

February 17th, 2019

Luke 6:17-26

Title:

Rev. Sharon Smith

This sermon invites us:

- To reflect on the ways we live out the values of Christ
 - To be honest about the dangers of wealth, self-sufficiency and status
 - To consider the ways we might learn from those who have experienced poverty, marginalization and rejection, thereby reversing a charity model.
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Introduction:

Blessed are the ones who carry empty bowls

Blessed are the ones who know the limits of their humanity

Blessed are the ones who come to the end of themselves and discover that Some One is holding them.

Gambling addicts confess: I am powerless over money and my life has become unmanageable

Food addicts confess: I am powerless over food and my life has become unmanageable

Affirmation and control addicts confess: I am powerless over others and my life has become unmanageable.

Coming to the end of ourselves, is the beginning of the spiritual journey.

Jesus words are given in the context of a culturally and economically mixed crowd,

People standing around him were from the Jewish nation (Jerusalem & Judea) and from the Gentile Nations (Tyre and Sidon).

There were many living with incurable physical and mental conditions.

And there were those enduring great distress.

And Jesus invited his disciples then, and invites us now, to reflect on the things we most value. By setting up blessings and woes.

These 4 beatitudes are blessings – literally meaning happy – but contextually meaning in right relationship with God and people.

You will be in right relationship when you are poor

You will be in right relationship when you hunger....

You will be in right relationship when you weep....

And you will be in right relationship when you experience rejection...

And if that's not weird enough...

They are followed by a mirror image of woes.

A woe is a curse, an expression of disfavor or calamity

Jesus says:

You don't stand a chance if you are rich, full, laughing over another.

You don't stand a chance if you are liked by everyone.

What do we make of this?

GK Chesterton once said:

“On first reading you feel the Beatitudes turn everything upside down; but the second time you read them you discover that they turn everything right side up. The first time you read them you feel they are impossible; the second time you read them you feel nothing else is possible”

Jesus seems to be making an official statement about the way of life inside the Kingdom of God. How life could be if God's way was the norm.

Perhaps he is showing us how the things we value can either open us up to God or close down the possibility?

In the deathly world of riches, fullness and uncritical laughter, those who live in poverty, hunger and grief are hopeless. But Jesus' blessing opens a new possibility.

Jesus' alternative community is to be shaped by those who are poor, hungry and grieving.

Walter Brueggemann The Prophetic Imagination

I am of the opinion that is harder for us who are materially rich, who don't feel hunger, and who are committed to protect our social images – It is harder for us to grow spiritually.

For when we have everything we need, we are easily fooled.

Foiled into thinking that we can do it alone, that we don't need each other and we don't need God. Self-sufficiency is the opposite of right relatedness.

While I was working on the Down Town Eastside, a friend of mine who was the spiritual care provider for Raincity Housing. Wrote a steamy article against the common heard slogan:

The DTES the poorest postal code in Canada.

Who article reads:

Poor...

 Poor in what?

 Poor economically – sure.

 Poor in health care – whose fault is that?

But Rich in community.

 Rich in friendship

 Rich in sharing story

 Rich in searching for the things of the Spirit.

Rev. Helen Auperly

You and I are used to being the ones who have an abundance to give, who offer help, we write a cheque. And oh, how we need to carry on doing this.

But these actions alone, do not bring us into right relatedness. It produces a power imbalance.

And when it comes to trusting God for daily needs or coming to the end of ourselves, it is those who have been marginalized, those who live with little, who also have something profound to give us...

Something more valuable than money or food or status.

If we get close to people who we usually don't talk to.

And if we pay attention and listen...

People who are marginalized, whose daily life is a struggle for survival,

They can teach us the entry way, the first steps into the way of the Kingdom,

They can tell us their experience of surrendering to this Loving Mystery that we call God.

And oh, we are so needy of this. We need to learn how to surrender.

This is not to say that Jesus words are making light of suffering.

Hunger, grinding poverty, misery, deprivation, grief, and deadly exclusion inflicted on marginalized people are all truly intolerable and not what God wants.

Jesus is not trivializing suffering, but magnifying grace.

For in the midst of every type of suffering – there is gift.

And so, it is for us also, in our suffering.

Whether it's the suffering that comes with Aging – loneliness, marginalization.

Or the weeping that comes from loss.

Or the hunger of unfulfilled desires.

It is hard. It can be excruciating.

And it can be a doorway to God.

Blessed are you who carry empty bowls – for you will be filled.

Blessed are you who know the limits of your humanity – for you will rejoice

Blessed are you who come to the end of yourselves – for you will discover that Some One is holding you.

Amen

In this season of Epiphany we are reflecting on Our lives of faith.

I have been inviting us to think about the question:

What does it mean for you to live a life of faith?

Today I have asked the Sheila Baldock to share her reflections on this question: What does it mean for you to live a life of faith? Nancy Sunderland is going to read Sheila's words.