:23)

You and I don't live up to the Biblical definition of **blessedness**, but Jesus has. You have His promise that you **are** His truly **blessed** saints. God grant that the reality of those **blessings** ease your pain under your crosses that you bear and encourage you until Christ returns or until by death you join the saints in heaven.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed Alleluia!

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, Amen.