

**The Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany**  
**Luke 6: 17-26**

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**Episcopal Church of the Resurrection**

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I keep an old wrapper from a Dove Chocolate heart on my desk, because believe it or not, it spoke to me. It says, it's ok to be flawed and fabulous. Hm, I thought. Yes, yes I am. It seems to sum up everyone I know. These contrasts -- flawed and fabulous -- need to go together, and stay together because either one alone presents an unreal portrait of reality. Much like blessing and warning go together as we follow Jesus.



That's what Jesus offers today in his Sermon on the Plain. Yes, *the Sermon on the Plain* from the Gospel of Luke. There is a more familiar sermon in Matthew <sup>1</sup> – the sermon on the Mount. It contains the Beatitudes within it. But they are different, softer than those we hear in Luke.

There are more differences than just location of the pulpit if we look a little closer. There are differences of perspective ---- In Matthew Jesus is preaching from above, to those below. Luke tells us that Jesus comes to a level place to speak to people. Think about it – it is a place where Jesus can look into people's eyes, and they can look into his, being on the same level. A level place is a physically accessible place as well. Matthew quotes Jesus talking about those in the 2<sup>nd</sup> person --- Blessed are THEY. In Luke we hear Jesus saying, blessed are YOU. Matthew only offers insight into blessing, but offers no warnings. Luke keeps it real, knowing that both are needed. Keeping those differences in mind, let's look at what Luke might have to say that we haven't paid attention to before, Matthew's beatitudes being much more popular.

Immediately prior to what we heard today, Jesus had selected his inner circle, the twelve. The first thing they do together is come off the mountain onto a level plain to 1) be with people who need healing and 2) to hear about they will be transformed through following Jesus. The twelve are watching and learning, as well as listening and learning.

Speaking to a great crowd who have come to hear him teach, to be healed, to be cured. The crowd is not disappointed. Perhaps they had heard of the woman who touched the hem of his garment and was cured. Because the scripture goes on to say they were all reaching out to touch him. And it says the power went out from Jesus and they were all healed. All of them.

Next Jesus looks up at his disciples. The tone is different, because Jesus knew that taking on his way of life was full of disappointment as well as transformation. He knew that what his disciples sought would not always be what they found.

God doesn't demand extravagant sacrifice, or liturgical purity or even having our act together before we follow him. He just wants us to follow him. And invites us to see others through his eyes:

The poor. The poor are blessed not because of their physical poverty, but because they are more dependent on God.

The hungry – are blessed as they too must turn outside themselves for relief.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 5: 1-12

Those who weep --- because grief, sorrow carve out a space for God to act.

These blessings are more about one's relationship to God than about having things, filling one's belly full or avoiding sorrow. You want to know the Aramaic word for **blessed**? (The language spoken by Jesus) It's Ripe. The poor, the hungry, the sorrowful – they are ripe for God.

What does that say to those of us who are not poverty stricken, or hungry or full of grief? That we can respond to their needs with God's help and all relationships can be strengthened. God's economy is different than a transactional economy. There is blessing a-plenty to go around. And we, who have been given much, are part of that economy.

In Matthew these things -- poverty and hunger --- are spiritualized (the poor in spirit, hunger for justice). But in Luke, they are real states in the lives of real people and Jesus by his actions throughout the gospels shows us there is actually something we can do.

Jesus goes on to say "Woe" --- a word we don't use to often any more. Perhaps we can substitute the following: "you're going to find yourself in trouble if" or "you're going to regret it if"

- If you are complete and content with yourselves. In other words, if you think you're all that. Because down the road you'll find that's all you've really got.
- If you are only focused on today's fun and joy, because there will be none later
- If you think having more things is better than having a relationship with God, because in the end, you'll have nothing.

These are warnings. And promises. They go together because they are real.

God sent us his Son, not only as Savior, but as a perfect example of what we can become: teachers, feeders, healers, consolers, focused on God and God's kingdom. We watch and learn, story by story, how we are to be, and how we are to act, when we observe Jesus interact with others in the scripture.

Jesus points us to a new vision of God's world: for us to be in relationship with the one who feeds our souls so that we can be in relationship with those who are longing to be fed. A beautiful, blessed partnership with God and others.

When Jesus calls us to follow him, he calls us to a radical reorientation of our thinking and our focus. He calls us to walk with God as God would have us walk, and to respond to those situations in our families our workplaces, our church and our community, where people are crying out for justice, kindness and humble examples of faithfulness. Crying out for relief from their poverty, food for their bellies, soothing for their souls that ache.

Changing the world, not just changing ourselves, is the business Jesus was in, and the business we are in. Modeling ourselves and our attitudes on those Jesus embraced and blessed, will make a difference. Whether we can see those differences or not. Whether we are privileged to enjoy the difference we make or not.

Are we free to hear and respond to God's will? Are we free from ties to more and more "things"? (That doesn't mean we don't have things that we cherish, but that "things" are not our focus.) Are we free from what people think or say about us? If we are, then we've got space in our lives to be filled by God's goodness, and we too are ripe for God. And ripe to be a blessing to God's world.

We are blessed, people, by the one who created us. Yes, we are flawed and fabulous. Let's go be God's blessing to those who are poor, who are hungry, who weep.