

**The Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany**  
**Feb. 13, 2022**

**The Lessons:** Jeremiah 17:5-8  
 Psalm 1  
 1 Corinthians 15:12-20  
 Luke 6:17-26

**The Hymns:** # 901 *Open Now Thy Gates of Beauty*  
 # 699 *I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say*  
 # 729 *I Am Trusting Thee, Lord Jesus*

**The Collect:** O Lord, graciously hear the prayers of Your people that we who justly suffer the consequence of our sin may be mercifully delivered by Your goodness to the glory of Your name; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reign with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

**The Sermon:**  
**Epiphany 6 – “Blessings and Woes”**  
**Luke 6:17-26**

Dear Friends in Christ:

In today’s text our Lord has just been on a mountain where He prayed through the night. In the morning, He called a large group of His followers to gather around Him. Luke doesn’t tell us how many that was but from these disciples He chose 12 who are now referred to as ‘Apostles.’ Then we are told:

“And He came down the mountain 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, who came to HEAR him and to be healed of their diseases. And those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all the crowd sought to TOUCH him, for power came out from him and healed them all.”

Again, isn’t this just what the church looks like and why you’ve come here today. We’ve come here to “hear Him” and to “touch him.” Just like we saw last Sunday in the Divine Service conducted on the beach by the sea of Gennessaret, now again the pattern is repeated here at this Divine Service on the “level place.” And today it is repeated here in our gathering at Redeemer. First we HEAR Him speak His Word that heals us. Then we come and TOUCH Him, tasting His body and blood in the sacrament where power comes out from him and heals us all.

Our text says that “He lifted up his eyes on his disciples...”  
 The “Disciples” are all those who desire to HEAR Him and TOUCH Him, because they know that His

Word is true and power comes out from him to heal us of that disease that causes all of our diseases – our sin.

“Disciples” are followers of Jesus. Which doesn’t necessarily mean they follow wherever He goes like the Apostles will do. But it does mean that Jesus goes with them wherever they go – and they know that.

“Disciples” are those who strive to live their lives in such a way that pleases Jesus – but not because they hope that by doing so He will bless them. That would be selfish and loveless.

“Disciples” strive to live their lives in such a way that pleases Jesus because He has already blessed them – and NOT because they have been so faithful or worthy, but solely because He loves them. And so “disciples” are those who strive to live their lives according to His will and His word, as their sacrifice of gratitude and thanksgiving to Him.

So when we hear that “Jesus lifted up his eyes on his disciples and said: ‘Blessed are you...’” we want to be sure to hear what He actually says. Because as we all know we can sometimes hear what we want to hear or what we expect to hear and maybe even hear what He never said at all.

“Blessed are you...” This is not a ‘future, conditional’ phrase. He doesn’t say, ‘you will be blessed if...’ He doesn’t say, ‘here’s what needs to happen in your life if you want my blessing.’ He doesn’t say “you need to be ‘poor,’ and ‘hungry,’ and ‘weeping,’ and “excluded, reviled, spurned by people before I will bless you.”

This is ‘present, indicative.’ “Blessed ARE you...” This is an official proclamation that puts what it proclaims into effect simply by the authority of the one who proclaims it. And in this case, the One who proclaims it has been given “all authority in heaven and on earth.”

“Blessed are you...” is a statement of fact.

So, what does it mean to ‘be blessed’ by Jesus Christ? Does it mean that Jesus is going to make you rich or well fed or happy or successful or healthy or accepted by others? Isn’t this the way that we usually think of what it means to ‘be blessed’? What do we count when we ‘count our blessings?’

What if you had none of these things to count? Would it mean that you are NOT blessed? Would it mean that Jesus’ “blessed are you” was not meant for you? We must be very careful how we count our blessings.

To be ‘blessed’ by Jesus means that He has called you by the gospel and written His name over your life and brought you to His Father in heaven and said, “Dear Father, here is the one whom You sent me to die for. See how my blood is all over him. I have brought him/her to you, holy as I am holy that that he/she may live with us forever and ever.”

To be 'blessed' by Jesus means that He is working everything that happens to you while you are still in this world according to His purpose for you, which is to preserve you in this one true faith until you depart this world and enter His peace.

To be 'blessed' by Jesus means by the authority and power of His Word you are blessed -- everything is going to turn out very well for us 'in the end' when on that Last Day He comes again to judge the living and the dead.

'Disciples of Jesus' are those who believe this – EVEN WHEN the circumstances of their life may not only 'SUGGEST' that they are 'not blessed' but even 'SHOUT' at them that they must be 'cursed' by God.

"You are poor." "You are hungry." "You are weeping." "People hate you and exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil."

And you know why? It's because you're one of those Jesus people. Being His disciple could actually cost you some of those blessings you love to count. It could cost you that promotion or even get you fired. You might be laughed at by your colleagues for being so ridiculously unenlightened, or excluded by your friends because you won't participate in their sin or acknowledge their gods.

That's the way it was for the 'disciples of Jesus' in the early church for whom Luke has written his gospel. The temptation to count their blessings according to the outward circumstances of their life was – well – as tempting as it is for us today.

"He lifted up His eyes on His disciples, and said..."

"But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.

Woe to you who are full now for you shall be hungry.

Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.

Woe to you when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets."

I think that it's important to recognize the fact that Luke does not say that Jesus directed this series of corresponding 'woes' to those who were NOT His disciples. No, He declares both His blessing and His woe to "His disciples."

We are living in a time of extreme 'polarization.' You're either on the 'left' or on the 'right' and there's no 'middle ground.' But that's not the way it is with us before God. We listen to the word of the one, true God AND we listen to the word of many false gods. We desire to follow in the way of Jesus Christ and be His disciple AND we desire to follow in the way of this world and to not be His disciple.

So, when we hear the Psalmist speak of the 'blessed man' who "walks not in counsel of the wicked nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in the law of the Lord..." and the 'wicked man' who does those wicked things, don't we find both of these within each of us.

And likewise, when we heard the prophet Jeremiah say, “thus says the Lord...

“Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD,” and “Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD,” wasn’t he describing the battle between these two men that goes on within each of us as we strive to be the disciples of Jesus that we have been called and blessed to be? (Jer. 17:5-8).

How many times have we forsaken our blessed call to be disciples of Jesus Christ for the sake of money?

How many times have we “walked in the counsel of the wicked” to satisfy some hunger in us for forbidden food?

How many times have we set aside the blessing of being a disciple of Jesus Christ for the pursuit of happiness or acceptance by others?

And so the point here is this, just as we dare not look to the outward circumstances of our life as the measure and proof that we are blessed by Jesus, neither are we to look inside ourselves for the same.

Rather, blessed is the man whose faith is based not on his faith,  
OR what he does or doesn’t do,  
OR on what happens to him....

But blessed is the man whose faith is based on the Word of His Lord who declares, “blessed are you...”

Blessed is the man whose faith is NOT BASED on what happens to him at all – but IS BASED on what happened to His Lord.

Jesus Christ is the man who was rich yet for your sake became poor so that you through his poverty might become rich.

Jesus Christ is the man who hungered just so that you might know that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

Jesus Christ is the man who was despised and rejected by men, all so that you might be redeemed and accepted by your Creator.

On the cross, Jesus Christ put the cursed man in you to death by becoming the cursed man for you. And then on the 3rd day, the same Jesus Christ set the blessed man in you free from your captivity to the curse of sin – that you may be His disciple.

So, “blessed are you who are poor” with nothing to call your own except Jesus Christ. “For yours in the kingdom of God.”

And, "blessed are you who are hungry now, for the true body and true blood of Your Lord, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins, for you will be satisfied."

And, "blessed are you who weep now," for all of the times that you gave into the wicked man in you and offered such little resistance to the temptations of the world, "for you shall laugh" at the devil and all his fallen angels that were overpowered by your Lord.

And, "blessed are you when people hate you and exclude you and revile you and spurn you on account of the Son of Man." For they are seeing Jesus in you. And you are bearing witness to this world that you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, and you count it the highest honor and the greatest privilege to be so blessed. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.