

Sermon: "Trustworthy Roots" Luke 6:27-38  
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Have you ever read something and immediately after reading it, you put it down, and say to yourself, "That didn't make any sense at all?" And so you re-read the text again and...if you could see a mirrored image of yourself... it might look something like an expression of puzzlement, curiosity, or disbelief. Well, this was my experience as I read and re-read the gospel lesson this week:

*Blessed are you who are poor...poor - you can't make the house payment, medical bills are in the tens of thousands of dollars, and once again, the car needs a major repair.*

*Blessed are you who are hungry...right now; I can't help but get the pictures of the Gazan children out of my mind, you know, the ones who are clamoring to the front of the line with a dented pot just hoping to have some substance poured into the pot.*

*Blessed are you who are weeping...or crying your eyes out; your loved one just died, your adult child is experiencing heartache and pain and you feel helpless, because you can't take the pain away or fix it.*

*Or...blessed when people hate you, exclude you, revile you, and defame you. A reputation ruined by harsh critics and untruths that leave others wondering about your character; or children excluded from playground games because they have a medical condition that dictates or limits their physical capabilities; or when hate becomes a way of life for those around you.*

And if this doesn't give me, and maybe you, too, cause to wonder what in the world Jesus is up to in Luke's version of the beatitudes, the responses to the blessings surely will:

*You're blessed when you are poor, because guess what...you will inherit the kingdom of God! Whoa! Or...blessed if your hunger is causing weakness and headaches and malnutrition, but wait...you're going to be filled and feel full.*

*And if you're weeping right **now**? Well...guess what? You will laugh again.*

*And that hate thing? Or exclusion, or defamation - well, this in essence will find you leaping for joy looking forward to your great reward in heaven; because you are living into your baptism and speaking truth to power on*

*behalf of the immigrant, refugee, or an entire people whose future is uncertain and are caught up in a political power that's not concerned about the "other." Speaking truth to power on behalf... of love?*

"Blessed are they, but in what sense? Why *does* Jesus declare the poor happy, fortunate and blessed? Are they blessed because despite their poverty they can have "inner" security, so that their poverty doesn't matter? Or perhaps their poverty is an advantage, causing them to trust solely in God and maybe find *true* happiness? Or perhaps, another's poverty creates some 'comfort' for the comfortable.

All of these insights may be true to a certain extent, but I think they (all) fall short of grasping the full importance of what is being promised in Luke's beatitudes. And maybe, just maybe, generate a type of rationalization for those who have not experienced such "blessings." William Loader states that the cause and effect of Jesus' teachings are all promises of reversal. The poor are blessed because there is a real chance they will cease being poor! Note the writer's placement on the word, *now*. You see, the blessing is partly in knowing that such a reversal is coming and...partly in the reversal itself.

These sayings, or teachings of Jesus, envision - change. *Now* is not forever and for me... this is hope. *Now*, indicates that liberation for the oppressed, food for the hungry and joy for those who mourn, will not last forever. Hope that life can be and will be different. And hope in this sense, is none other than justice. Justice for those suffering at the hands of another. I wonder if I am beginning to get a 'glimpse' of what God may be up to in the reading today. But the reading and Jesus' teaching doesn't end there. We also are provided with what happens at other end of the spectrum:

*Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. 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.*

*And woe to you when people speak well of you, for that's what their ancestors did to the false prophets.*

In other words, this has been going on for a long time. And during the time of Jesus, economic poverty was real. Let me re-phrase that part of the text... economic poverty IS real, now. The poor, you see, in many ways were the dispirited, overtaxed, exploited, lost and hopeless in spirit. Let me re-phrase that too... the poor.. ARE dispirited, overtaxed, exploited, lost and hopeless in spirit. And to 'these people', the promise of reversal is as real to those who listened to Jesus' teachings at the time as it is today.

And if we are to be completely honest with ourselves, we are people of both blessings and woes. We don't always get it right, even in our faith communities. Sometimes we are the ones

who don't speak up for those who are suffering due to the need for self-preservation. We don't always give out of our abundance. We aren't always mindful of those who weep and mourn, especially when they aren't in our inner circle or thousands of miles away. And so woe to us, too.

You know, Jesus may have initially been addressing the people of Galilee and the fledgling Christian communities, but his message is just as relevant for us, today. Jesus' teachings are for all who are holding out for change. Change for a more equitable way of life; change for an end to oppression; change for children caught in the crossfire of war and violence; change for systemic poverty; change, change, change. But not just change for individuals, but for changed communities. Blessedness, you see, is when we act in solidarity *with* the poor. The blessedness of the poor...lies ultimately in the blessedness of sharing compassion and change. But trust me...living into hope and the radical promise of reversal, is not always easy. Oftentimes, it creates confusion, tension, doubt and anxiety.

Little did the people on the plain know, that the teachings of Jesus would turn the world upside down...or...perhaps rightside up. And what gives substance and rootedness to who we are as Christians is that we are embodied in the resurrection of Christ every, single, day. We are resurrection people but we DO live with injustice, poverty, pain, oppression, racial injustice, war, *and* we DO find joy in abundance even in the midst of brokenness.

I think the gospel lesson today, at least for me, started out with more questions and wonderment than I would like to admit. Questions about fairness, equity and justice. And in all honesty, I'm beginning to think that my longing for a faith that is cut and dried - an either or thinking - is slipping away. I'm beginning to think that Jesus has come down from the mountain to 'teach me' that my orderly pattern of how "I" live out my faith may need a little tweaking. Blessed are you, Paula, when you don't have it all figured out. Blessed are we, First Lutheran, because we, too, don't have it all figured out at times.

This week was a stark reminder of what the embodiment of the Word *among us* means. And not just to me...but to those whose lives interact with mine. Jesus' illogical, upside down way of thinking does disturb me at times. It ruffles my feathers and nudges, or maybe even pushes me out of my comfort zone. Maybe you feel that way, too, as you hear the words of Jesus' teaching by Eugene Peterson:

*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....because joy, does come in the morning.*

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

*Jesus' ministry involved changed lifestyle, changed communities, and changed people. Somedays, I need the promise of God's radical reversal of love. Somedays, it might be you. Somedays, it might be my neighbor.*

*Blessedness in solidarity with the poor and blessedness of the poor ... lie ultimately in the blessedness of a shared life.*

Blessed are we...now. Amen.