

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

Epiphany 6
Saturday, February 12, 2022 at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, February 13, 2022 at 9:00 a.m.

“Blessed Are You Who Are Poor”

Luke 6:17-26

Enduring our recent Winter chill, it is amazing at how fast people have become winterized, calloused, and hardened to the cold. Temperatures that once sent chills to your bones are now no big deal. On Monday, when I sat down to start working on my sermon, it was 32 degrees and sunny. I had several people comment on what “a beautiful day” it was. Imagine if that was the weather in August.

We experience this phenomenon most every Winter, and it is a good lesson. Because our society does the same thing to us. Things we see and hear which once sent chills down our spine are now viewed as no big deal. We have become hardened, calloused toward the evil of this world. We are told that this generation is allowed to act, think, or speak differently because the world has changed.

The world has changed. It is completely different from what God intended it to be in the beginning. And when Christ came into the world, He came to radically change God’s creation that had been spoiled by sin. And by “spoiled,” I mean that we live in a world that is far worse and far more dangerous in an eternal sense than having simply grown cold toward God. Jesus came to fix the

problem of sin and death and to “make all things new,” because we live in a world of death and darkness.

We pray that we do not grow comfortable with the darkness. As Isaiah says, “A people walking in darkness have seen a great light.” We proclaim those words each year at Christmas when we celebrate that Christ has come. Never get comfortable with slinking back into darkness.

The message of the Gospel is viewed as an odd message by those who are comfortable with the cold, dark, dead world. The Word of God, the Gospel of Jesus Christ turns the entire world upside down. It turns darkness to light. It brings warmth and comfort where there was once only coldness and death.

Even Jesus’ words in our Gospel reading is a message that you won’t find in society too often. You wouldn’t find too many people proclaiming that message even 2000 years ago either. “Blessed are you who are poor...But woe to you who are rich.”

Not only, as the Gospel of John records, did the Word become flesh and dwell among us to pay the ransom price to free us from our slavery to sin – to free us from the shackles holding us in the darkness and cold of death, but Christ came to alter every aspect of our sinful lives. He came to change the world.

Looking at our Gospel lesson today, we should not jump to conclusions and misinterpret the words of our Lord. Just because Jesus says: “Woe to you who are rich...who are well fed...who laugh...[who have] all men speak well of you;” this does not mean that money, food, laughter, and a place in society will automatically drag you into the pit of hell. Just as poverty, hunger, weeping, and

being an outcast do not earn us merits toward heaven.

What we see is the result of the altered reality that Christ and the Gospel have brought into the world. The first shall be last, and the last shall be first. For those in this life who are suffering, lonely, not knowing where the next meal will come from, Christ has good news: remain faithful to Me, and I will provide all good things. These blessings may not, and probably will not occur in this life, but taking up our cross and following Him is our life in Christ. Taking up our cross and connecting our lives to the cross of Christ (as we are crucified with Him in our Baptism) is what brings us out of darkness and into His marvelous light.

Struggling through our blink-of-an-eye existence here on earth is a small price to pay for the eternal joy and bliss that God has prepared for His people. Paul tells us, “Christ has been raised from the dead.” He is the firstfruits of the resurrection – death will not hold us either.

Christ enters the world and turns the way we have been taught to think upside-down. Blessed are the poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. In Christ, those who have nothing (that is, those who are “poor in spirit” and recognize that there is nothing good within us to earn salvation and that everything that has led to our place in the kingdom of God has come from outside of us (God’s Word and Sacrament)) – in them we receive the greatest and most priceless of all treasures.

But for those without Christ, those who are hardened and calloused toward the cold, evil, darkness of this world, those who trust in their own power, grace, or goodness to get them through, they had better enjoy the meager pleasures of this world, because the weeping and pain is about to begin. I do not like to think

about what that will be, but that is reality.

The purpose of these woes spoken by our Lord is not to blanketly condemn those who are wealthy or who have been blessed with an enjoyable life – all good things come from God. He wants to bless us in this life – but the Lord shows that what the world considers good or useful or powerful will ultimately come to nothing if separated from Christ and the Word of God.

The life of faith has completely altered our reality. In our Baptism, we were set apart and we were changed. No matter what disease, difficulty, or even death with which we are confronted, we can rejoice and give thanks for the many blessings we receive, because the greatest of all blessings – the forgiveness of sins won for us through Christ’s death on the cross – can never be taken away.

As St. Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” [Rom. 8:35, 37-39].

Therefore, Christ’s words are a comfort to us all: “Blessed are you...whether from a worldly standpoint you are rich or poor. . . . for you who are in Christ, yours is the kingdom of God.” Amen.