



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

Today we have Luke's less familiar version of the Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Plain. Over the years we have become used to reading the Beatitudes in Matthew from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The version in Luke is much shorter than in Matthew. The version in Luke comes later in Jesus' ministry than the one in Matthew which comes immediately after Jesus' baptism and temptation. The version in Luke is delivered on flat or common ground where the Matthew version is given from a mountain to the people below. However, both the Luke and the Matthew version give a glimpse into the kingdom of God. And at this point the hearers of the day found this sermon to set their world upside-down. All they knew in life was going out the window in this teaching from Jesus, at least according to their standards. So, this morning I would like to look briefly at Luke's version of the beatitudes and woes and see what we can glean from this teaching of Jesus.

One thing that was very noticeable to me in this text was that it was preached from a level place. Could this be the way Luke emphasized Jesus' ministry to ordinary people in ordinary places? He is also quick to name the three groups of people that are present. The apostles, a great crowd of disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. This is a wide area from north to south, that includes an orthodox Jewish contingent as well as many Gentiles. All these folks came because they heard

that Jesus could help them. And he healed them, but his mission was also to teach them.

In teaching all people Jesus has a mixed message. For those who were broken, hurting, and rejected, Jesus tells them that there is hope for them. All the injustices they encounter daily will be turned up-side down. The poor will be rich, the hungry will be fed, the grieving will one day laugh again. And then Jesus turns his attention to those on the other end of the spectrum; the powerful, the popular, the beautiful people. For them Jesus has some woes, some caution.

There is only one sermon being preached on the plain. There was only one crowd. But there was a myriad of listeners present. Some were given hope and some heard warnings. And how is that any different from today? Will you hear the message of hope this morning or maybe be a bit uncomfortable and challenged with this teaching of Jesus?

That idea is one that is reiterated repeatedly in any good seminaries preaching class. A good preacher is responsible for what he or she says but even the best preachers are not responsible for what people hear. And that folks is where the Holy Spirit comes in. True, sometimes a preacher will say a word that will touch your heart, sometimes we will offend you, and sometimes we will make you wonder or question. But what you hear is not up to me, it is what God wants you to hear in this time and in this place. And I think Jesus is doing just that in this sermon on the plain.

Sundays when you come to church, I think it is fair to say, you need a good sermon. Somedays you need a blessing and sometimes a woe. To put it more succinctly, do you need a pat on the back or a kick in the butt? So, what do you hear today from this sermon on the plain? And it truly is not a plain sermon for sure! I do think that Jesus' sermon with both beatitudes and woes is descriptive rather than prescriptive. What I mean is that they describe reality instead of calling us to new behavior. It is not the case that these statements by Jesus all filled with reward and punishment either. What I take away is one message that has four parts.

First part deals with wealth. We do live in one of the wealthiest countries on the planet. We are by world standards, very rich, yet many of us struggle with finances or watch the stock market daily and fret over our investments. We can get frustrated when the gap between our needs and our wants grows large. Did you ever hear a quote from May West? She said, "I've been poor,

and I've been rich. Believe me, rich is better." On the outside it seems like it should be true, but it is not always the case.

Being a St Olaf graduate, I always enjoyed the wisdom of Soren Kierkegaard, where the volumes of his works were translated, studied, and are stored. Kierkegaard once wrote: "I walked into a spectacular cathedral surrounded by stained glass windows. I watched as the preacher, dressed in silk robes opened a bible with gold edges and read these words: 'If anyone wants to be my disciple, let them sell their possessions, give away their money, and come follow me.' And Kierkegaard said, 'I looked around, and no one else was laughing!'"

You see, wealth can be a blessing or a woe. It can bring us joy, or it can cause angst. But the one thing it cannot do is bring us eternal life. All the financial security in the world cannot make us secure, only Jesus can and did that.

The second part of this text has to do with hunger. That is one of my peeves that interestingly comes after Jesus talks about wealth. I cannot tell you how much I believe in this statement; We live in the richest country in the world and there is no reason, no reason at all that any child should ever go to bed hungry. And yet it is true that many do close their eyes at night with an empty belly. What a travesty when our country is constantly talking about food. "Atkins", "South beach", "Weight Watchers" and the list goes on. We are obsessed with food. This week we have heard repeatedly that the price of our precious wings is at an all-time high, just before the Super Bowl, go figure. So, most of us who live to eat do not know the real feeling of hunger. And no one knows better than I do that food can be a blessing or a woe. Gluten aside just ask Rodney about my cooking. But might I remind you that there are all different kinds of hunger.

Laughing and weeping comes next on our list. Have you been to a wedding lately? Did you hear tears of joy or tears of sadness? Or how about going to a funeral? I know we don't seem to have as many actual funerals in the church today but try to remember the last one you attended. Was there laughter that flowed right along with the sadness and grief? Can that be a cover up, so we don't have to show anyone how we are really feeling?

Remember a book by Dr Thomas Harris written in 1969, I'm OK, You're OK. Over 15 million copies are in print today. The book tried to answer the conflict between good and evil. It was the talk of the town. Everyone wanted to read it to find out if they were truly Ok or not! In 2008 there was a book

written, I'm Not OK, You're Not Ok, But That is Ok with God. This book was trying to find the humor in the good verse evil accounts in life. 2014 brought us I'm Ok, You're Ok, God's Ok. Some people are still seeking the answers to life's basic questions. We want to be accepted and not persecuted for what we believe and who we are. We hush up religious talk and don't want to offend someone by saying that we are Lutheran or Catholic or Baptist or that we believe in God. Religion is a private matter or so we say. Dare we talk about it with even our relatives. Religious convictions can be a blessing or a woe. What do you think? Does your walk resemble your talk? And are you OK with where your actions and words meet?

Not sure how you are feeling right now. But I do believe that what Jesus had in mind when preaching this Sermon on the plain was to deliver a single message. And folks the Holy Spirit is here right now in this place entering our lives, lives of the humble and lives of the proud. He comes to touch the poor and the rich, the hungry and the filled, those weeping and those laughing and those that are persecuted, with one message, one very important message. And that is that you are all blessed. Blessed beyond measure because the Savior loves you. He died on the cross and rose again to give you forgiveness, abundant life here on earth and the promise of life eternal with him in heaven one day. And if that is all you hear in this sermon this morning, it is enough. Thanks be to God. **AMEN**