

*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.*

I've only been in great crowds at sporting events – a playoff game at Jacob's field – Monday night football with the Browns playing the Rams - people moving together, full of energy and excitement and hope. There is electricity in the air and smiles everywhere. It must have been something like that that day:

Luke tells us that Jesus was in a level place and a great crowd from Jerusalem and Judea and the coast of Tyre and Sidon were there to hear him, to be healed of their diseases and to be cured of the unclean spirits. Everyone who touched him was healed. Can you imagine the pressure in that crowd to get close to Jesus - the joy when his touch brought health –wholeness - release from every affliction? Like tailgate parties little celebrations must have been going on everywhere. Lame walking - deaf hearing - it must have seemed that the end of the world had come.

Can you imagine what it would be like if Jesus restored the sight of those whose eyesight is nearly gone? Or with a touch drove out every cancerous cell? Can you imagine what it would mean to have the confusion of schizophrenia taken away? Epilepsy banished for the rest of a lifetime?

I wonder how Jesus ever quieted them all so he could be heard. We only know what he spoke: *"Blessed are you who are poor, yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, and then the 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.”*

Jesus spoke these words to his disciples, those who had invested themselves in Jesus. Poor, hungry, weeping, persecuted – the contrast could not have been greater between all that was happening that day and these words. Maybe those who had come to him that day had come to be relieved of their poverty, their hunger, their weeping, their persecutions. And certainly Jesus said that these would be theirs no more sometime in the future. But as Jesus spoke these words the poverty and the hunger and the tears and the persecutions were theirs still.

And then Jesus spoke to those who already had the very things his disciples hoped would one day be theirs: *“Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, 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.”*

Riches, food, laughter, a good name – who among us does not want each of these? And yet that day, our Lord promised those who had these that they would lose them. Woe to you.

Now I am going to assume that you and I are just like the people who were there with Jesus that day. I assume that we come to him seeking healing, and guidance and help with every problem our life throws in our faces. “Touch me Jesus and make life easier for me.” “Take away the pain, the sorrow, the hungers, the dying.”

And Jesus so often answers: “Not yet - trust me even in pain, in poverty, in hunger, in sorrow - trust in me and you will grow. More than you can imagine – trusting in me you will grow. And you will learn what it is to love and to be loved. Just as I learned what it is to love and to be loved through the cross.”

And the woes? Well, have you ever hoped that life could stop right where it is and it does not? I think Jesus knows how dangerous it can be for us in a world of change when things are going well. The psalms and the prophets of the Old Testament speak of the rich preying on the poor, using the poor to increase their wealth. Again and again those with the advantage of wealth used their wealth to increase their wealth even if it meant suffering

for the poor. It is like me shopping in the store where the employees receive the least pay. I save some nickels or dimes or dollars but my neighbors who are in unions, whose wages are higher are not helped through my spending. I who can afford to spend a little more always seek the best bargain and squeeze the poorest of my sisters and brothers. Who would I harm to keep on having riches, and a full stomach, and laughter? Would I go to war for that? Elect politicians who will favor me over those who have less? Turn my back on my sisters and brothers in Christ rather than share in their sorrow and shame?

Jesus says, "Woe to you who are full now" for he knows my heart and your heart. He knows we might give up our souls to gain the whole world.

Or go find some preacher who will give us laughter and entertainment rather than confronting us with Jesus' difficult and confusing words.

Jesus knows how dangerous riches, a full stomach, laughter, and the opinions of others about us can be.

The only solution to all of this is to trust in Jesus and in nothing else - to trust in Jesus. Those who came to him that day may have thought that once they had what Jesus could give to them they had everything. But Jesus himself is the true gift and life.

To belong to him is to be rich, the only kind of rich that is an eternal blessing. To belong to him is to have joy, and a good name, and to be filled with every good thing. And so I will add a beatitude to the ones Jesus spoke:

Blessed are you who believe and trust and hope in Jesus above all else. You will be safe with him, today, tomorrow, forever. Amen.