

the political background, the deeper concern of trust and distrust, fear and hope take center stage in God's work among us.

⁵ Thus says the LORD:

Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals
and make mere flesh their strength,
whose hearts turn away from the LORD.

⁶ They shall be like a shrub in the desert,
and shall not see when relief comes.
They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness,
in an uninhabited salt land.

⁷ Blessed are those who trust in the LORD,
whose trust is the LORD.

⁸ They shall be like a tree planted by water,
sending out its roots by the stream.
It shall not fear when heat comes,
and its leaves shall stay green;
in the year of drought it is not anxious,
and it does not cease to bear fruit.

⁹ The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse—
who can understand it?

¹⁰ I the LORD test the mind and search the heart,
to give to all according to their ways,
according to the fruit of their doings.

Luke 6:17-26

Rosemary Dawson

In the verses leading up to today's readings Jesus had a prayer retreat on a mountain, then named his apostles from among his disciples. Returning to the plains and the crowds, he offers his first words to the newly appointed. What follows is known as 'the Sermon on the Plain', offering to his listeners words of both blessing and woes, instructions on love, grace and obedience. Today's reading covers the introduction and beginning of Jesus' words.

¹⁷ He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. ¹⁸ They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. ¹⁹ And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

²⁰ Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

²¹ "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.

"Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

²² "Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you,
revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man.

²³ Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great
in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

²⁴ "But woe to you who are rich,

blessings. And these blessings are not meant just for our personal enjoyment. Rather, God's blessings are meant for the whole of God's world. do you remember when God entered into covenant with Abraham? Do you know what God said to him? "I will make you a great nation and I will bless you. I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing." (Genesis 12:2) Did you catch it? Do you see what is at the heart of God's kingdom life? "I will bless you and you will be a blessing." Whoa, that is a blessing!

That has been God's intent from the first day of creation, and all the way to the Day of Judgement and beyond. "I chose you (there it is, our blessing), and put you in this world to bear fruit (and there it is too, blessings for the world) [John 15:16]. The problem for us is that we only want half a blessing, the first half to be exact. And so, not only do we turn the world upside down – where the rich get richer (on the backs of the poor); but as disciples of Christ, when we don't live the kingdom life, blessing others as we have been blessed, we bring shame and contempt on the church and more importantly on Christ – who by the way "although he was rich became poor for your sake, so that by his poverty you might become rich." (2 Corinthians 8:9)

This sermon on the plain really sets me back. Does it have the same effect on you? I have been asking myself all week 'am I rich? Or am I poor? Am I blessed, or am I under God's warning- 'woe lady!?' I know the answer to that. And when I am willing to admit the truth, too often I am 'rich in things and poor in soul'. How about you? Maybe you and I can recognize God's grace filled blessings and our riches, our poverty and our neighbor's needs. And maybe we *can* live according to God's reign.

Whoa, now what a blessing that would be! Amen.

***Hymn**

Hope of the World

PH 398

Joys and Concerns

Prayers of the People

Wondrous God, we are awed and humbled by the greatness of your blessing to us. We know the abundance of the earth and the joy of heaven. You have offered us salvation in Christ and life in your Spirit. We are also humbled and awed by your call to live faithful to your kingdom's ways, as true disciples and true blessings for your world.

And so we pray for your church and for this congregation. May we live the abundant life of grace, celebrate your blessings and favor and embody your goodness, mercy, generosity and love towards all the world, especially those in need. We pray for the world, its leaders and all who enjoy wealth and power. May they recognize all they have as both your blessing and your call. May they use their resources to work for justice, equity and peace for all peoples. We pray also for all who are in need today. Grant your healing to the ill, your comfort to the sorrowful and your provision to the needy. We especially thank you for.... and we ask your continued care and blessing for....

We praise you, O God, for the fullness of your blessing to us through Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray...

The Lord's Prayer

Choral Response

Remember Me

Offering

Christ proclaims God's truth to rich and poor; God has blessings enough for all. We who are rich, need one important thing – to share generously from God's gifts, so that others might truly live. Our offerings are meant to share the kingdom life with the whole human family. Let us dedicate our gifts with joy.

Thank you, God, for blessing our lives with the riches of earth and heaven. Now use what we have shared to provide fulfillment in others' lives- among our neighbors, near and far. Direct our lives according to your purpose, that your reign of love may take root and grow. Amen.

Doxology

(choose the one that is best for your faith)

Praise God from whom all blessings flow, praise him all creatures here below,
praise him above ye heavenly hosts, praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost

Praise God from whom all blessings flow, Praise God all creatures here below
Praise God for all that Love has done; Creator, Christ and Spirit One. Amen

*Hymn

God of Grace and God of Glory

NCH 436

*Common Commission

Let us go forth into the world in peace, being of good courage, holding fast to that which is good, rendering to no one evil for evil, strengthening the faint-hearted, supporting the weak, helping the afflicted, honoring all persons, loving and serving the Lord, and rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

*Benediction

Go now into the world,

And my our most generous God...bless you in every way, so that you may grow into full-formed lives, robust in God, and generous and gracious to all ...and so bring forth great praise and thanksgiving to God. 2 Cor 9:10-11 the Message adj

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord, Amen.

Postlude

“He's Got the Whole World in His Hands” American spiritual, Arr. by Larry Shackley

Music provided by Chris Harris and Lynne Walker