

"COME AS YOU ARE, FOR YOU ARE ENOUGH"

Luke 6:17-26

February 17, 2019

In this version of Jesus' teaching of the Beatitudes, he speaks to them while standing them. Luke differs from Matthew in this regard: Matthew's Jesus is more formal and speaks from a position and voice of authority. Luke's Jesus is more personal; he prefers to be with the crowds as one of them, teaching them from a position of a pastor. Here what the Spirit is saying to us in Luke's Gospel, the 6th Chapter, beginning with the 17th verse:

Coming down off the mountain with them, he stood on a plain surrounded by disciples, and was soon joined by a huge congregation from all over Judea and Jerusalem, even from the seaside towns of Tyre (Tire) and Sidon (Sydon). They had come both to hear him and to be cured of their ailments. Those disturbed by evil spirits were healed. Everyone was trying to touch him—so much energy surging from him, so many people healed! Then he spoke:

You're blessed when you've lost it all.

God's kingdom is there for the finding.

You're blessed when you're ravenously hungry.

Then you're ready for the Messianic meal.

You're blessed when the tears flow freely.

Joy comes with the morning.

"Count yourself blessed every time someone cuts you down or throws you out, every time someone smears or blackens your name to discredit me.

What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and that that person is uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens—skip like a lamb, if you like!—for even though they don't like it, I do . . . and all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company; my preachers and witnesses have always been treated like this.

But it's trouble ahead if you think you have it made.

What you have is all you'll ever get.

And it's trouble ahead if you're satisfied with yourself.

Your *self* will not satisfy you for long.

And it's trouble ahead if you think life's all fun and games.

There's suffering to be met, and you're going to meet it.

"There's trouble ahead when you live only for the approval of others, saying what flatters them, doing what indulges them. Popularity contests are not truth contests—look how many scoundrel preachers were approved by your ancestors! Your task is to be true, not popular.

Here ends the lesson. May God bless these words as we seek to apply them to our lives.

Thursday evening, I shared food and talk with my dear friend, Rev. Kathleen Gorman. We went to seminary together and met in a theology practices class. The professor instructed us to find community in the class and to design and engage a project demonstrating intentional theology.

I was looking around to find a partner and so was she. Our match was destined, for she was a recovering CPA and I was a recovering lawyer. We made plans to meet later for our design session.

I suggested we play with metaphors. We both needed to get out of our heads and into our hearts and spirit. We needed to relearn how to play. We decided to meet once per week to share dinner at a salad bar, and there to communicate with each other completely in metaphor.

If I asked her to pass the salt, I had to state my request in such a way that the salt shaker was representative of something having to do with God

or Jesus or Spirit. I might have said, "Please pass that which grounds us to God's earth" (i.e. the salt of the earth.)

If she picked up a piece of wilted lettuce, she might exclaim, "this reminds me of Jesus after a hard day's preaching!" Hopefully you get the idea. It was a challenging spiritual practice at first and our early attempts resulted in rather stilted and shallow conversation. But after a week or two, we got pretty good at translating the mundane into the meaningful.

I remember us having conversations about seminary and lamenting about how foreign most of the learning was for us. I thought I never would get a handle on words like "pericope" and "pseudepigrapha," much less on concepts such as "systematic theology" and "liberation theology." I was feeling rather overwhelmed with the new discourse and practice, not to mention the reading—oh the volume of reading!!

It took me a long time to get what Jesus was saying to me in his preaching and teaching. I felt for my whole life up to that point that God and Jesus judged me as inadequate, in need of someone else's death for justification, unable to hold my head up and claim God's favor.

Love? I never thought God loved me! I never thought Jesus loved folks, especially not me, a poor hopeless sinner. And the only voice of God's Holy Spirit I recognized in my head as such was the one telling me all the negative things about myself that I did not want to hear but that I knew deep down inside were true. I was raised in a tradition that was all about

guilt, and I learned guilt very well. I was never good enough for God's love. Maybe some of you have felt as I did.

The Beatitudes indicted me every time I read them. I hated them. "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven." Busted! I have never been truly poor. Sure, there have been times in my life when I have been down on my luck and lacking adequate resources, but I always had an out. I always had a friend that would lend me lunch money, or the pastor that "forgot" to collect from me the key to the church where I had to hide out a few nights as a teenager when my parents lost track of their responsibilities.

I have never truly been poor, destitute, without a friend, without a hope, without a bed or at least a couch on which to hold my head. So, I guessed the kingdom of God was not for me. I was not good enough.

"You're blessed when you're ravenously hungry," Jesus said to the crowd gathered around him. Well, I've been hungry in my life, but never for long, and not like the lepers and the starving peoples of occupied Rome that we read about in the Bible, not hungry enough, rejected enough, hopeless enough to die like so many impoverished people in our world today. That's never been me.

Busted again. And when Jesus blessed those who were able to cry and promised them the last laugh, well, I had been taught that crying is a sign of weakness, so I was not about to go there either. I couldn't do *anything* right in the eyes of the Holy Teacher.

How can any of us in Parker, Colorado relate to the Beatitudes? We have it good! We have addresses and bank accounts and people who care about us. We have skin that for most of us does not put us at the back of a bus or in a place where we are stared at with unspoken "what are *they* doing here?" looks. We are not denied entrance to the church if we don't have any money or an unblemished goat to offer or an unerring knowledge of our blessed scriptures to quote.

We sure don't have to worry about someone cutting us down or throwing us out of anywhere because we are professing Christians. So how are we "the blessed" ones that Jesus reveres?

Hey, look, I don't have any easy answers for this text. I know you might want that from me, but that's not what you get this morning. The Beatitudes indict us, they do. *We are the ruling class. We are the ones the Pharisees let in to the Temple. We are privileged, most of us by race, half or more of you by gender, most of us by living in the middle class, many of us by education and fancy degrees, most of us by family who claim us and love us, all of us by access to clean hospitals and schools, many of us—not all-- to any church we choose, and all of us by free access to this church. We are the ruling class; we are not the ones Jesus is choosing to bless in this passage.*

So, let's all leave church, hopelessly dejected, shall we? No! Let's resign ourselves that the kingdom of God Jesus promises will not be ours, right? Well, actually no. Let's just not read those portions of the Bible

that appear to indict us, let's just skip over those sections and get to the ones where we are the beloved of Christ, shall we? We can't we must not. We must sit with them and talk through them and pray about them in relation to how we live our lives.

We are Christian, and Jesus calls us to look into the difficult mirrors of our many rooms. We are Christian and no one named Jesus ever promised us we would have it this easy. We are Christian and if we need to examine our addictions and our affluenza and our protections and our privileges, then so be it.

But here's also what I want you to hear this morning; here's the pastoral part of this sermon:

I want you to know that in this house of worship, in this community of faith, in this mess we call human connection, that you should come here as you are—wonderfully flawed, boloxed up and a spiritual mess, awash in misaligned priorities, judgmental of those who can't possibly meet your standards, *especially yourselves*,--you should come here just as you are, for you are enough.

You are enough.

You are enough for Jesus. You are enough for God. Come as you are to this place of hope and healing and be loved and enriched. Come as you are as a disciple of Christ and let him love you up, too. His disciples were all in need of grace. His family was all in need of grace.

Even Jesus showed his privilege once in a while, yes, he did, for he was a product of his culture same as us. Sometimes we need grace in the text and sometimes he needs our grace in the text, too. The Samaritan women at the well that he wrongly judged knew that. The hemorrhaging woman that reached out for his cloak to stop him and make him help her knew that. And the children who came to him to sit in his lap when he was busy and distracted and on his way elsewhere knew that, too.

The Word of Faith gospel message of Joel Osteen, Joyce Meyer, Marilyn Hickey, Kenneth Copeland, and others is that those who prosper get their just rewards from God. Kenneth Copeland states the faith formula this way: "All it takes is 1) seeing or visualizing whatever you need, whether physical or financial; 2) staking your claim on Scripture; and 3) speaking it into existence." This is "prosperity gospel." From an article written by Gary Gilley, a prosperity gospel minister from Springfield Illinois: (*Joel Osteen and the Prosperity Gospel*, June 2009)

As implied by the title "Word of Faith," the supporters of this movement believe that faith works like a mighty power or force. Through faith we can obtain anything we want — health, wealth, success, or whatever we please. However, this force is released only through the **spoken word**. As we speak words of faith, power is discharged to accomplish our desires.

This is the theology of Kenneth Hagin (considered by many to be the father of this movement) as found in his booklet *How to Write Your Own Ticket with God*.

In the opening chapter, titled "Jesus Appears to Me," Hagin claims that while he was "in the Spirit," Jesus told him to get a pencil and a piece of paper. He then instructed him to "write down: 1, 2, 3,

4." Jesus then allegedly told Hagin that "if anybody, anywhere, will take these four steps or put these four principles into operation, he will always receive whatever he wants from Me or from God the Father." That includes whatever you want financially. The formula is simply: "Say it, Do it, Receive it, and Tell it."

1. Step number one is "Say it." "Positive or negative, it is up to the individual. According to what the individual says, that shall he receive."

2. Step number two is "Do it." "Your action defeats you or puts you over. According to your action, you receive or you are kept from receiving."

3. Step number three is "Receive it." We are to plug into the "powerhouse of heaven." "Faith is the plug, praise God! Just plug in."

4. Step number four is, "Tell it so others may believe." This final step might be considered the Faith movement's outreach program.

I'm sorry, but this is ridiculous. It's also diabolical, and I'm calling it out as such right here and now. It's antithetical to the teaching of Jesus--in the Beatitudes, in the Lord's Prayer, in his parables and elsewhere. It is not my Gospel truth, and I hope and trust it is not yours, either. If it is, please come talk with me about your belief structure.

I get riled up about this nonsense. So, let me slow it down a bit. I invite you to come as you are here to UCC Parker Hilltop. Come as you are, for you are enough. We'll muddle through our faith crises together. We will seek to hear and understand Jesus with new ears, and we will try to see with new eyes the world we are so quick to judge.

We will be disciples of Jesus. Not perfect, flawed in many ways, yet beloved by the teacher, blessed by the Christ, and sent out into the world

just as we are, for we are enough. Just like Simon Peter and Matthew and John and yes, even Judas, we come to Jesus as we are, and Jesus loves us all. Just as Mary Magdalene and Mary, mother of Jesus, and Prisca and Phoebe—two of the early apostles, we come as we are, and we are enough.

Just as Paul was flawed and the early church fathers were flawed, they were enough and God loved them, too.

Isn't that what we stand for at UCC Parker Hilltop? Don't we believe that we can come here as we are and be accepted? Don't we tell others that we come here as we are, and we leave here empowered and inspired and committed to better the lives of others and ourselves with the fruits of our Christian witness? I hope so, I really do.

We come as we are, and we are enough. Just as Jesus chose simple people to be his closest allies and students: fishermen and women of the streets, blind men and beggars, lepers and former tax collectors, Jesus said to them all, "Come to me just as you are, for you are enough. But prepare to be changed; prepare to be moved to action; prepare to go out from this place sporting not riches and jewels and prosperity in your gospel tote-bag, but rather showing for others a servant's heart, a compassionate hand, a justice soul, and a troubled mind. Jesus did not promise peace. Jesus did not promise a fat bank account. When he talks about a "mansion with many rooms," he is not talking about a heavenly reward for rich church-goers, he is talking about God who has room in the Creator-heart for all people, not just Christians.

"Come as you are, for you are enough" does not mean easy street. It means discipleship based in heart, not in pedigree. It means taking our flaws and using it to build God's just peace on earth. It means grace and it means doubt and it means prayer and it means sacrifice and it means service. For we are not a country club—we are church, and we are disciples of Jesus Christ. We come as we are, and we are enough.

May it Be So.