**A Blessing or a Woe/Epiphany. 6C**

**Sermon by the Rev. Bernadette Hartsough**

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When was the last time that you blessed someone? A blessing is usually a prayer asking for God’s favor and protection. A blessing can also be praise devotion, and worship like when we say we bless God. We say someone is blessed when we see someone else do extraordinary acts for others. Blessings and the use of them have changed over time. In Hebrew scripture, the father blesses the sons before he dies. In Genesis 49 we read of a detailed account of how Jacob blessed his sons. In ancient times blessings bestowed your place in the family and your standing in the community. Blessings gave you your inheritance and defined your life.

Today we hear a version of the beatitudes with the “Sermon on the Plain”. The sermon on the Plain is Luke’s version of the Beatitudes. In Matthew’s version it is called “The Sermon on the Mount” because they were on a mountain. Matthew’s version of the Beatitudes are much longer. Luke only names 4. The 4 that Luke names are the core of Jesus’s teaching.

When Jesus says, “Blessed are you”, he is saying that God favors and is pleased when you take on these characteristics. “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God”. The Gospel of Luke always reminds us of the dangers of being comfortable and having too much wealth. When you are comfortable it is easy to be removed from those that are poor. The poor exist by having faith and trusting every day that they will have enough. They depend on God not wealth. Jesus’s words here are harsh. He says, “Woe to you who are rich for you have received your consolation”. In Jesus’s day, the wealthy were the landowners, the royalty, and those that held the power. However, the wealthy were also the people like the tax collectors who had more than enough. They had enough wealth to eat and live in a house for the rest of their lives. They had enough to thrive and to feel secure. The question for us becomes when is enough -enough. Jesus calls us to take on the attitude and stance of the poor.

“Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled”. This beatitude could be describing the feeling of physical hunger. Jesus was speaking directly to his disciples but there were lots of other people around him. Speaking about physical hunger, this statement is a judgement. If you are full now and that’s all that you think about then you will be lacking-hungry in God’s kingdom. Jesus could also be talking about the spiritual hunger to know God and to be in a relationship with God. If you think that you are full now, that you know all you need to know about God and are righteous, then, “Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry”.

We need to be open to a deeper relationship with God, continuing to be hungry for God and God’s plans.

Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Again, this statement could be a physical condition of being in mourning. It could be a reminder that this too shall pass. Jesus’s words could also be a warning to those who act happy and satisfied all the time while ignoring the suffering of others; they are indifferent to it. As Christians we are to have compassion on others. That means understanding others’ situations, feeling and mourning with them. Jesus warns”, Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep”.

“Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man.” Jesus is saying to speak the truth of the gospel. Show others what Jesus taught; to care for those in need, to be with the suffering, to speak against injustice. Do not just say what others want to hear to be liked and admired. That is false speech. One of the ways injustices and inequalities are overcome is by speaking up. When we are silent because we want to be admired and we want to fit in, then injustices continue. We see this in big corporations, in government, and in society; when people are being discriminated against, when money is being mishandled, when certain races are being oppressed. Jesus gives us this warning, “Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets”.

These blessings and woes are the core of what makes us human. In Spanish woe is translated as affliction. Depending on how we live Jesus’s words, the Beatitudes could be a blessing or an affliction. We want to feel secure but then we accumulate wealth at the expense of others. We need to eat but we can overindulge. We want to be happy but then we avoid the suffering of others. We want to be liked but then we give up our self -our core values to fit in. We become afflicted because instead of being who God created us to be, we become who others want us to be. These are human physical, psychological, and social needs. To be human means that we are all of these. All of these areas affect our spiritual self. They impact our souls and our relationship with God. These blessings and woes should rattle us a bit. They remind us to look at what we have, who we are, and what we need to do.