

BLESSED ARE YOU
Sermon for the 6th Sunday after Epiphany, 2019
Luke 6:17-26

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is taken from Luke 6:17-26, our Gospel reading we heard read before: **¹⁷ Jesus went down with (His apostles) and stood on a level place with a large crowd of His disciples and a great many people from all over Judea, Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon. ¹⁸ They had come to hear Him and be healed of their diseases, and those who were troubled by unclean spirits were made well. ¹⁹ All the people were trying to touch Him, because power was coming from Him and healing them all.**

²⁰ Jesus looked 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 satisfied.

“Blessed are you who are weeping now! For you will laugh.

²² “Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you, insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man! ²³ Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For, you see, your reward is great in heaven. For that is how their fathers used to treat the prophets.

²⁴ “However, how terrible for you who are rich! For you have already received your comfort.

²⁵ “How terrible for you who are well fed now! For you will be hungry.

“How terrible for you who are laughing now! For you will mourn and weep.

²⁶ “How terrible for you when all people speak well of you! For that is how their fathers used to treat the false prophets.

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Last Sunday we heard of the miraculous catch of fish, and how Jesus had up until that point, been proclaiming His kingdom by Himself. We remember how he told Simon Peter that he would no longer be catching fish, but people.¹

The twelve apostles had now been chosen, and so begins their intensive training. **¹⁷ Jesus went down with (His apostles) and stood on a level place with a large crowd of His disciples and a great many people from all over Judea, Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon. ¹⁸ They had come to hear Him and be healed of their diseases, and those who were troubled by unclean spirits were made well. ¹⁹ All the people were trying to touch Him, because power was coming from Him and healing them all.**

The popularity of Jesus had reached its greatest height. His earlier prophecy about telling the Good News to poor people and being sent to announce freedom to prisoners and restoration of sight to blind people, to set free those who have been oppressed,² is now coming true. He is present in the world as the Messiah, who brings release from the bondage of sin.

Jesus goes on to speak beatitudes to His disciples. A beatitude is a declaration of blessedness. The state of blessedness that believers enjoy results from the fact that God is in communion with them through His Son, Jesus Christ. A beatitude describes Gospel gifts that pertain to each and every believer, functioning like a Gospel invitation, calling the hearer to faith in Jesus, and it is through faith in Jesus that God’s blessings come. Also, some beatitudes function in a manner similar to that of an absolution. This is what we find in the four beatitudes Jesus speaks today:

²⁰ Jesus looked 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 satisfied.

“Blessed are you who are weeping now! For you will laugh.

²² “Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you, insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man!

These words of Jesus were intended to comfort afflicted believers with the assurance that God knows their plight, looks upon them with favour, and will deliver them, filling their need with blessings to the point of overflowing.

¹ Luke 5:10

² Luke 4:18

But is it better to be poor rather than rich? Starving instead of completely satisfied? Sad instead of happy? Hated instead of liked?

In our day and age, you don't find many books written on how to become poor, or hungry or sad or hated. Quite often these are things that happen naturally if you don't help yourself. Yet, when Jesus speaks these words, He declares that it is a blessing to be poor, hungry, sad and hated. Even more startling, He goes on to declare **how terrible for you who are rich!... "How terrible for you who are well fed now!... "How terrible for you who are laughing now!... "How terrible for you when all people speak well of you!** What is it that Jesus is saying? We need to know, for after all, He is speaking to us too. The best way we can answer our question is by dividing it into Law and Gospel.

Jesus declares blessings to the poor, hungry, weeping and hated, and woe to the rich, the satisfied, the happy and the popular. Jesus mentioned these kinds of people because things are often not what they appear. We know that God sends daily bread upon the righteous as well as the unrighteous,³ but we need to remember that those who are successful in this world aren't necessarily blessed by God, and those who seem to suffer much misfortune may indeed have His eternal favour.

Take for instance, Jesus' words about the poor. He says: **"Blessed are you who are poor! For yours is the kingdom of God,"** and on the other hand **"how terrible for you who are rich! For you have already received your comfort."**

There can be no doubt that God has blessed numerous believers with wealth - and in itself there is nothing wrong with being wealthy, but it has its temptations. Having the *desire* to be rich can lead one to engage in all sorts of nasty practices. It can lead to living for the job and ignoring one's spouse and family. It can destroy any competition, take the credit of other people's work, or even resort to shady deals. The road to wealth is often littered with all sorts of ways in which the Lord's very own commandments on how to treat one's neighbour are ignored. Besides, we only need to remember the parable of the rich fool to see that once wealth is achieved, it cannot save you from dying.⁴ Many a time, those who have wealth place all their trust in their money, and not in God, living for today and not for tomorrow. Those who fall prey to the temptations of riches will certainly face God's wrath and woe. The poor will not be so tempted if they don't have wealth.

It is much the same with the hungry. **"Blessed are you who are hungry now! For you will be satisfied,"** contrasted with **"How terrible for you who are well fed now! For you will be hungry."** In the time of Jesus, having a full stomach was hard to come by. Today, we often fail to realise that in the eyes of the world, a full stomach is a sign of wealth. We have plenty of food in Australia. Even though we are in the midst of the worst drought in living memory with next to no crops, and now with the loss of thousands of cattle in the floods to our north, I doubt that there will be an impending hunger or famine coming on our land. So there is no shortage of food. In a nation where news broadcasts spend far more time dwelling on diet plans and the dangers of gluttony than hunger and famine; this is a woe to take seriously. With this blessing and woe, Jesus again warns against the peril of placing worldly luxuries - in this case, food - over and above obedience to Him. The hungry are not tempted to dwell on a full belly if they have no food to fill it with.

Again, **"Blessed are you who are weeping now! For you will laugh,"** and **"How terrible for you who are laughing now! For you will mourn and weep."** Certainly, we live in an age that lives for all kinds of enjoyment and pleasure. Maybe it's no wonder that a lot of people are apparently overweight, since much enjoyment and pleasure is found by eyes glued to phone screens, or playing video games, or watching television and eating out, rather than getting out and doing a bit of exercise. But Jesus warns that those who devote themselves to the pursuit of worldly pleasure, and who ignore the importance of repentance and confession, will face God's wrath and woe.

Finally, **"Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you, insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man! ²³ Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For, you see, your reward is great in heaven. For that is how their fathers used to treat the prophets,"** and on the other hand, **"How terrible for you when all people speak well of you! For that is how their fathers used to treat the false prophets."** The Lord here tells us that time and time again, He will be rejected by the world. It happened to the prophets of long ago, and it will

³ Matthew 5:45

⁴ Luke 12:16-20

continue to happen until the world ends. Therefore, one who enjoys immense popularity with the world obviously isn't being faithful to Christ and His Word. The one who is rejected is far more likely to be the faithful one.

So, there we have it. With these four blessings and four woes, the Lord warns against the dangers of wealth, a full stomach, laughing and popularity. He explains why the one who is poor, hungry, weeping, and rejected is blessed.

However, we all know that it isn't this easy. Some people are poor simply because they are lazy, or can't hold down a job, or because they have done some kind of stupid and foolish thing that has cost them their livelihood. Furthermore, while those who are poor don't suffer from trust in wealth, they are certainly afflicted with covetousness and envy for what others have. Likewise, the one who is hungry may have destroyed his chance at success by poor job performance or something. Some will mourn and be sad because, by the choice they make, they will indulge in all kinds of sin that ruins their life with no hope of recovery. They may be saddened out of guilt or harm brought to others. Is this what the Lord chooses to bless? And, frankly, some people are unpopular because they're rude, boorish, pushy and irritating; when people supposedly speak ill of them, they are only saying what is honestly true. Clearly, then, Jesus is not saying that those who are poor are more righteous in God's sight than those who are wealthy; both have their sins and vices to deal with. All possess the same sinful human nature.

Perhaps Jesus is telling us that we need to make sure that we don't become too rich, too satisfied, too obsessed with pleasure, or too popular. This is closer to the truth, but it is still Law, and in the end, you will not find any comfort there.

Jesus warns against the perils of wealth, and so we respond that we'd better be careful about that. But please note, Jesus never stipulates how rich "rich" means. Compared to chief executive officers in big corporations, I daresay that we're not exactly a wealthy bunch. But compared to the slums of India or the factory workers in China, we have wealth beyond the wildest dreams of much of the population in the world. So, the question to ask ourselves is this: Are we sure that we are poor enough to be blessed with the kingdom of heaven? Are we sure that we are not rich enough that we haven't already received our consolation?

Jesus warns against the perils of a satisfied belly, and these are words to take seriously in a land where effective diet methods seem a much greater concern than hunger. So, we may well respond that it's a good thing we're not gluttons who live only for the next meal. But given the ongoing famines in nations around the world, are any of us sure we are hungry enough to be blessed? Are we sure we are hungry enough, and not too satisfied now?

Likewise, Jesus warns against those who laugh now, who pursue pleasure and ignore the fact that this world lives under the curse of sin. We may well respond that, unlike all those unbelievers, we certainly, soberly realise our need for forgiveness. But don't we still delight in some of the worldly entertainment and some of those secular luxuries? Are we sure we mourn the state of this world enough to be blessed?

And we can further expect that, as a congregation and as individuals, some will be offended at us for the Gospel that we proclaim. On the other hand, there are no picketers outside calling for the dissolution of our church. Are we sure that we're proclaiming the Word purely enough to invite the rejection that the prophets faced? Are we excluded enough by the world to be included by Christ and His blessing?

The Law of God declares that we are to be poor, hungry, sad and rejected, to be blessed by God. But it doesn't stipulate a level. Just how poor, hungry, sad and rejected do we have to be? This is the purpose of the Law, to accuse - to make good and sure that we know we can't trust in ourselves. Jesus does not preach His Law to make any of us say, "*I am doing well enough.*" He preaches His Law so that we say, "*Am I doing well enough? In many cases, obviously not. In the rest, I can't be sure, and that's just as bad. I want to be sure that I'm blessed by God, because faith is sure.*" That's the answer of the Law.

Now, let's speak of the Gospel.

Of course, we know that Jesus is the only One who has been perfect in all things. This means that He has been perfectly poor, hungry, mournful and hated. The Apostle Paul tells us how poor He was: "*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, although He was rich, yet because of you He became poor, in order that you through His poverty might become rich,*" (2 Cor. 8:9). Jesus took on the form of human flesh by being born as a child in a lowly manger by poor parents. Growing up, He still was poor, for "*foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to rest His head,*" (Matt. 8:20). And then, being even more poverty stricken, He exchanged His perfect righteousness and holiness for our sin as He hung on the cross. Jesus has become perfectly poor for us.

Listen to how hungry He became: “*Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where the Devil continued to tempt Him for forty days. He ate nothing during those days, and, when they were over, He was very hungry,*” (Luke 4:1-2). However, not only was Jesus hungry, but He had the added struggle of being tempted by the devil for forty days, and yet, He remained perfectly sinless. Why? So that He might remain the perfect Sacrifice for our sin. And even while on the cross, Jesus was thirsty. He was perfectly hungry for us.

At the death of Lazarus,⁵ Jesus wept, for He knew the wages of sin. Likewise, He lamented for Jerusalem, because they had rejected God’s Word and stoned the prophets.⁶ The Lord Jesus grieved the sinfulness of man and mourned death - so much so that He died in our place so that He might raise us up from the dead. In other words, Jesus’ weeping was perfect.

If we want to recall when He was hated, listen to the following account taken from Matthew: “*What shall I do then, with Jesus who is called the Christ?*” Pilate asked. They all answered, “*Crucify Him... Let His blood be on us and our children,*” (Matt. 27:22, 25). So reviled was He that the crowd demanded that an insurrectionist be spared, and the holy Son of God be put to death. At the cross He was rejected by man - and forsaken by God for our sin. Yet perfect in His love, He prays that His Father would forgive them.⁷

Dear friends, it is plain to see. Throughout His life and journey to the cross, Jesus is perfectly poor, hungry, sad and hated – and perfectly sinless, so therefore, He is perfectly blessed. At the same time He suffered all of God’s woe to give us His blessings. That’s exactly what He does. Hear this Good News of woes and blessings: The Saviour takes away from us and the Saviour gives. The Saviour takes away our sin and suffers its woes on the cross. He becomes the perfect Sacrifice whose blood is shed so that we are forgiven. But even as the Saviour takes away our sin and woe, He credits us with His blessed sinlessness. He shares His merit with us, so that we are holy and blameless in the eyes of the Father.

In other words, how can any of us be blessedly poor, hungry, sad and rejected? We can’t - not by our own works, reason or strength. But with the forgiveness of sins, the Lord gives us credit for His perfect obedience, and His merit covers up our sins. Thus St. Paul writes, “*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me,*” (Gal. 2:20). If Christ dwells in us with the forgiveness of sins, then He brings with Him all of the blessings He has earned for us.

We can be sure that Christ dwells with us because when we were baptised, we were joined to His death and His life, sharing both with us. By His Word proclaimed, the Word made flesh continues to dwell among us. At His Supper, He puts His body and blood into us for the forgiveness of sins. Are you baptised? Do you hear the Word? Do you receive His Supper? Then we can be sure - Christ dwells with us, and so every blessing of His is ours.

If you and I are to seek perfection by being poor enough or sad enough or enough of anything, then we will never reach perfection, but will face only woe; that is the message of the Law. But the Gospel declares this: Blessed are we, because the Saviour Jesus Christ has been perfectly obedient in our place and covers us with His merit now. In other words, we are blessed, because we are forgiven for all of our sins. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and mind in Christ Jesus. Amen.

EPIPHANY VI

O God our Father, You are our rock and our fortress, our joy and our salvation, our light and our life, our sun and our shield. You are always ready to hear those who come before You. Therefore hear us as we come before You with our prayers and praise.

We thank You that You have called us by Your Spirit to believe in Your Son Jesus Christ, made us citizens of His eternal kingdom, given us righteousness as our dress, and equipped us with power, love, and self-control. Continue to give us these blessings, and fill us with the fruits of faith. Make us living letters that speak of Jesus Christ, that people around us may read of Your mercy and saving power in human lives.

⁵ John 11ff

⁶ Matthew 23:37

⁷ Luke 23:34

We praise You for Your grace in calling us to work in Your vineyard. Bless our work, witness, and giving, in Your name. Use us to bring many people to Your glory. Make us glad to obey Your great commission, ready to accept every service, eager to perform every duty well, and strong to do every task faithfully. Make us patient and willing even when service in Your kingdom is long and difficult. Give us the joy of seeing others come to worship You, and give us the grace to welcome them warmly as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Keep us all safe in Your loving care, and lead us to the heavenly land of promise. Grant that we may run our daily race by the presence and power of Your Spirit. Give us self-control over everything that could endanger our faith and disqualify us for the prize. Grant that we may seize every opportunity to live the new life. Prevent us from boasting in our own wisdom, wealth, or power. Enable us to glory only in knowing You as our Father. May our only treasure be to possess Your wisdom and power in the life, death, and resurrection of Your Son.

Be with us, dear Father, in all that we do. Strengthen and direct us in our daily work. Protect us in our leisure. Shelter us in our homes. Guide us as we travel. Teach us in our problems. Shield us in our afflictions. Comfort us in our sorrows. Hear us as we pray, and lift up our spirits to You as we worship.

Show compassion upon all those who have suffered severe loss of home and property, and livestock in the floods of North Queensland. Working through different government agencies and individuals, help them to recover. If it is Your gracious will, please look with compassion on the parched earth around us, and send gentle drought-breaking rain which is sufficient for our own needs.

Accept these sacrifices of humble prayer and joyous praise that we offer before You, for the sake of Jesus Christ. And to You, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, be all glory and praise, for ever and ever. Amen.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Jeremiah 17:5-8

⁵ This is what the LORD has said: “Cursed is the man who trusts in a human being, who makes flesh his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD! ⁶ He will be like a shrub in the desert and will not see when anything good comes. He will live in the parched places in the wilderness, in a salty land where no one lives. ⁷ Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD! The LORD will be his confidence. ⁸ He will be like a tree planted beside water, which spreads out its roots beside a stream. He will not be afraid when the hot season comes, but his leaves will be green. He will not be anxious in a year of drought or stop producing fruit.”

1 Corinthians 15:1-20

1 My fellow-Christians, I am telling you the Good News that I told you, which you also received and on which you also stand. ² You are also saved by it if you cling to the Word that I have preached to you, unless you have become believers in vain. ³ For I delivered to you, first, what I also received: that Christ died for our sins as the Scriptures said He would, ⁴ and that He was buried and that He was raised again on the third day as the Scriptures said He would, ⁵ and that He appeared to Cephas and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, He appeared to more than five hundred Christians at the same time, most of whom are still living, but some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then He appeared to James and

then to all the apostles, ⁸ and, last of all, He appeared to me also, as to someone abnormally born. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles and do not deserve to be called an apostle, because I had been persecuting the church of God. ¹⁰ However, by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me has not been without effect; but I have worked harder than all the others have — yet not I, but the grace of God, which has been with me. ¹¹ Now, whether I have done it or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you have believed.

¹² If it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁴ If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is useless, and your faith is also useless. ¹⁵ We are also found to be false witnesses of God, because we have testified about God that He has raised Christ; but He did not raise Him if it is true that the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For, if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷ If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile. You are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have also perished. ¹⁹ If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all other people. ²⁰ However, now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Luke 6:17-26

¹⁷ Jesus went down with them and stood on a level place with a large crowd of His disciples and a great many people from all over Judea, Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon. ¹⁸ They had come to hear Him and be healed of their diseases, and those who were troubled by unclean spirits were made well. ¹⁹ All the people were trying to touch Him, because power was coming from Him and healing them all.

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