

## **Fullness and Emptiness**

February 17, 2019

### **Luke 6: 17-26**

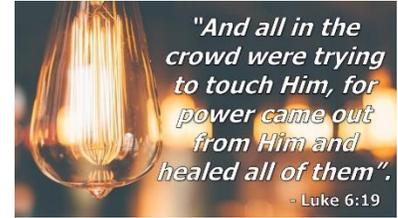
*17 He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. 18 They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. 19 And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them. 20 Then 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. 23 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. 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".*



Let us pray...

As our passage from Luke 6 begins today, a great multitude of people are coming to Jesus to hear Him, to be cured of their diseases, and to have unclean spirits removed. They are being drawn to Jesus'

power. In verse 19 we read, *"And all in the crowd were trying to touch Him, for power came out from Him and healed all of them"*. The miracles were always what



drew the crowds to Jesus. People often came just to see if they could gain an audience with Jesus, if they could somehow have some personal time with the Healer. But this day was different. This day, if they could just touch Jesus, healing was happening. Word of that would have spread like wildfire. As this news spread, the people would have become a bit more anxious and emotional. I imagine the crowds were like ants milling around Him, just trying to get close enough, all seeming so busy. Just to touch Jesus.



If we take a moment and think about all the people we know, we can identify people who are just so busy.

Their lives seem consumed with busyness – they run from this to that and then they run over here and over there and then next, they run... and they run, and they run. It just goes on and on. Their lives seem full but there is no meaning or purpose. The busyness is what consumes them, what makes it seem like life has purpose. We can also identify another group of people we know who try to fill themselves and fill themselves – with all sorts of things – and yet they are never quite satisfied either. The new car satisfies for a few months, but then it is old. Then the quest begins for the next thing that will bring a little joy for a moment or two. Others turn to alcohol or drugs or other addictions to find satisfaction. And others try and find purpose by gaining more popularity or by landing a better job title or by working out, so they can have a nicer body. The chasing after the stuff and the things of this world never really satisfy though, do they?

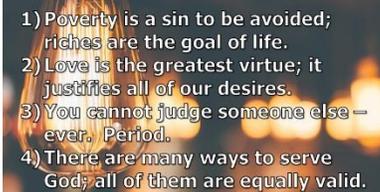
In the verses leading up to our passage for today, Jesus has just gone up the mountain and has spent the night in prayer. When day came, Jesus called His followers or disciples to Him, choosing twelve of His disciples to name as apostles. These twelve men – Peter, Andrew, James, John, Matthew, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, James, Simon, Judas, and Judas Iscariot – would become Jesus' inner circle. He would pour into these men and eleven would go on to build the church after Jesus' death and resurrection.

In today's passage, we learn that Jesus came down the mountain with them and they encounter a crowd of people. Jesus stood that day on a level place and, in an unusual display of power, people were being healed – simply by touching Jesus. But then our scripture shifts gears, somewhat abruptly. Jesus began to teach His disciples. Yes, the crowd was still there, probably overhearing this teaching. The milling around would slowly cease as Jesus began to teach. What we find in Luke 6 is a shortened version of the Beatitudes that we find in Matthew 5. As in the Beatitudes, Jesus first offers several teachings that speak of when we are 'blessed'. The original word could also be translated 'happy'. Then Jesus also goes on to speak of some woes. These are times when we are not blessed, when we are not happy, when we are cursed or sad. According to the world, though, Jesus has all of these things backwards. When we hear these blessings and woes, we tend to hear them through our ears attuned to the world. But Jesus is speaking from the kingdom perspective.

Many people gathered that day saw Jesus as a good moral teacher, but not the Messiah. Today many people continue to view Jesus as a good moral teacher. He had some good things to say that help us in life. Other world religions even

portray Jesus this way. Jesus taught a lot of good things. For example, I think you would have to work pretty hard to find someone that says the “Golden Rule” is not a good thing. Now, people might not always practice and live out the Golden Rule, but we think that we should. It is what good people do, right?

Deep down, all people – Christians and non-Christians alike – want to be good people. They want to be treated well and, even more importantly, want to be treated well by others. From the Christian perspective, we believe that we are all created in the image of God. Whether or not we acknowledge this or live into it – we still all have a spark of good within us. But because the world is of the flesh, it can pervert or misunderstand what goodness really is. In one of the commentaries that I read for this Sunday, I found this list about what is seen as “good” by the world. From the world’s perspective, good moral people believe these four things to be true:



1) Poverty is a sin to be avoided; riches are the goal of life.  
 2) Love is the greatest virtue; it justifies all of our desires.  
 3) You cannot judge someone else – ever. Period.  
 4) There are many ways to serve God; all of them are equally valid.

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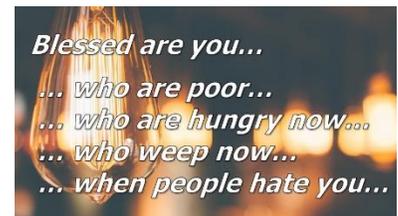
Most people who you and I would consider to be “good” people would look at this list and they would agree with these things. But this is goodness from an earthly perspective. Jesus is preaching to us today from a whole other place. In our passage today, Jesus preaches about a fullness that feels empty, about a richness that feels like poverty, about laughter that feels like weeping, and about power and prestige that feel weak and inadequate. These blessings and woes

that Christ taught about are counterintuitive to this list of modern, worldly ways of thinking. To be poor, to be hungry, to weep, to be persecuted – they do not line up well with the things that the world says matter.

We struggle at times with this list versus the list we find in Luke 6 because we are taught to look out for ourselves. We are taught that if we want anything in life, we can work hard and achieve success. If we do not quite get what we want, the solution is just to work harder. The American dream is for our children to have a better life than we had. And along the way, we too should enjoy nicer cars, fancier cell phones, and bigger homes. We are taught that the ends justify the means. Catchy phrases like “Just do it!” and “Have it your way” and “If it makes you feel good...” all speak to this worldly point of view that Jesus so often speaks against.



Jesus' mission throughout His ministry was always to prioritize the “other”. For us to live this out, we need to orient our lives to seeing the needs of others before and over our own needs and desires. As a beginning place, Jesus teaches us today that the things that satisfy now will leave us empty in eternity. In verses 20 through 22, Jesus makes four “blessed are” statements. Here they are: *“Blessed are you... who are poor... who are hungry now... who weep now... when people hate you”*. These things do not sound so good to our earthly ears, do they? To be poor, hungry, weeping, hated? To correctly hear these things, we need to hear them with our faith ears and we need to understand them as Jesus was saying them. When we find ourselves in these conditions



because we follow Jesus, then we are “blessed” or happy from God’s perspective. Each of these stems have a “when” to them.

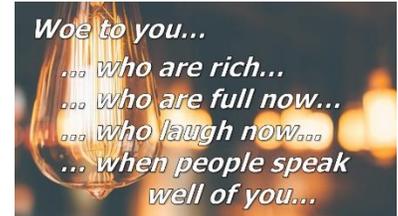
If we are poor, we have no earthly kingdom now. When we give generously of ourselves to others, we might not have the new car or fancy house or latest and greatest whatever, but we are bringing God glory through our giving. This is the *"storing treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal"* that Matthew writes about in chapter 6. Matthew also reminds us, *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"*. When our heart is with those in need, our heart is closer to God’s heart. When we are there, close to our God, we are indeed blessed.

If we are hungry now, one day we will trade that for complete satisfaction as we feast at the heavenly banquet. If we weep now, we are promised that one day we will walk with Christ in His complete joy and love. For Luke, there is a sense of the temporary in these sufferings. When we hunger and thirst, the reality for us is that they are but temporary in the literal sense. If we go without a meal or two because we are led to give generously and sacrificially to another who has absolutely nothing, we know that we will soon eat again. What Jesus and Luke are talking about here are our perspectives, our frame of mind. When we see another in need, are we willing to have less so that they can just have some? When we see another in need, is our first inclination to help or is it to turn a blind eye? If we feel compassion and empathy and act on the nudges of the Holy Spirit, yes, we might find ourselves temporarily experiencing these things. But we will also be filled when we give to alleviate another’s emptiness.

For me, and perhaps for you, the last one can be the hardest. "*When people hate you...*" is hard to pursue, to seek, to willingly enter into. As followers of Christ we are called to act justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God. We hear this directive in Micah 6:8. It is a joy to help others know Christ, to share His love with others. But to take a stand for Christ, to seek justice for someone who is being treated unfairly or is being abused, when we might instead draw the fire ourselves, is a harder task. The disciples rejoiced when they were persecuted or stoned or even crucified for their faith. To suffer with Christ was the disciples' highest reward on earth. Is it ours too?

Our reality is that this is what we are called to as 21<sup>st</sup> century followers of Christ. When we are in a situation and we see something that is wrong, do we take a stand for our faith? Just a quick example from one of our own that illustrates what this looks like. This story was shared a while ago by a man from our church. His wife, also from our church, and he were at a football game at Dakota Wesleyan. A man in the stands just above them was using some colorful language. Instead of ignoring the language and just watching the game, she stood up, turned around and faced the man, and addressed the man's choice of colorful language in such a setting. The inner sense of "this is not right" led her to take a risk for her faith. This is just a small illustration of what it means to be willing to suffer for our faith. All of us come to choices such as this. Do we stand up and speak out? Or do we bite our lip, remain quiet, sit on our hands?

In our passage today, there are also some woes. These are the opposites of the blessings that we just discussed. Jesus says, "*Woe to you who are rich... who are full now... who are laughing now... when all speak well of you*". These are woes because these rewards do not follow us to heaven. This is illustrated in the story of Lazarus and the rich man that we find later in Luke, in chapter 16. Lazarus suffered in this life but found his reward in heaven. The rich man enjoyed the pleasures of this life and did not give a hoot about poor Lazarus just outside his doorstep. The rich man spent his eternity in torment – not because he was rich and had plenty but because he did not share what he had with the man in need.



Seventy years ago, during World War II, the U.S. transport ship *Dorchester* was carrying a thousand soldiers to battle. On a cold February night, it was hit by an



enemy torpedo and began to sink. There were four Army chaplains on board. The Jewish rabbi, Catholic priest, and two Protestant pastors worked to distribute life jackets, to keep the men calm, and to help them into the lifeboats. There were not enough life jackets or lifeboats to go around, so the chaplains took none for themselves. They gave away everything they had and then joined hands and prayed together as they sank with the ship.



These four men did something crazy by the world's standards. But they lived out the realities of our passage for today. They give us a living parable of what it looks like to shine Jesus' love to the whole world.

These four men entered into the fullness of God's kingdom with hands and hearts wide open – empty but full. Christ invites you and I to do the same. Let us pray... Amen.

### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve**

- 1) Jesus calls us to prioritize the "other". How does doing this lead to growth in our faith and spiritual life?
- 2) What do you think the four chaplains prayed as the ship sank? When have you prayed this type of prayer?
- 3) When have you served and become empty, giving all you could, only to feel as full as possible emotionally and spiritually?