### “Blessed Are You Who Weep” Steve Finlan for The First Church, Feb. 13, 2022

**1 Corinthians 15:12–19**

12Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? 13If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; 14and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. 15We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ—whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. 16For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. 17If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. 18Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. 19If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

**Luke 6:17–23, 26**

17He 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. 18They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. 19And 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. 23Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. . .

26 Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.”

Our Scriptures deal with two different themes, first the issue of the Resurrection, secondly the content of Jesus’ healing and teaching on behalf of the poor, the hungry, and the faithful. There is a link that can be drawn between his healing power and his resurrection power.

First, Paul makes it clear that the Resurrection is not just a symbolic concept standing for recovery and re-invigoration. It is a literal fact, and if it is not, then Christians are not going to be raised, either; you would be “still in your sins,” and “of all people most to be pitied” (15:17, 19). Christ’s Resurrection carries the promise of our future resurrection. You can hear the emotion in Paul’s writing. If there is no Resurrection, there is no Christian faith, and we are all miserable fools. The Resurrection is non-negotiable, Paul says.

Now, when Christians read the Gospels, even the parts that precede the Resurrection story, we know that the Resurrection is coming. It is in the backs of our minds when we read about Jesus’ ministry. The Luke passage begins with people coming from all over Judea and the Phoenician coast—that is, both Jews and Gentiles—to hear and be healed by Jesus. He blesses them in a way that may shock the apostles. He never says “Blessed are you when I come into my kingdom and you will get to be Secretary of Defense or Secretary of State.” Rather there is an emphasis on humble and sometimes painful experiences. He starts “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” (6:20). Some of the other beatitudes follow, resembling the more familiar passage in Matthew 5, but lacking some of those beatitudes, such as “blessed are the meek,” “blessed are the merciful,” and “blessed are the pure in heart” (Matt 5:5, 7–8). In Luke he ends by saying “Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets” (Luke 6:26). Popularity without any hostility seems to be a sign of corruption. It seems that honesty and truth will always arouse hostility.

This is a belief that we often encounter in the Bible, perhaps especially in John and Paul, but here it is in Luke: the belief that the world is so corrupt and violent, that it will inevitably feel threatened by the truth, and will wage war on it. Expect persecution, he says.Those who are living and loving their position in the dog-eat-dog world want things to stay as they are, and truth threatens that. They enjoy their earthly pleasures, and they think that’s all that there is.

Let’s look at the rest of the beatitudes in Luke. There is this one: “Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh” (6:21). Jesus understands human sorrow. He is connecting with our experience, too. This saying corresponds to the one in Matthew that says, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (5:4). The version in Matthew implies God’s action as a comforter. The version in Luke just focuses on the result: the one who weeps becomes the one who laughs. Luke is focusing on the reversal, a surprising and delightful result that is coming. These beatitudes end with a surprise, too: the alarming remark about being well-spoken of.

The Beatitudes in Luke are very accessible, somewhat surprising, and down to earth. He has “blessed are you who are poor” rather than “blessed are the poor in spirit,” as in Matthew (Luke 6:20; Matt 5:3). Instead of Matthew’s “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (5:6), Luke has “Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled” (6:21). It is just hunger, not hunger for righteousness. Luke seems to be more interested in human poverty and need, rather than in the transcendent, spiritual dimension. Maybe Jesus said both of these things, on different occasions.

According to Luke, Jesus is concerned to comfort the poor and the hungry, and to let them know there will be a reversal of fortunes for them. According to Matthew, Jesus is concerned to comfort the poor and the feed the *spiritually* hungry; God will answer the needs of the inner life. We are living a human experience, and we have both physical and spiritual needs.

A commentator named Kathy Escobar says that the poor in spirit are those who have admitted they are powerless over their addictions. It is a call to “radical humility.” She prays that God “soften our hearts, crack open our pride, show us the way.” (<http://www.kathyescobar.com/2011/02/01/blessed-are-the-spiritually-poor/>). She says that weeping means “allowing ourselves to feel hurt, sorrow, anger, loss, and grief.” It does not mean that one is lacking in faith. For one thing, she felt God’s comfort when she gave in to her grief. She is saddened by the fact that so many good Christians feel they are not allowed to be filled with these difficult emotions, but she says we have to “allow ourselves to mourn and feel.” We can create a safe space for others to mourn, and can “hold our friend’s hand in the dark” while they experience it. (<http://www.kathyescobar.com/2011/02/11/blessed-are-those-who-mourn/>). Blessed are those who weep, who have such a friend. She writes, “In the midst of longing for change in our own lives, in the lives of the world & the neighborhoods & churches & families, we can have deep peace.”

I look at the Beatitudes, both in the Lukan and Matthean versions, and I see the infectious power of Jesus’ compassion, whether he’s caring for the poor or the poor in spirit. There is a miraculous power in him, which we see in the line, “all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them” (Luke 6:19). It is this same miraculous power that enabled him to raise himself from the dead. As he says in the Gospel of John: “I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again” (John 10:18), his life, that is. So, first his power drew people to him to be healed. Then he used his teaching power to try to reach their minds and their hearts, and to contribute to their spiritual growth. At the end, he used his power to raise himself up. And finally, his power and God’s power will raise *us* up, after our deaths: “we will live with him by the power of God” (2 Cor 13:4), Paul says.

It is the same life-giving power in each case. Jesus had life-giving power in the first place; it is through him that God “created the worlds” (Heb 1:2). “In him all things in heaven and on earth were created” (Col 1:16). He exercised that same life-giving power in his healings and exorcisms, and again when he restored himself to life after being killed. And his power will raise *us* up in the end. It is the unique life-giving power of Jesus that makes him the Savior.

Rest assured that the miraculous power of Jesus’ love is within you, is available to you, but that it is okay to feel sorrow and sadness. It is part of this life experience. And when all this is through, we will take all these valuable experiences with us and continue on in the school of love.