

February 16, 2025

INTRODUCTION: In our Gospel passage, Jesus heals many of their illnesses and teaches his disciples that the values of the kingdom of God are quite different from worldly standards.

Luke 6:17-26

Jesus came down with the twelve apostles and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre (Tire) and Sidon. They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

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." The word of the Lord.**

**Live Upside Down
Laura Daly, Lay Preacher**

**Lord, give me the confidence in the power of your Gospel. Grant me
clarity in understanding and proclaiming the truths of your Word.**

**Good morning to all present, and a shout out to those participating in
today's worship from home.**

**In today's gospel reading, Jesus speaks directly to the crowds gathered
around Him on a level place. In these verses, Jesus pronounces blessings
on those society often overlooks and delivers warnings, or woes, to those
who cling to worldly comfort. His words challenge us to reexamine our
values and invite us into a radical, upside-down way of living that
mirrors the coming Kingdom of God.**

**Jesus had just spent time teaching and healing, and here He gathers with
His disciples in the midst of a large crowd. The atmosphere is charged
with expectation. People come to see miracles, to hear His words, and
perhaps to catch a glimpse of something that promises a better life. In
this diverse crowd, Jesus begins a sermon that would forever change how
we understand success, comfort, and true blessing.**

**Jesus starts by saying, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the
kingdom of God." He does not merely refer to those who lack material
wealth but those who embrace a posture of dependence on and humility
before God. In saying "yours is the kingdom of God," Jesus declares that**

God's reign isn't reserved for those who accumulate riches—it is for those who trust in Him.

He continues with, "Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be filled" and "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh." These blessings are not empty words but are promises of a future reversal. In our present suffering—whether it be poverty, hunger, or grief—the kingdom of God is at work. It is a promise that our current state is not our final destination.

In the midst of our struggles, God is preparing something greater: a fulfillment that transforms sorrow into joy, emptiness into abundance.

Jesus then turns the message on its head. He warns, "Woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort." Likewise, "Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry," and "Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep."

Jesus is not saying that wealth or comfort in themselves are evil. Instead, He challenges us to see that when our hearts are entangled in the trappings of this world, we risk missing out on God's transformative power. The "woes" remind us that the things we often celebrate—wealth, self-sufficiency, and the pleasure of the moment—can become chains that bind us, keeping us away from the freedom of God's kingdom. When we rely solely on our worldly securities, we are setting ourselves up for a future that is not as secure as we think. We should view all the positives in our lives as gifts from God and not merely of our own doing.

Jesus condemns total self-reliance and hoarding wealth, warns of the complacency and satisfaction in material comfort, highlights the fleeting nature of worldly joys, challenges the desire for popularity over faithfulness to God, and that persecution for righteousness is not a curse

but a sign of faithfulness.

Jesus confronts us with a paradox: the very things the world celebrates are the things that keep us from His kingdom. For many of us, this is a hard truth. We live in a culture that values success by the measure of wealth, popularity, and comfort. Yet, Jesus calls us to a counter-cultural way of life—a life marked by humility, dependence on God, and a readiness to suffer for the sake of the gospel.

This doesn't mean we must renounce all comforts or wealth. Rather, it means we must continually assess our hearts: Are we trusting in what is temporary, or are we anchoring ourselves in the eternal promises of God? When we see someone in need—someone who is poor, hungry, or grieving—we should be reminded of Jesus' words. The blessings He pronounces on the downtrodden aren't reserved for a select few; they're an invitation to all who choose to live in His light.

Jesus offers hope to the oppressed and provides a vision of values that center on inner transformation as well as addressing the immediate realities of life.

Humankind may aspire to but has yet to fully live according to these teachings. As a Medieval Studies major in college, I was struck by the similarities between living according to God's laws and living by the chivalric code, and the stark differences between these aspirations and reality. During the Middle Ages, knights undertook various vows centered around the ancient principles of chivalry, such as living by a code of honor, protecting the weak and the defense of God and his Church. Unfortunately, these vows were often misinterpreted for temporal gain and reserved for the upper classes. Today, the misinterpretations of Jesus' message are endangering the disenfranchised and contributing to an environment centered on cruelty apathy, opportunism, and retribution. The only retribution one should be wary of is described by John the Baptist: "The axe lies ready at the

root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”

In today’s gospel, Jesus speaks of God’s justice for the marginalized and challenges the wealthy and powerful to reconsider their priorities. There are those today taking Jesus at his word and reminding others to do the same, regardless of personal danger. Consider Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde and her recent remarks at the service at Washington National Cathedral on the day after the Inauguration:

“Let me make one final plea, Mr. President. Millions have put their trust in you, and as you told the nation yesterday, you have felt the providential hand of a loving God. In the name of our God, I ask you to have mercy upon the people in our country who are scared now.

There are gay, lesbian, and transgender children in Democratic, Republican, and independent families - some who fear for their lives. The people who pick our crops and clean our office buildings, who labor in poultry farms and meatpacking plants, who wash the dishes after we eat in restaurants and work the night shifts in hospitals - they may not be citizens or have the proper documentation, but the vast majority of immigrants are not criminals. They pay taxes and are good neighbors. They are faithful members of our churches and mosques, synagogues, gurdwara, and temples. I ask you to have mercy, Mr. President, on those in our communities whose children fear their parents will be taken away, and that you help those who are fleeing war zones and persecution in their own lands to find compassion and welcome here. Our God teaches us that we are to be merciful to the stranger, for we were all once strangers in this land. May God grant us the strength and courage to honor the dignity of every human being, to speak the truth to one another in love, and walk humbly with each other and our God, for the

good of all people - the good of all people in this nation and the world. Amen."

Was this an inappropriate prayer to say in Church? Consider Jesus' role in his society. During Jesus' time, the Jewish people followed a plethora of strict rules and regulations taught by the Scribes and Pharisees. Jesus was taking these impossible laws and boiling them down to their truest essence. This was revolutionary, a major disruption and repudiation of those in power. Jesus did not acquiesce to please them, nor to be safe from their retaliation.

Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde's prayer is rooted in today's gospel. In these tumultuous times, she is showing us how to live according to Jesus' teachings, unafraid of repercussions, and continuing to pray for all, including those who wield power for good or ill.

I am proud that other Episcopalians have not asked her to walk back her comments, but are adding to her prayer:

Last week, Julia Ayala Harris, president of The Episcopal Church's House of Deputies, released a statement of solidarity and standing up for marginalized groups, referencing the words of the late Dr. Pauli Murray, an American civil rights activist, advocate, legal scholar and theorist, author and – later in life – an Episcopal priest.

"Like the psalms of lament that turn to praise, Dr. Murray understood that hope is not passive optimism, but an act of holy defiance, a declaration that the struggle for justice is worth enduring. Their life reminds us that we are called not simply to lament the injustices of the world but to act — to sing our own songs of hope in a weary time, to advocate, to organize, to protect, and to uplift."

We are all equal in God's eyes and no opportunistic interpretation of the Bible will change that. We must do what we can to be courageous,

faithful to God's teachings and love all, especially those who are the targets of hate.

This is not being political. This is about being true to Christ's teachings. It is about taking a stand for God's message of love and understanding.

Jesus is often seen as a revolutionary figure, walking a path of rebellion by using words of love and acts of compassion in the face of power and oppression. We must try to emulate this behavior.

How do we live out this message in today's Gospel? We must cultivate a spirit of humility. Recognize that our value does not come from what we own or how comfortable we are, but from our identity as children of God, and how we treat the "least of us."

God calls us to be agents of change in a world that values comfort and gain over compassion. When we see systemic injustice, or when we encounter individuals marginalized by society, we are reminded that God's heart is with the poor and the oppressed. Our actions—whether through volunteering, advocating for justice, or simply offering a listening ear, or a helping hand—can reflect the values of God's kingdom.

We must be willing to embrace the future as God envisions it for us, even when the present is painful. Jesus' promise that the hungry will be filled and the weeping will laugh is not just for a distant future; it is a call to trust God in the midst of our trials. This trust can sustain us even when life seems harsh and unyielding. The alternative to this is to descend into self-pity, which often leads to a lack of compassion for others, a feeling that one is being cheated out of something, and a need to get even.

Let us remember that the blessings and woes in today's Gospel are a call to choose what we value most. Do we invest in temporary comforts, or do we invest in a relationship with God that offers eternal hope?

Today's Gospel invites us into a radical reordering of our priorities. In a world that tells us wealth and comfort are the ultimate goals Jesus shows us that true blessing comes from dependence on God and from a life lived for others. His message is both a promise and a warning—a promise that those who are poor, hungry, and sorrowful in spirit are heirs of God's kingdom, and a warning that clinging too tightly to the pleasures of this world can blind us to the eternal treasures that await.

Make it your priority every day to adhere to the vision of a kingdom where God's grace transforms your life, where the lowly are lifted, and where every act of love and compassion becomes a testimony to the world of our belief and faith in Jesus. That we live our lives marked not by what we accumulate, but by the love we share, the hope we nurture, and the faith we embrace.

If enough of us can accomplish this, we can stand fast against those who would tell us to live a life full of bravado and devoid of compassion. Let us remind people, by our actions, of what it means to live in the light of Christ.

Amen.