

Listen Up!

King of Glory Lutheran Church
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February 12/13, 2022
Lectionary Year C: Luke 6:17-26

¹⁷He 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, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. ¹⁸They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. ¹⁹And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

²⁰Then he looked up at 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 will be filled. "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. ²²"Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. ²³Rejoice 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. ²⁴"But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. ²⁵"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. ²⁶"Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

'Woe' is a wake up word. Jesus is calling people to listen up. God's world reverses the values of our world. We are called to live into that reversal and walk with our neighbors, as painful as it might be.

Hello! I learned this week, that apparently, I like interjections. Now it's been a very long time since English class in Junior High or High School – you see, they called it Junior High in my day. But hey! An interjection is a word that gets our attention. It's a word that carries emotion. These words are often followed by an exclamation point! Fabulous! (Exclamation point) Excellent! (Exclamation point) Oh my!

If you've been watching any of the Olympics, we've heard the commentators use interjections all over the place! "No! (Exclamation point filled with emotion) Look what just happened!" "Incredible! Stunning! I'm speechless!"

(Tomorrow / This evening) when we are watching the Super Bowl, if you happen to be watching with a particularly vocal fan, you can count on hearing interjections. "Go! Go, go, go, GO!" "What?!" There will likely be some other forms of speech that aren't appropriate from the pulpit. But I know none of you will be using them.

In Luke's Gospel, this day, Jesus has just finished praying in private up on the mountain. While there, He calls the disciples. Then they travel, Luke says, down to a level place. There, many people are gathered, perhaps even hundreds. They've come from all the surrounding areas of Judea, Jerusalem, even the coast of Tyre and Sidon. Many of them are sick. Or poor. Or have unclean spirits within.

After the healings, as good a preacher as Jesus is, He speaks to the people who need to hear a comforting message. Remember in that day, if you were sick or had an unclean spirit, the belief was you were certainly on God's bad side. Uh oh!

Jesus begins. "Blessed are the poor."
"Wait! Blessed? Did Jesus just say, 'blessed?'"

Yes. Blessed in Greek means 'happy.' It is connected to God's benefits or God's blessings upon someone. (<https://www.biblehub.com/greek/3107.htm>)

"Wow! Jesus, just said we're blessed!"

Then Jesus' tone changes. "Woe to you who are rich."

"Whoa! Wait just a minute. That's not the way it works, Jesus. Aren't the rich blessed and the poor cursed?"

Rev. Dr. Karoline Lewis reminds us the meaning of the Greek word, w-o-e, literally is an interjection of grief. (<https://biblehub.com/greek/3759.htm>) "Alas! Woe!" Karoline goes on to slow us down just a bit. Whoa – w-h-o-a. Wait just a second. Jesus literally wants the crowd to sit up and listen. He's getting their attention. It's 'listen up!' Listen! You who are rich. You've already received your consolation. Hello! You that are full, might just soon be hungry.

Hey! Do you understand what I'm saying?

I won't ask you to raise your hands. Yet, if we were listening to Jesus, would we rather find ourselves in the 'blessed are you' part of the sermon or the, 'hey! Listen up', part of the sermon?

Yep, that's what I thought. None of us truly want Jesus to catch us by the coat collar and speak the hard truths. But there are some hard truths here. The rich, the full, the respected cannot continue to live by the world's standards. God's values come by a different play book, and God is about to reverse them all.

Today, February 12/13, 2022 we still live in a world of have and have-not's like in Jesus' day. Many people still carry the mistaken idea that God blesses some people and doesn't bless others. But education gaps, and food deserts and health care disparities, aren't myths. They truly exist. Listen.

This year's Super Bowl tickets sold from \$3000 up to over \$10,000. One 30 second Super Bowl commercial costs \$6.5 million. Yes. \$6.5 million dollars. Whoa! As much as we love those commercials, that's ridiculous! The NFL has created franchise kingdoms based on loyal, emotional fans and our dollars.

Now think about this. 6.1 million Syrian children are living in crisis. Since the beginning of the war in 2011, basic food items are 20 times higher than they were in 2010. Hospitals, homes, water treatment plants, and schools have been destroyed. Millions of children are living as refugees or displaced with emotional as well as physical needs. Woe!

(<https://www.unicefusa.org/mission/emergencies/child-refugees-and-migrants/syria-crisis>)

(Tomorrow) The Bengals are supposed to be the underdog in the game. We like to root for the underdogs, when rooting for them doesn't extract anything from us; emotionally, spiritually or financially. It's not easy to look at children dying from hunger. It hurts to sit with one who is crying.

Jesus says, "Woe to you who are...!" He wants us to hear Him correctly. Jesus doesn't want any of us to overlook the suffering in this world because God is there. Blessed are those who are hated for who they are. Blessed are those who weep and those who go to bed hungry each night. Simply throwing money at systemic problems won't change everything. Yet if we refuse to acknowledge the suffering of the world, Jesus has something to say to us. Look towards God. Love your neighbor. You're not off the hook.

Until Christ comes again, we continue to live in this hierarchical, vertical, upward mobile world. Winner and losers, the have's and the have nots are real categories with real consequences for living. Education, food, shelter and medicine are not distributed equally among all of God's children. Jesus calls us to act.

Yet when we come to Christ's table, wow! Here all of God's children are on a level plain, united by love and mercy, categories to the wind. The body of Christ, given for you. The blood of Christ, shed for you, and you, and you. Rich woman, poor boy. Weeping child, laughing adult. Exploiting owner, exploited victim.

Whoa! Hello!

Gospel.

Amen.