**2/16/25**

**“Blessed Ares” and “Woe Tos”**

**Vicar Vince Piekarski**

**Luke 6:17-26 (NRSVUE)**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2, NRSVUE) (2) **Amen.**

The introduction that was read at the beginning of our Worship Service could not have been any more spot on in my mind. There is a reason we incorporated that being read aloud during our Worship Service quite some time ago. Honestly, it is rather easy to glance over, or even passively listen to. However, we are reminded it is there for a reason, and that very reason is to give us an alternative and concise message. Today, I chose to focus on it because in just a few sentences it really does inform us of so much, especially when we manage to buckle it together with the scripture from our Gospel Reading.

What I also know is that if we do indeed really take all of this in, when we are reading all of this together, that it may cause each and every one of us to squirm in our seats just a little bit, or possibly even feel a little uncomfortable. For I know for certain that we all can admit that we have fallen on both sides of the fence at times. We have indeed been on the side of the “blessed ares,” and unfortunately, we have also been on the side of the “woe tos.” I would be rather shocked if you could say that you have not been on both sides at one time or another, or even at this moment. I know for certain that we all are those folks in the crowd always trying to find our place in need of, with, for, and because of Jesus. Invitation and healing are in the crowd, and Christ’s presence is here with us when we gather as a community around the table in the mystery of the holy communion.

Everything we get delivered to us, all that we read, heard, and ponder really has me having flashback to my recent Seminary class. For Christian Ethics is the focus and topic here, and our focus is even more specific as things really come down to Sacrificial Ethics for that fact. That being simply put, that we need to make a sacrifice of self in order to be part of and included in the kingdom here on earth, and the life hereafter as well. We are called to that very sacrifice because God was about each and every sheep, and not just a prized sheep or a select few. More simply put, we are to die to self each and every day and be reminded of our very baptism so that we can grow in our love, respect, and admiration of all of humanity. It is through the very sacrifice of self on the cross that Jesus allowed each and every one of us to live. It is through the very resurrection that we have all received grace upon grace. It is through our very sacrifice of self that we will be able to truly live as our Triune God desires.

Alright, I know I went pretty deep there with that, and that is okay. I hope your wheels are spinning a little bit more, and I hope your hearts and minds have opened a little bit more to take in more. With that being said I am quite sure that you may have connected a few dots and realized or felt that our Gospel Reading actually gave us another version of the Beatitudes. Now, of course this is not the Gospel of Matthew, and this is not the famous Sermon on The Mount, but it has a lot of the same vibes and purpose. This message, this very scripture, gets delivered to the people back then, and to those of us here and now right out in the open. It is not delivered up on some high mountain, and we do not need to have some status or title to even be addressed or spoken to. No one is excluded in any shape, way, or form. That is indeed the blessing and the curse though, for the author of Luke is rather harsh here, and that is why I spoke of that squirming or uncomfortable feeling before. We, and the people back then, all too often only want to hear the good stuff, and we do not want to hear where we swerved off the proverbial path or did anything wrong. If you really think about it, as a child, or even as an adult or employee, we never truly want to hear what was or is wrong. Yeah, of course we all can say we are comfortable with constructive criticism, but let us be honest, this right here is the all too true and too forward constructive criticism that the people back then, and those of us right here and now are just quite frankly not all too comfortable with. This message makes us do a self-review, it makes us have to address and fix things, it makes us have to level with where or what may happen to us if we do not get right with the very people, places, and things that God has created and desires our very respect and love of.

 As a matter of fact, this very message that you heard today is part one of two of the Sermon on the Plain. Next Sunday we will get even more of this message. However, today’s verses are just enough to get us thinking, they are enough to get us going, they are enough to keep us intrigued and yet not be so overwhelmed or even disinterested that we manage to disregard or push it off. We will indeed explore who is truly blessed in the eyes of God, and we must come to terms with the very fact that the blessing is also that very curse I spoke of earlier as we can all too often be rejected just like Jesus was. These very verses are calling for a role reversal in our hearts and minds, and by no means are they a curse if we have managed to do good in our lives. They are just simply calling our focus back onto all, and they are calling us back to the very love and respect of everyone. They are calling us into service and love for one another. They are indeed reminding us of a true definition of the Christian life.

So, buckle in here with me a little longer as we explore things a bit deeper. And by the way, don’t you go and think that I forgot to thank you for joining me out there in the pews and on the conference call. As I really do appreciate your presence and your very commitment to this community. I really do appreciate your willingness and interest to explore the Word together with me. We are truly better indeed because of your very presence.

Now, we are going to take a little different approach than maybe the conventional way you might expect. We are going to deconstruct these very verses in a parallel fashion. So, that essentially means we are going to put the “Blessed ares” and the “Woe tos” right next to one another. This will allow us to attend to all four of these respectfully. As we are reminded that this is a call for a radical mindset shift, and there is no glory or condemnation delivered here to any person for what they have achieved or not achieved to this point in life. There is also no expectation for an entire role reversal in regards to becoming the alternative. It is simply a call to awareness, a call to respect, and a call to focus so we all can be right with God and our Neighbor.

So, with all that being said I invite you back to the Gospel Reading in your bulletins if you wish to look at things while I reintroduce things side by side. We explore the first set here being, “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” “But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.” Our true consolation, our true comfort for that very fact, will come when we not only focus on self and our belongings, but when we focus on our neighbor and our very commitment to love and share with them. Then, and only then, will we all become rich in spirit, and rich in love. We are reminded that our blessings here on earth are only temporary, but we come to realize that we all have something to share with one another.

Our second set here is, “Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.” but “Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry.” We all too often look at hunger in a context related to our stomachs. However, this very hunger here has more of a relation and context to our hunger for knowledge, our hunger for compassion, and our very hunger for the faith. When we believe we are full, or when we believe we are right, we are reminded that there is always work to be done on self and with others. Hunger is a lifelong commitment and journey, and not a pain or struggle as we all too commonly think of. We all need to ensure we get our fill, and well all need to feed one another.

Our third set to explore is, “Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.” but “Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep.” This is not a call to be miserable, and this is not a call to not be thankful for the good times and the joy that we have been blessed to experience. However, this is the very reminder that those around us may not be showing their feelings on the outside as much as we think. This is our very reminder that everyone has a story, everyone has hurts, everyone has grief, and everyone has sorrow. This is our call to be ever so mindful of that, and this is our focus to pick one another up at any and in all places. We are to cry and laugh together, as we look at things from both ends of the spectrum, and we are to respect one another while doing so.

Lastly, our final, or fourth set being, “Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven, for that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.” but  “Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.” Whew! This one definitely has some bite to it. This one here reminds us not to show some false sense of pride or status just because we experience and have a love of our Triune God. This right here reminds us to be humble and care for and be respectful in our sharing. Our status, or our call, is the very status and call for each and every believer. It is the very status and call for each person that comes to the faith. It is the very reminder that none of us are less than. It is also the very reminder that we may not be liked because we share, but share we must. And, most importantly, it is our very reminder that we simply do the sharing and let God do the rest. Our goal is to all be leaping for joy and rejoicing together in eternity, in the here and now, and the life ever after. No one is to be left behind. However, we will also will not be mocking or laughing at those who did not chose to listen or take the message to heart. We will experience some sorrow with our joy, because not all will get to experience eternity if they do not choose to reverse their very role here on earth.

We are reminded that the people back then experienced these words on the plain with the selected disciples. The people back then got to experience this because the message was for all, and it remains for all to this very day. The people back then got to experience the healing power and the truth of God present with them in flesh and blood in Jesus. We get to experience those very same things today with the presence of the advocate by our side in the Holy Spirit. The power is always flowing from God to heal and restore each and every single one of us. It is our choice how to handle and delicately blend our “Blessed Ares” and “Woe Tos” for the Kingdom is always near. We all are invited to live in and through our Triune God, and live we must!

**Amen.**

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**Introduction**

 Blessings and curses abound on the sixth Sunday after Epiphany. We would do

 well to listen closely to whom the “blessed ares” and the “woe tos” are directed

 and to find our place in the crowd among those who desire to touch Jesus. The

 risen Christ stands among us in the mystery of the holy supper with an invitation

 to live in him, and offers power to heal us all.

**Luke 6:17-26 (NRSVUE)**

 After choosing his twelve apostles, Jesus teaches a crowd of followers about the

 nature and demands of discipleship. He begins his great sermon with surprising

 statements about who is truly blessed in the eyes of God.

 17 [Jesus] came down with [the twelve] 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 everyone in the crowd was 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 on that day and

 leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven, for that is how their

 ancestors treated the prophets.

  24 “But woe to you who are rich,

   for you have received your consolation.

  25 “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.

  26 “Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated

 the false prophets.”