

## Epiphany 6C 2022 Sermon

### Luke 6:[12-13], 17-26

...[Jesus] went up a mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer before God.<sup>1</sup> And when day came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles... 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 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."

I know that some of you have watched the film series on the life of Jesus called *The Chosen*. Now, whenever a film has been made on the life of Jesus, the writers of the screenplay must necessarily make some interpretations of the Gospel stories. One of the interpretations in *The Chosen* that I found fascinating is that Jesus is shown spending a lot of time in sermon preparation and rehearsal before he gives his Sermon on the Mount, as recorded in Matthew's Gospel.<sup>1</sup> I can certainly *identify* with the need for much preparation before a sermon; so, I commend *The Chosen's* screenwriters!

But, in *today's* Gospel reading, we have the beginning of **Luke's** version of Jesus' Sermon, which we *rarely* ever hear. In **Luke's** Gospel, the sermon is not given “**on** the Mount;” it is given *after* Jesus has come *down* from the Mount and is standing on a level place. (Therefore, in Luke, it's called the “Sermon on the Plain.”)

Now, if Jesus wasn't giving his **sermon** from the top of the mountain, what *was* he doing on top of the mountain? He was *praying*. A few verses before today's Gospel reading, Luke tells us, "[Jesus] went up a mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer before God."<sup>2</sup> **That**, according to *Luke's* story, is Jesus' sermon preparation.

In fact, Luke's Gospel has been called "the Gospel of prayer," since Jesus is seen praying in *Luke's* Gospel more often than in **all** the other three Gospels combined.<sup>3</sup> And when one spends a whole night **steeped** in prayer in the Presence of God, like Jesus does, *something* happens. Like an Easter egg steeped in a bowl of dye, taking into itself the color of that dye, so it is when someone is steeped all night in prayer in the Presence of God: the pray-er takes on the hue of God, the Spirit of God; and sees the world more and more through God-colored lenses. The pray-er's ego-self, and worldly values and perspective, diminish; and their consciousness, values, and mindset become more and more like the consciousness, values, and mindset of God. Over and over again in Luke's Gospel, Jesus takes the time to pray, to soak himself in God's presence, where he is renewed in God's consciousness, values, and mindset. (And if **Jesus** needed to be regularly renewed, through prayer, in God's consciousness, values, and mindset, how much *more* do you and I?)

A few Sundays ago, we read in our Gospel about Jesus' rejection in his hometown of Nazareth, where Jesus said, "No prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown"<sup>3</sup> – Jesus seeing himself in the role of a prophet. Indeed, **Luke** sees the role of "prophet" as Jesus' *primary* role. And what is a prophet's function? To speak truth to God's people when they are not living in sync with God; not living out **God's** vision for human life.

We can clearly see Jesus playing the role of prophet in today's Gospel passage. John Shea writes: "The... consciousness reflected in the blessings and woes is very much in the prophetic tradition. Although Jesus is *more* than a prophet, he shares the unyielding prophetic sensitivity to the discrepancy between **God's** *vision* for human life and the way humans are actually living. It is this *discrepancy* that drives the blessings and woes [in today's Gospel]."<sup>4</sup>

And, my friends, if we are honest with ourselves, I think we can clearly see that same discrepancy in our world today. We can see that the present world and **its** values is out of sync with **God** and God's values. What **is** it that our present world values? I think we can fairly say that we value power and control over weakness and vulnerability. We value winning over losing; being first rather than second (the Olympics and the Superbowl are both prime examples of our tendency to value winning). We value being right and proving other people wrong (the present arguments over wearing masks are prime examples). We admire people who have been successful financially and professionally (Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg and Jeff Bezos are constantly in the news); and we tend to look down on those who have to scrape to get by or must rely on public

assistance. And yet, here is Jesus saying, “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” The kingdom of God is the only consolation they have.

My friends, I think the issue, for Jesus, is not money, *per se*; it is rather that, when one has wealth (and we are *all* wealthy compared to the vast majority of the world’s population), it can so easily draw one’s attention and values *away* from the kingdom of God and *toward* the values of this world.

In his 1<sup>st</sup> Letter to Timothy, St. Paul writes: “As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not... to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share... *so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.*” (1 Tim. 6:17-19)

So that they may take hold of the life that really *is* life. Not the *false* life of wealth and control and winning over others, which our society holds up as its goals; all of these are fleeting and transitory, capable of being blown away by the next tornado, flooded out by the next hurricane, burned away by the next forest fire, ravaged and brought to a standstill by the next pandemic. The “life that really *is* life” is lived within the mindset and consciousness of Christ, lived in union with God in the kingdom of God, which is eternal, and yet is already manifest on earth to those who would enter it.

My friends, you have often heard me quote what I consider to be one of the most important passages of the whole Bible, wherein St. Paul writes, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.”<sup>5</sup> **This** is the mind of Christ, the consciousness of Christ: *emptying* ourselves of our egos, our False Selves, our inordinate attachments to the kingdom of *this* world and **its** things and values, so that we might be filled with the mind and consciousness of Christ, filled with that “life that is **really** life.”

Emptying, and being filled; emptying, and being filled – that is the rhythm of our lives! Praying on the mountaintop, Jesus was emptying himself of the world’s distorted values that surround us all and cannot help but cling to us and permeate us as we go through our daily lives. He was emptying himself of all this world’s “stuff” that had accumulated in his mind and consciousness during several hard days of healing and confronting the criticisms of the scribes and Pharisees. On the mountaintop, Jesus was letting it all go, and was *opening* himself to be filled once again with the spirit, the love, the divine **life** of God. And that is the *pattern*, the rhythm of life that Jesus lived and that he models for you and me: emptying ourselves, letting go of our egos, our false selves, the idols of money, esteem, approval, control, security, being right; and then, after emptying ourselves,

opening ourselves to being filled with God, **God's** power, God's love and compassion and forgiveness.

My friends, let me suggest that perhaps what Jesus is doing in today's Gospel is not so much dividing the world into two groups of people – those who are lacking and suffering being the “good guys” and those who are well-off and comfortable being the “bad guys.” Rather, he is saying that the life that is **really** life is not defined by *any* of these worldly conditions, these polarities: wealth or poverty, hunger or fullness, sorrow or laughter, exclusion or acceptance. Each of these worldly conditions can come or go, and they are not always within our control. St. Paul said it well when he wrote to the Philippians, “I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress.” (Philippians 4:11–14) It is kind of the well-off to share the distress of those who are *not* well-off, because on the level of “the life that is **really** life,” there is no difference between us: rich or poor, hungry or satisfied, accepted or excluded – *all* of us are brothers and sisters, one of another; all of us children of one God, called by Christ to love one another as he loves us. (John 15:12)

AMEN

1 Matthew 5:1-11

2 “before God” is from *The Message* translation

3 <https://scalar.usc.edu/works/jesus-christ-in-luke-acts/luke-as-the-gospel-of-prayer#:~:text=Jesus%20is%20shown%20in%20Luke,His%20baptism%20in%203%3A21.>

3 Luke 4:24

4 John Shea, *The Relentless Widow*, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006, p. 44

5 Philippians 2:5-7