

*Engaged in the Life of the Kingdom*  
A Sermon on Luke 6:17-26 by the Rev. Philip Major  
St. Paul's ~ Syracuse, NY ~ February 13, 2022

We are here because the example and message of Christ bring truth and hope to our lives. This is the case with our passage from Luke chapter six. In these verses God is revealing more truth and hope for us.

We remember these verses as similar to passages in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew and Luke incorporate many of the same parables and sayings of Jesus, but each one incorporates Jesus' message in different ways, with slightly different purposes. In Matthew's Gospel the passage is called 'The Beatitudes', which means 'The Blessings'.

Matthew's Gospel is the one that is most like a novel. Matthew is very intentional about telling the story of Jesus in a way that clearly communicates several main ideas of Jesus' message. In Matthew chapter five, Jesus says, *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.* Matthew continues on for several more verses, with more and more blessings. Matthew's Beatitudes include many people, who are blessed for many reasons. This is part of Matthew's mission, which emphasizes Jesus' welcome to people who had been excluded from the work and the blessings of God's kingdom.

Luke's version of the Beatitudes is different, and Luke's purpose is somewhat different. In Luke, Jesus says, *Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.* The descriptions are concrete and simple. Blessed are you who are hungry, rather than 'Blessed are you who hunger and thirst after righteousness.'

I love Matthew's version of the Beatitudes. Obviously, many other people love Matthew's version as well, because when you Google 'Beatitudes' most of the search options take you straight to Matthew chapter five, with very little mention of Luke chapter six. Matthew's Beatitudes invites many people into the life of God's kingdom, which is important. We may be tempted to throw up our hands and say, "Let's just read Matthew from now on." But I urge us to take a closer look at Luke. The example and message of Christ, including here in Luke chapter six, bring more truth and more hope to our lives.

Let's begin by considering Luke's Gospel as a whole. Whereas Matthew's Gospel is the one which is most like a novel, Luke's Gospel is most like a history book. Luke is actually a two-volume work, with the second book, *The Acts of the Apostles*, being a history of the earliest years of the Jesus movement.

Let's notice that at the beginning of Luke's telling of the story *Jesus came down with the twelve apostles 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.* Jesus is preaching to a great multitude of people. The people come from a wide range of places, which indicates there are Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles in the crowd. Jesus invites all of them into the kingdom life.

Luke is trying to tell the whole story, and that story is a message of salvation for all people. Especially in Luke's Gospel, national, ethnic and religious boundaries are unimportant. Luke includes many more voices and stories of women than Mark and Matthew. Luke is attempting to give a comprehensive, factual account of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

That does not always mean that Luke is more factual, more accurate, than the other Gospels. However, today's passage is one of the places where we can say, with high confidence, "These are the words Jesus said." The evidence for this is the subject for an hour-long Bible Study, not a twelve-minute sermon. Nevertheless, we can be fairly certain Jesus said, *Blessed are you who are 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 you will laugh.*

Notice this is spoken in a very personal way: *Blessed are you who are poor.* It is personal because during Jesus' actual sermon, whether it was preached on the plain or on the mountain, there were many poor people crowded around him. It is personal because Jesus is telling the twelve disciples, that they will be blessed in their future ministry, during which time people will hate them, exclude them, revile them and defame them. Jesus words are personal. They are also especially directed toward those who are suffering the most. Jesus is especially concerned for those who are suffering and for the poor.

Luke's beatitudes are also different from Matthew's because the orientation is clearly in the present tense. *Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now.* Jesus is concerned with our life in the present tense. Jesus is inviting us to live the kingdom life in the present.

Let's notice that Luke has an extra set of verses that Matthew has left out of his text: *Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.* These statements of a reversal in relationships of power are contrary to conventional wisdom, and very uncomfortable, which point to their authenticity.

This theme of the great reversal is prominent throughout Luke's Gospel. Recall that, back in Luke chapter one, it was Mary, the unwed, teenage mother who said: *God has cast down the powerful from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.* Jesus is continuing the message of the reversal of power relationships in the kingdom of God, first articulated by his mother.

Yet Jesus' message in Luke chapter six is much more challenging for many of us. *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.* Many of us check off the boxes for being rich in Luke's Gospel. These verses are challenging, yet only through that challenge, seen clearly in Luke's Gospel, do we enter into the kingdom life.

What will it look like for us to live the kingdom life, whether we are rich or poor? What is the critical piece Jesus is pointing to in this passage? We might understand it best by thinking about what happens in real life. In order to explain I'd like to tell you a story. The story goes a bit deeper than a simple division between rich and poor. My account is fictional but you will see it is drawn from our actual experience.

This is a story of three women, let's call them Pat, Ruth and Kate. Pat is poor. Ruth is rich. Kate is our main character, and Kate is also rich. Kate is our main character, and Kate's story helps us understand the difference between living the kingdom life and not living the kingdom life.

The story happens on a Thursday morning. The night before, Kate sets her alarm for 5:30 a.m. Kate gets out of bed when her alarm rings at 5:30. It is cold and dark. She is tired. Kate didn't sleep well, but she doesn't turn over and go back to sleep. She has to be at the Samaritan Center by 6:15 in order to be ready for the guests. Kate doesn't have time to eat breakfast. She fills her travel mug with coffee and gets in her car.

Kate is in her place and ready to serve breakfast when the first guests walk through the door at 6:30. Kate knows many of the people who come through the line. She volunteers here every Thursday morning.

Then Kate sees a woman she has never met before. Her name is Pat. Pat is wearing a men's coat which is too big for her. She is not wearing any gloves, even though it is February. Pat's hands and face are not very clean, but she gives Kate a big, beautiful smile. Then Pat says, 'God bless you for serving this breakfast. Thank you very much. Can I say a prayer for you or for someone in your family today?' Kate responds to Pat and the two share a few words of encouragement.

At 9 a.m. Kate is finished with the clean-up chores at the Samaritan Center. She gets in her car and drives to Wegmans. Kate keeps thinking about Pat, and the way she offered to pray for her or for someone in her family. This was one of the kindest things anyone has said to her in weeks.

At Wegmans Kate sees her neighbor, Ruth. Ruth invites her to sit down and have a cup of coffee. Kate replies, "Thank you but no, no more coffee for me. I need to get home and eat some breakfast. I've been up since 5:30, and all I've had is three cups of coffee."

Ruth replies, "How can it be that you have been up for four hours and haven't had breakfast yet?" Kate tells Ruth about volunteering each Thursday at the Samaritan Center. Ruth looks perplexed, "Why would you get out of bed before dawn on a cold day like today, in order to serve breakfast to these people?" Kate still has the picture of Pat's face in her mind, and the sound of Pat's voice in her ears. Kate says, "I guess you would have to serve at the Samaritan Center in order to understand."

Kate is living the life of God's kingdom. Kate is inspired by Pat, who is also living the life of God's kingdom. Pat lives with God's mercy and compassion squarely in the center of her life. Kate understands that those of us who are rich have an extra burden when it comes to living the kingdom life, so she follows Pat's example.

Jesus calls us to leave behind our feelings of entitlement. Jesus calls us to show our gratitude through our actions. Jesus calls us to live lives of generous service. Jesus calls us to work alongside Pat and Kate, engaged in the life of the kingdom.