

Luke 6:17-26 (Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany—Series C)

“Christ’s Blessings”

Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield CT

February 13, 2022

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

Our text is the Gospel reading recorded in Luke 6:

¹⁷And after [Jesus] had come down with them, He stood on a level place, and a large crowd of His disciples and a great multitude of the people from all of Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast district of Tyre and Sidon ¹⁸came to hear Him and to be healed from their diseases. And those troubled by unclean spirits were healed. ¹⁹And the whole crowd sought to touch Him, because power was coming out from Him and healing them all. ²⁰And He lifted up His eyes to His disciples and said, “Blessed are you who are poor, because yours is the reign and rule of God. ²¹Blessed are you who are hungry now, because you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, because you will laugh. ²²Blessed are you when the people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and reject your name as evil on account of the Son of Man. ²³Be glad when that happens and jump for joy, for behold! your reward is great in heaven. For their fathers did the same to the prophets. ²⁴But woe to you who are rich, because you have received your consolation. ²⁵Woe to you who are full now, because you will be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, because you will mourn and weep. ²⁶Woe to you when all the people speak well of you, because their fathers did the same to the false prophets.

When you hear the word “beatitudes,” you most likely think of the beginning of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 where the Lord introduces His sermon with nine beatitudes. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” (Matt. 5:3–6 ESV).

A beatitude is a declaration of blessedness. That state of blessedness that believers enjoy is the result of the fact that God is in communion with us through His Son, Jesus Christ. Beatitudes describe Gospel gifts that belong to each and every believer. In today’s Gospel lesson, Jesus speaks several beatitudes as an opener to what has been called the Sermon on

the Plain. He declares believers to be blessed in order to comfort believers with the assurance that God knows what they are going through. God knows and looks upon us with favor and mercy and will deliver us by filling our need with blessings to the point of overflowing!

When Jesus speaks a beatitude, His spoken words actually deliver the blessing of which they speak, although often by way of a future promise. So, we end up with a tension between the now and the not yet. Already now believers in Jesus have the blessings Christ declares. They are yours and mine through faith in Jesus' promise. That's why Jesus can say, "Blessed are you who are poor, because yours is the reign and rule of God." God's reign and rule, and our being a part of it in Christ, **is** a present reality. The reign and rule of God's kingdom has in fact come to the hearers of Jesus' Word. His Word says so and His Word always does what it says. For example, Jesus' Word says that in Baptism, you have eternal life. You have it now. It is a present possession, today, yesterday, and forever. But you don't yet have eternal life in all its fullness. We are still in our mortal bodies, awaiting the Last Day and the resurrection of all flesh to glory when all believers in Christ will be given new, eternal bodies as we live in glorified body and soul with Christ forevermore. Again, the tension between the now and the not yet. We have good things to look forward to because the blessings of Christ are ours now.

But here and now, it doesn't always look like we are blessed. You see, the world, our culture and society, look for success and advantage as a sign of blessedness. If you have a lot of money and possessions, people say, "You're blessed." If you have popularity or status in society, people say, "You're blessed." God does indeed bless all people with the things needed for this life. Out of His grace and mercy, there are many physical blessings that we

do enjoy. So, in that sense, yes, we are blessed. But Jesus' beatitudes do not promise even the smallest amount of worldly advantage for Christians. The blessings of Christ are spiritual blessings, and they are not intended to be principles to live by in order to achieve success in the things of this world, whether it's our occupation, finances, or relationships.

Consider who Jesus' declares blessed: the poor, the hungry, the weeping, the hated. Jesus' beatitudes are nonsensical to those outside the reign and rule of God. What could possibly be so blessed about being poor, hungry, or hated? How can those who are grief-stricken and mourning possibly rejoice? There's no earthly advantage here. No, but consider the immense spiritual advantage of Christ's spiritual blessings of body and soul that you already have now according to the promise which you will fully and completely enjoy in the new creation. Only a believer in Christ can say that the beatitudes are true and do so joyfully. But this is foolishness to the world that lives apart from faith in Christ because it is the theology of the cross. 1 Corinthians 1:18-25, "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. . . . For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Cor. 1:18–25 ESV).

Again, who are the blessed? The poor, the hungry, the crying. Those hated, insulted, and excluded because of the Son of Man. Notice now the One who was poor for you, the One

who hungered in the wilderness for you. Notice the One who wept for Jerusalem and who received hate, insults, and exclusion, who was cast out and crucified outside Jerusalem as evil—the very Son of Man, Jesus Christ. When you were incorporated into Christ through Baptism and faith, the life of Christ became your life and by grace, the blessings of Christ have become your inheritance.

Jesus was the One who believed with unwavering faith the Father's words about the fulfillment of His mission of salvation, and He persevered without taking offense at the shame of the cross. Jesus was the One who was poor and hungry, who cried and was persecuted like the prophets of old. He endured the scorn, the shame, and the death that purchased and won the blessings His Word gives through faith. In Baptism, you are joined to Christ. What's His is now yours. You live under the cross. This means that you may face poverty and need, tears and sorrow, hatred and exclusion because you bear the name of Christ. Nevertheless, you are blessed because the reign and rule of God in Christ belongs to you.

Even now, in this valley of weeping and sorrow, pain and suffering, hatred and insult, you belong to Christ. Your sins are forgiven because Jesus endured the cross, scorning its shame, redeeming you from Satan, sin, and death with His holy, precious blood. Where there is the forgiveness of sins, there is also eternal life. You have victory over death and the grave, the very victory that Jesus won for you with His own death and resurrection. As the Psalmist wrote in the confidence of faith, "I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the LORD" (Psa. 118:17 ESV).

Jesus is your eternal blessing for the now and the not yet. Yours is now the reign and rule of God as you are united with Christ in your Baptism. For richer, for poorer, in abundance

or in hunger, in suffering or in rejoicing, Christ and His forgiveness, life, and salvation belong to you as a gift of God's grace received by saving faith. Now, you also have a foretaste of the not yet, the eternal blessings that are to come because you have been washed in the water and Word of Baptism. You have a foretaste of the not yet as your sins are forgiven in the Absolution by the Gospel of Christ and as you eat and drink Christ's true Body and Blood. In faith, you are looking forward to the heavenly banquet feast that will have no end.

So, even in the middle of our earthly poverty and hunger, sorrows and struggles, God's blessings in Christ prevail. To you now belongs the reign and rule of God. To you now belongs the forgiveness of sins and the life everlasting. Look forward with faithful joy to the not yet of your salvation. In the words of the apostle Peter, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet. 1:3–9 ESV). Amen.