

God's World Revealed

Luke 6:17-26 (Beatitudes)

Season of Epiphany

Slide: Coffee in the sun

Last week, in-between the two snowmageddons that we have had around here, I was drinking a cup of coffee in my dining room and the morning sun was pouring into my window, brightly shining all along my floor, as if it too was tired of being hidden behind the snowy clouds. I remember one moment of joy as I sipped my coffee, took a breath and felt the warmth.

And, then I saw all the dust the sun had quickly revealed - dust on the piano, dust on the floor underneath the couch, dust on my table. The joy was gone and I instantly got up and got a duster. Suddenly, I was unhappy with the sun and what it reminded me of.

Slide: Liturgical Wheel

If there is one major theme that runs throughout the season of Epiphany of which we are currently in before the time of Lent, it is the truth of Jesus Christ as the light of the world. Epiphany is about that light being revealed to us and around us. It begins with the light from the star in the east the magi followed to find the baby Jesus, but then ends before Lent with the story of Jesus Christ's transfiguration, otherwise known as the theophany, where his garments beam bright white on the top of a mountain as he had a conversation with Moses and Elijah.

But, here we are today, in-between these two big events of Epiphany and the Transfiguration, but the light is still there, showing the dust, revealing God's world to us as ones who are called to follow Jesus. Part of the Epiphany story includes Jesus' teachings and callings to his disciples, drawing light upon who God truly is for us. Each week during this season called Epiphany, the readings are meant to grant us our own epiphanies, our own revealing

of faith, as if a light bulb suddenly goes on again or the sun streams in after a darkness.

Slide: Sermon on the Plain

Today's reading from the Gospel of Luke is no different. This sermon from Jesus, who is the light of the world, is clearly intended to shine some light upon the life of faith, upon our lives as disciples. And, while it does indeed do that, I can't help but wonder if the world doesn't always look at this important teaching of Jesus in the way it might have been meant.

These sayings from the sermon on the plain in Luke are famously known as the beatitudes, but they are not the ones we tend to like from Matthew's gospel. You might remember that when Jesus preaches this sermon in Matthew's Gospel, it's from a mount or hill, not a flat plain like in Luke's Gospel, suggesting a space where Jesus is able to level with us about life. And, when Matthew heard this sermon by Jesus, he also interpreted it differently for his audience - in a more

spiritualized way and perhaps even to a more wealthy audience. Matthew's audience would have heard this instead: Blessed are the poor in spirit. It's almost hinting that if you were not poor, you could still relate to it.

Slide: Woe to you

Matthew also leaves out the woe statements - woe to you who are rich! This sermon indeed is quite different from Luke: "Blessed are the poor", "Blessed are those who weep, "Woe to those who are rich," "Woe to those who laugh." These sayings are drawn from a very important sermon of Jesus, but we don't like to hear it as much as Matthew's version for good reason. Who would really want to hear these hard sayings of Jesus put so bluntly? Like the sun on dust, it's almost too hard to look at. And yet, I think this very important lesson but dare I say even beautiful lesson from Luke is often misunderstood, especially in light of today.

Slide: How to Be

For example, it's all too easy to imagine that these beatitudes, these blessings and woes, are about us; that these statements are even like commandments for *us* to follow literally and thoroughly. So, we might believe that what Jesus is asking for us to do is to go out there and get poor, hungry, mournful, and persecuted. After all, who doesn't think that when hearing these woes about being rich, full, and happy, that Jesus intends for us to feel shame. Do we really think that Jesus would not wish for us to occasionally be happy and indeed, sometimes full? Is Jesus really shaming people in this sermon?

Yet, if that is indeed what Jesus is asking us to do, than it seems to me like a waste of time. No offense Jesus. I mean, no one person could possibly be willing to be ostracized, oppressed, or poor on purpose, would they? Nor, are we likely to give up our comforts, as we are sinful people every day, who as it is find it difficult enough to follow Jesus as it is without the help of the Holy Spirit.

Now, this is not an excuse, mind you; it simply is a fact that we would not likely choose without falseness to be weepier for Jesus just so that we may feel more blessed. It just doesn't make sense really. Therefore, the harder we try to make these Beatitudes instructions, commandments, or marching orders for perfect discipleship, the more we fail, and the more it doesn't make sense for our lives.

So, let's look at what these statements may mean. And, looking at the grammar and syntax of the original Greek it was written in may help here. I found that nowhere in the Beatitudes does the grammar show a command. A command would be something like "Go baptize" or "Do this in remembrance of me." Nowhere does Jesus give us a directive, an order, or a command.

Slide: Indicative

Rather, the Beatitudes are full of what in grammar is called the indicative. The indicative is descriptive. When using the indicative in a

sentence, the mood is used to talk about facts and other statements that are believed to be true and concrete.

Therefore, it is likely that Jesus is simply describing reality, he is not telling us so much what to do as how things are.

And, if that is the case, than perhaps these Beatitudes aren't about us. So often when we read the bible, we think that it's all about us. What does Jesus want us to do? Yet, this sermon of Jesus seems rather to shine light not on us, but upon something other than us. Too often in our history we have tended to turn the subject always to ourselves thinking that Jesus spoke these truthful statements for the sake of the world, and in many places, the Beatitudes have been used to show how the world should be; that somehow the world should be a better place if we live out these things Jesus is instructing us to live.

Slide: That Love Your...

And even by many scholars, it has been said that if only we as a community, a church, or movement would be

more spiritually poor, hungry, or persecuted, it will bring out the best in people and encourage them to love others, as it is related to the commandment to love the neighbor. This view, a very humanitarian view by the way, somehow makes the world a better place in the long run, making God's Kingdom a reality for today.

Again, it's a very noble idea, to believe that Jesus wants us to live this way, but even though we ought and should, Jesus knows we can't, at least all the time. Jesus knows we are captive to sin and ultimately that God's Kingdom, while here already, is not fully to be realized until the end of all things when Christ makes it so. So, I wonder that Jesus in preaching this sermon was trying to shine light upon us as individuals or as a world.

The fact of the matter is that these wonderful Beatitudes may not actually shine light upon the world, or us as we so often think when we read the bible. But, what if...just what if the Beatitudes are really more so about - let's turn the subject

around and assume they are actually about...God and who God is.

Slide: Lightbulb

Jesus, the light of the world, does indeed shine some light upon our living in these statements of truth. For, although these Beatitudes are not about the way the world works, they are about how God works. They are about God, who God is, who God blesses, and what God's kingdom is like, a kingdom that is opposite of what we should think it is. These Beatitudes tell us what matters to God, what is important to God, and to what God pays attention.

Slide: World in hand

In this topsy-turvy and upside-down world of God, we get a true glimpse of what following Christ really looks like. It doesn't look like the world we live in, a world where the wealthy are blessed and those who laugh at the world get away with it. It's a completely opposite world. In a recent reflection by Frederick

Buechner he wrote this about these Beatitudes in Luke:

"The world says, 'Mind your own business,' and Jesus says, 'There is no such thing as your own business.' The world says, 'Follow the wisest course and be a success,' and Jesus says, 'Follow me and be crucified.' The world says, 'Drive carefully – the life you save may be your own' – and Jesus says, 'Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.' The world says, 'Law and order,' and Jesus says, 'Love.' The world says, 'Get' and Jesus says, 'Give.' In terms of the world's sanity, Jesus is crazy as a coot, and anybody who thinks he can follow him without being a little crazy too is laboring less under a cross than under a delusion."

This surprising glimpse into the world according to God then has a valuable effect upon us, one that then becomes up to us. Jesus shows us a God whose priorities offer an alternative to the vision of life we generally carry with us. With this vision, Jesus is

carrying us farther into discipleship, so that we can better know the God who calls us into daily living. And, the result is that if we actually see who is blessed according to God, we too will know the road to blessedness with God's help.

The Beatitudes are a glimpse into the mind and the world according to God. They don't tell us what the world is like to us. They tell us what the world is like to God, a world that is in contrast to what we believe it should be or is. And, Jesus shakes us from those assumptions of what the world should be by giving us a different vision, one that has foundations not in the world, but in the nature of God.

This very nature of God shows us that the most insignificant, the most poor, the losers, the nerds, the least powerful, and the grieving are really ones who God chooses to bless. These Beatitudes aren't rules to follow. They simply show God's priorities for the world God created.

Therefore, what we do with this knowledge is up to

us, isn't it? We are being offered to look upon God's self by hearing these phrases called the Beatitudes. Question is, now that we know this about God, what are we going to do about it?