

Luke 6:17-26

6th Sunday after the Epiphany February 12, 1995

*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*

The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence. Maybe it is because we are far away and can't see the weeds.

Our own losses cut deep into our soul - our own disappointments, our own shattered dreams. But so many of our neighbors seem to be rolling merrily along so I put a smile on my face, slap some green paint on the lawn and hope the neighbors will not get so close as to see.

They look and see the green, and wonder why life is so easy for me.

Jesus was standing before a crowd of people just like us. They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were healed. And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

To tell you the truth, if things were so great for us we probably would not be here. We would be so busy having a great time that we would not have slowed down this morning to pull into the parking lot, and sit on a hard pew, and pray. We know something is wrong, missing, needed. We come to touch Jesus. We know power comes from him. We all want to be healed, healed of disease, and sorrow and sin.

Imagine that crowd who were physically touching Jesus. Can you see the smiles on their faces, the hope in their hearts? Can you hear the laughter as the lame walk and the demon possessed are freed? Can you sense the joy as their ears hear the voice of the only Son of God?

*Blessed are you 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 your will laugh.*

Maybe some in that crowd were poor... or hungry...or full of sorrow. Jesus' words filled them with hope.

Others owned boats, had just eaten a lunch they had packed for the day, were smiling and laughing because of the healing Jesus brought. I wonder how they heard Jesus' words? And the words that followed.

*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.*

On this day when it looked like in Jesus there would be only healing and joy and abundance Jesus promises poverty, and hunger, and sorrow.

Jesus was telling the truth.

Everyone will have their moment for laughter, everyone their moment for tears.

We will not all be crying at once, nor all rich at once, nor all hungry. Some will not always have greener grass. Everyone's lawn will dry out...even those who gather before Jesus.

I always thought that I could be the tree of which Jeremiah spoke. I would sink my roots deep into the waters of God's word and when drought came I would still be green and vibrant, my leaves dancing in the wind. While those who trusted in themselves withered and died, I would still be alive.

But what happens? I care about people and when sickness strikes, or death their pain and sorrow brings a sadness over me. I believe in God but like Mary at the foot of the cross, a sword pierces my soul when those I love suffer. The more I love the sharper the sword.

A teacher sees a child's life bent and twisted by the drinking in the home, a friend shares that her marriage has ended in divorce, a community grieves over a girl attacked, over young boys whose lives will never be the same. To care is to sorrow, there is no escape.

Not even for Jesus. Luke does not tell us Jesus walked through life with a long face - no, his enemies labeled him a glutton and a drunkard. Surely he was one who celebrated life.

But he wept when he saw Mary and Martha weeping over the death of their brother, Lazarus. He sorrowed over Jerusalem that would not receive him. And hear the sadness in his voice as he says, "Judas, would you betray me with a kiss?"

You and I will not escape sadness; maybe we will not escape hunger and poverty also. We do not know.

But we have this promise: When all the tears have been cried God will dry every tear. Death will be no more, mourning and crying and pain will be no more.

And until that day we have this promise in the words of Paul: Who shall separate us from the love of God? Will hardship or distress or persecution, or famine, or nakedness or peril or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth nor anything else in all creation shall be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.