

Barre Congregational Church
February 13, 2022: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser
~ Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany ~
“Blessings and Woes, a Messahe of Christ”
Our sermons and previous worship services can be found on our website at
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Scripture Reading: Luke 6 v 17 -26

I. Introduction:

This morning I am reflecting on how good life can be at times, and the joys we feel when things go well. I am also thinking about the times when things do not go well, and how hard it can be to pray and to trust for things to get better and for life to be easier. When we or our loved ones experience illness, death and economic struggles, it can change life dramatically from the moments where there were laughter and joy. I find Jesus’ words here in the Beatitudes interesting to explore and to mediate upon. Let’s have a look.

II. Blessings and Woes

In Chapter 6 verses 12 – 16 we see Jesus go out to a mountainside to pray, as He would do regularly, spending time with God, listening to God’s voice, and discerning and answering the call for what was next. Afterwards, He selected the twelve disciples, knowing that they would carry forth His ministry as apostles. With His newly elected disciples, He came down the mountain, and saw a large crowd who came from different parts of the region, including Judea, Jerusalem, Tyre, and Sidon. As usual, they came to hear Him preach, and to be healed from their diseases. It was surprising to see those from Tyre and Sidon in the crowd, because these were wealthy and as David E. Garland and Clinton E. Arnold said in their commentary on Luke, Godless oppressors of Israel. We read about them in Amos 1 v 9-10 and Jeremiah 47 v 4.

Jesus must have noticed those from Tyre and Sidon because He starts to bless His disciples, calling them poor, knowing they were not rich, but ordinary poor fishermen, who came from poor communities, who left everything behind and followed Him. While Matthew talks about the poor in spirit, Luke here and in other parts of his Gospel is focusing on those who were economically poor, who were in distress, and had no or little hope for the future. And so, the masses in the crowd were overwhelmingly those who knew they needed Him, the One who did not make them feel like beggars and outcasts, but the One who saw their pain and healed them and had a message of hope for them.

Whereas Matthew in his account of the Beatitudes addresses people in the third person, “Blessed are the poor in spirit”, Luke uses the second person in verse 20, “Blessed are you who are poor.” Luke seems to address the conditions poor people were facing and describes Jesus’ words as aimed at the need He saw in front of Him. The Beatitudes were also meant to imply the promise of the Kingdom of heaven, of salvation, the hope for the world. In Luke 4, we see Jesus pronouncing the purpose of His coming, to bring Good News to the Poor.

“Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied, blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh”, says verse 21. Those whom Jesus encountered were the hungry, the sick, the worried ones, the grief-stricken ones, because their conditions were so dire. They are blessed, He says, and they will be filled, and their circumstances will be changed from grief to laughter. These are dramatic and radical pronouncements from Jesus.

Then Jesus makes these very risky statements about the rich in verses 24 – 26. “Woe to you...” He says, who are rich, who have your comforts, who are well fed now, who laugh now, when others speak well of you. You, He says will go hungry, will mourn and weep, and those who speak well of you, their fathers treated the false prophets like that as well. This does not sound like Jesus’s message of loving the enemies, right? Garland and Arnold express it in this way, that the woe form is an expression of pity for those who find their security in their riches, selfishly serve themselves, perpetuating their status, and neglect and trample on the poor. They must heed this message, and change their behaviors, because their fate is not going to be very good. The Beatitudes therefore is a challenge to society of the wealthy, to use their wealth for the good, instead of service to the self only. These are the kind of people in the crowd! God is a God who came to transform lives, to provide for the poor and suffering, and if you, the wealthy can see this divine plight and concern, and open your hearts and purses and efforts to the ones who suffer, then you will be blessed. Even you will be blessed, because of God’s grace and mercy.

III. Do we fully understand this message of Christ?

It appears that for Jesus these beatitudes are for those who faithfully trust in God for their lives, their livelihoods, their well-being, instead of their wealth, political and social status; those who have a humble attitude in all they do and say.

I keep on wondering whether we get it right in our day-to-day lives? Do we fully understand the power of the purpose of Christ's coming and His intent of healing our brokenness and healing our illnesses and diseases, and being there for the poor? Then again, if we question ourselves too much, would it not feel like beating ourselves over the head, thinking we are not praying enough, or do not have enough faith to believe in God's healing power, or are not doing enough for those who suffer?

But Jesus was indeed a Man of prayer. He constantly retreated into the mountains, or some distant place, seeking the face of God, and looking for divine guidance for His ministry. Nothing He did was done without that intimate relationship with God. He leaves us these promises of the Beatitudes, but He also instructs the disciples and His followers to live a life of loving God and neighbor. His Spiritual life of prayer was connected to His ministry and service to the poor, and so He is modeling for us a way of life that can be blessed, because we have that intimate relationship with God.

IV. Conclusion

The Beatitudes remind us of our own calling as Christians, to retreat into our quiet spaces to hear the voice of God for our own lives, our plans and purposes, and our struggles. It is a reminder of our blessings from God, but also to remain humbled in our trust in God to change our circumstances, to sometimes cry, because we do not have the answer, to surrender in faith that understands that God is with us, sees our pain, our diseases, and wants to help, because our help does not always come from the people and the things we rely on in this world. It reminds us that we may not be rich and wealthy, but we may have the means to give to others, and to keep the poor and the hopeless in mind when we live our own lives of comfort.

The Gospel message is therefore both a message of comfort and blessing, and a challenge to us, to live our lives as Christ would want us to live. May God help us as we do the best we can and help us when we do not see and do not hear. May God hear our prayers as we ask for healing and provision for ourselves and our neighbors. Amen