

2/17/2019

“The Expectant Crowd”

Scripture: Luke 6:17-26

Theme: People come to Jesus with different needs and expectations, among them curiosity, guidance, compassion, deliverance from demons, and healing.

Luke 6:17-26

¹⁷ *He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon.*

¹⁸ *They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by impure spirits were cured, ¹⁹ and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all.*

²⁰ *Looking at his disciples, he said:*

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

²¹ ***Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.***

²² ***Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.***

²³ ***Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.***

²⁴ ***“But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort.***

²⁵ ***Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry.***

Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.

²⁶ ***Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.***

† **Jesus welcomes all of us as we are and gives what is needed by God’s power and grace.**

From Luke’s account, again Jesus encounters many people from all over the region. In viewing the crowd, Jesus saw that the large crowd was made up of people who were his disciples, while others were his faithful followers, and still others were people who only knew something about Jesus. These people wanted not only to see Jesus, they desired to hear Jesus and to be healed of their various ailments.

By now, Jesus was likely accustomed to being surrounded by a crowd of people. I’m not an expert, but from what I’ve read and seen on the news, as well as first hand at parades,

sporting events or concerts, there are many characteristics of a crowd, including perhaps these . . .

First, when a person becomes part of a crowd, there is some anonymity. Such anonymity allows the members of a crowd to act as though they do not know one another. This perhaps grants each person a certain freedom to act on his/her own behalf with less or no fear of being identified by others.

Second, generally speaking, behavior in a crowd is emotional and usually impulsive. For example, all the people tried to touch Jesus. They exercised their freedom to claim a portion of Jesus' power by touching him. Their anonymity in the crowd may have allowed them to drop any personal inhibition that might have prevented them from touching Jesus.

Third, a crowd often becomes impersonal, losing its individuality. In this story, the crowd began to act as a group, coming to Jesus and receiving his ministry.

There is also another special characteristic of this crowd that came to Jesus. As Ernest S. Lyght, a retired UM bishop, points out . . .

“This was not an ordinary crowd. They were neither angry nor unruly. This was an expectant crowd. They were full of anticipation, because they knew that since Jesus had previously healed sick people, surely, he could and would heal them. Their expectation was threefold: They wanted to see Jesus and they wanted to hear his comforting words; but most of all, they wanted to be made whole. Jesus did not limit his healing ministry to physical health. He also cured people who were ‘troubled by impure spirits.’”

Lyght asks, “Can you visualize the excitement that was generated by these miraculous activities? How would you describe the scene?” *(from UM Discipleship Ministries, 2019)*

In some ways, I'm sure the crowds of people that come to churches, youth rallies, concerts or other events, and the crowds that stay away from churches today, are like those in Jesus' time.

People came to Jesus with questions, needs, hopes and expectations. Deep in their hearts they felt that Jesus would empathize with them. Their minds were open to the possibility that Jesus might lead them through his teaching to a new way of living. Finally, some of them wanted to be welcomed into Jesus' ministry. Jesus accepted the people in the crowd just as they were.

He taught all who would listen. He offered God's loving wisdom and grace. He healed them of disease and relieved them from troubling spirits.

Many of you, I'm sure, can testify with me of Christ's power, wisdom and grace at work in our lives.

† **We, too, accept people as Jesus would and strive to develop a Christian relationship with them, using “kingdom” values.**

As Bishop Lyght says, “Like Jesus, we are called to accept people as they are and to strive to develop a Christian relationship with them.”

Jesus perceived the unexpressed needs of some, as well as the misguided values of others. Looking into the eyes of his disciples, he taught them about the many ways in which they were or will be blessed. God will bless the people in spite of their status when they align themselves with Jesus and follow in his way. You might be rejected, but “rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven” (6:23).

And Jesus also issues a warning to those who are rich and comfortable. He articulates a series of “woes”, signaling the possibility of deep suffering, misfortune, and grief. “A life of discipleship is not about popularity; rather, it is about living the truth that Jesus teaches us. It is better to give your life away in service, just as Jesus shared his spirit with those who touched him and believed in his teaching.” (ibid.)

I firmly believe that Jesus came to give us new and abundant life in this world and the next. Yet, I also believe these words of Jesus which sometimes run counter to our cultural values of wealth, popularity, and even self-indulgence at the expense of others.

As a family of faith, we may not always agree with one another, but it is in the way that we disagree that make makes us followers of Jesus. And it is how we come together to demonstrate the love of Jesus to others in need, as we do in this place, in our community, and around the world. It is in letting the power of the Holy Spirit flow through us to bring hope and healing, to those in despair and affliction.

And as a community of faith, we open our doors, as well as our hearts and minds, to all who would enter to come and know Jesus. We welcome all who seek and desire healing.

So, let me ask . . .

Why have you come to church today? What are you expecting?

How has Jesus made a difference in your life?

What blessings have you experienced? What blessings do you still hope to receive?

I encourage you to share a witness with me or someone else today. And if you have a special need or heart's desire, or if you want to know more about how you can enter a closer relationship with Jesus or our family of faith, talk with me after the service.

And may God bless you with hope and healing now and forevermore! Amen.