



Rev. Paul Alliet

Sermon for Epiphany 6
February 13, 2022

Strange Blessings

Luke 6:17–26

¹⁷ And he came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, ¹⁸ who came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. And those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. ¹⁹ And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all.

²⁰ And he lifted up his eyes on 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 shall be satisfied. “Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. ²² “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! ²³ Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers 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 shall be hungry. “Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. ²⁶ “Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.”

Jesus says a lot of surprising things. We’ve heard them so often that the sharp edges have been worn down and the clear images blurred, and they don’t surprise us any more. But they’re still there. When we hear the Beatitudes and see what kind of people Jesus considers blessed, what He says ought to surprise us. His words don’t seem like blessings; the people He describes don’t seem like blessed people. To see what Jesus is saying, we need to look at the Beatitudes again and see what strange blessings Jesus pronounces.

At the beginning of our text, Jesus has just come down from the mountain. He spent the night there in prayer. And then in the morning, after He had prayed, He chose the Twelve to follow Him and eventually to go out and preach. Everything seems to be going well. Jesus has the Twelve. Multitudes from Judea and Jerusalem and even from the seacoasts of Tyre and Sidon have come to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases. People with unclean spirits are being cured. Power is going out from Him and healing them all. And so the natural question is whether this is the way it will be from now on. Has Jesus come to take away all our problems? Will crowds always come and listen to Jesus? Will power flow out from Him and make everything all right?



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Jesus answers those questions by speaking the Beatitudes. Jesus blesses His disciples, but His blessings are strange. He turns the normal order of things upside down. We assume that the person who is wealthy, satisfied, laughing, and popular is blessed. Television evangelists write books with titles like *The Be Happy Attitudes* and *Your Best Life Now*. And we take it for granted that people who are poor, hungry, weeping, and rejected are not blessed. Jesus says the opposite. He says that the people we would ordinarily say have every right to be unhappy and disappointed are blessed, and pronounces woes on the people we would say are happy. Why does Jesus say such strange things? Is He exalting misery as if it was a good thing?

Jesus says these things because of who He is. At Jesus' Baptism His Father pronounced Him His beloved Son, with whom He is well pleased. He was anointed with the Holy Spirit to carry out the work of salvation. The Father is pleased with Him not only as His eternal Son, but now as His Son in human flesh and blood, the One who is bearing the weight of the world's sin. He is bearing that burden, and He will bear it to the Cross. He is the One who is rich above all, but he became poor for our sakes, so that we might become rich in Him (2 Cor. 8:9). He is blessed above all, and yet He suffers above all. He is the Father's beloved Son, with whom the Father is well-pleased; but He dies on the Cross as one stricken by God, smitten by Him, and afflicted (Is. 53:4). He exchanges places with us. He takes on our sin, so that we can be given His righteousness. He suffers our death, so that we can live in and with Him. His body is placed in the grave, so that He can rise from death as the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep; and because of that our bodies are placed in the grave with the certainty that He will raise them. All that He does and all that He suffers, He does and suffers for us.

In Jesus everything is reversed. The people who in their unbelief are consoled by riches; who are full of themselves and do not hunger and thirst after righteousness; who laugh at Jesus and His salvation and at those who follow Him; who are well-spoken of and follow and praise false prophets — those people have what they want: they are not like Jesus, the Savior who came into the world fallen into sin and misery to suffer and die for the salvation of sinners.

The people who follow Jesus, who recognize in this Man of sorrows who is acquainted with grief and has taken up our illnesses and home our disease (Mat. 8:17; Is. 53:4), who see Him suffering and dying on the Cross and recognize in Him the Son of God and the Savior of sinners — they are blessed. At Jesus' Baptism the heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove, and the Father said, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:21-22). At your Baptism, although we didn't see it, the heavens were torn open and the Holy Spirit descended in the water and the Word, and the Father pronounced you His beloved child in Christ, with whom



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He is well-pleased. You were born in the “Woe!” of sin; you were reborn in the “Blessed!” of God’s grace.

Both “blessed” and “woe” are verdicts. They don’t tell us how we ought to act or how we ought to feel. They are verdicts, and they are spoken by the One who at the Last Day will speak His verdict of salvation or condemnation over every member of our race. He speaks His verdict now so that now we can hear Him and be brought to Him. So we need to set aside how we feel, good or bad, and listen to what Jesus says.

Do you feel fat and sassy in your unbelief? Are you convinced that you have no need of a Savior like this? Then understand that He has already spoken His verdict over you: “Woe!” Not just “woe” for the moment, but eternal woe. If you trust in man and make flesh your strength because your heart turns away from the LORD, you are like a shrub in the desert, which turns green for a brief time and then withers and dies in the salt land of eternal death (Jer. 17:5-6). If you have received your consolation in this life and want nothing more, then you will receive no consolation in eternity. If you are full and have no hunger for anything Jesus could give you, then you will eternally hunger for what you can no longer obtain. If you laugh now because you have everything you want, you will mourn and weep for the eternal joy which you cannot have. If all people speak well of you, then remember that the only One whose verdict over you really counts is Jesus.

But if you are poor and have nothing to offer to God, then you are blessed, because God gives you His kingdom. If you are hungry, if you have a hunger which nothing in this world, not even the whole world itself, can satisfy, then you are blessed. You are blessed because Jesus satisfies that hunger. His flesh is true food and His blood is true drink (John 6:55). His words are life-giving words, a well from which you can draw the water of salvation (John 4:14; 7:38-39; Is. 49:10). You can sink your roots into the water of Holy Baptism, and when heat and drought come upon you your leaves will remain green, because that water never dries up (Jer. 17:7-8). If you weep over sin, not just your own sin but the sin of the world when you see the misery and suffering and abuse which sin causes, you are blessed, because Jesus wept over it also. If you weep over the death of others and over the prospect of your own death, then you are blessed, because Jesus wept over the death of His friend Lazarus, and wept and prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. If people hate you because of Christ and His Word, then you are blessed, because they hated Jesus, too, and they still hate Him. Leap for joy, because that puts you in the company of the Prophets and Apostles.

Jesus’ blessings are strange. That shouldn’t surprise us. Our world misunderstands, distorts, and rejects everything that God does. It refuses to acknowledge that this Man is the Son of God, the Savior. But faith hears. It hears what Jesus says and it believes what Jesus says. Faith believes that this Man, strange as it seems, is the Savior



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of the world, is your Savior and mine, and that the only blessing that matters is the one that comes from Him.

Amen.