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Sermon #26
Luke 6:20-23

The man has nothing to his name but a tent, a sleeping bag, and a small propane heater. He's applied for plenty of jobs but heard nothing back. He has no place to take a hot shower, no family who can give him a real home-cooked meal, no plans for the future. But he remembers Jesus' words, "Blessed are you who are poor, blessed are you who are hungry." *Really, Jesus?*

The college sophomore feels like a fish swimming upstream. She is immersed for the first time in a secular, atheistic culture. Her professors belittle her, her peers pick on her, her sorority sisters ignore her because she seems different and weird. Jesus says, "Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you." *Really, Jesus?*

A mother attends her 21-year-old son's funeral. Who tragically died 6 days earlier of a motorcycle accident. Someone whispers, "He had so much left to live for." This kind of thing is gut-wrenching. A mother forced to grieve her son? Jesus says, "Blessed are those who weep now." *Really, Jesus?*

Jesus calls these people blessed, but is it true? Blessed are the poor, the hungry, the weeping, the excluded? Is this really who we aspire to be? And if so, should I seek poverty, hunger, pain, hatred? When I see these people, they seem cursed not blessed. And so it's easy to wonder, "Am I really blessed?"

This isn't the way we usually talk about blessing. When I think of someone who is blessed, I imagine a full thanksgiving banquet with a roast turkey, stuffing, maybe some mashed potatoes and gravy. I imagine being surrounded by happy family and friends, kids playing in the backyard, adults playing cards in the dining room. When I think about blessing I think of the American dream—a house with a white picket fence and two cars in the driveway. I think of the freedom we enjoy—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That's blessing.

But Jesus says, "blessed are you who are poor." Jesus' words feel contradictory. They're a paradox. But by faith we believe them. As believers in the Son of Man, we are both poor and blessed. We are poor in the eyes of the world. The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing (1 Cor 1:18). But we are also blessed, because this same message is the power of God that brings salvation of everyone who believes (Romans 1:16). It's vital that we take both truths to heart. We are simultaneously poor and blessed.

Side 1 – Seeing myself only as blessed.

But often we see ourselves only as blessed...When life is going well, I often take my blessedness for granted. It's easy to forget the "poor" part of what Jesus says, thinking that I really deserve more good things than bad, that I've earned happiness because of how hard I work or the type of person that I am.

"God, I thank you that I am not like other people," who don't believe in you.

- I go to church nearly every week. I even volunteer my free time. I go to Bible studies and send my kids to our Lutheran school. That's why *I'm* blessed.
- I raised my kids the right way, with Christian morals, of course they're going to be successful.
- I was patient, waited for sex until marriage, that's why my marriage won't end in divorce like most people.
- I don't abuse alcohol and drugs like so many others, that's why my health is so much better.

When I see myself only as blessed, the natural conclusion is to think, "I've got it all right, and the world's got it all wrong." I become comfortable in my blessedness and fail to see my poverty before God. I become the Pharisee. I stop hungering for righteousness because I think that I am already full.

But, my friends, we are not entitled to Jesus' blessing. You and I know from experience that as Christians, we are still sinners. Our families aren't always as put-together as it appears on the outside. Our marriages are far from perfect. We still struggle with physical and mental health problems. Our reality is of Genesis chapter 3—we live in a fallen world. And we're not all that different from the society that surrounds us. We are *not just blessed*. We're poor.

Side 2 – Seeing myself only as poor

And if we can't overstate our blessedness, we shouldn't overstate our poverty either.

We live in an increasingly anti-Christian society: And you don't have to go to lengths to notice it. Even some of the commercials you see while watching Sunday night football would have been shocking 30 years ago. "Believe whatever works for you," people say, "But don't tell me how to live my life. You can have your Bible, your truth, and I have mine."

You have maybe seen statistics that show church membership and worship attendance plummeting, while anxiety, depression, and mental illness, those numbers continue to rise.

Deep down we believe "we are the poor of spirit," those who suffer for the name of Jesus, a persecuted minority in a postmodern world. And so we fixate on our poverty:

- Maybe you've been called narrow-minded or unloving for your Christian faith. Or have you ever heard, "Christians are so heavenly-minded that they're of no earthly use." Words like that hurt.

- When it seems impossible to live out our Christian life, we envy those who laugh now, those who enjoy all the pleasures life has to offer.
- Have you heard the stories of Christians in other countries around the world being beaten, and imprisoned, and shamed for their faith? I begin to believe that the world is out to get me, that following Jesus costs everything and gives nothing. I feel so sorry for myself that I forget how blessed I really am.

Gospel Resolution

But in the midst of suffering, Jesus sees us and his promises sustain us:

“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.**

Jesus came to save the poor and lowly! Mary sang that her child “Has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty,” (Luke 1:53). Jesus himself said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick,” (Luke 5:31).

And Jesus didn’t just come to rescue us from our poverty and brokenness but he actually lived it. Jesus perfectly fits the description of every beatitude in his sermon:

- For the poor, Jesus became poor at his incarnation. “Though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich,” (2 Cor 8:9). We are spiritually rich! The inheritance of heaven is already ours!
- For the hungry, Jesus hungered. He hungered for 40 days in the wilderness as he stood up to every temptation of the devil (Luke 4) in our place yet he was without sin (Heb 4:15).
- For those who weep, Jesus set aside full use of his power and became a human being. He felt our pain and heartache. He wept at the grave of his dear friend Lazarus (John 11). He wept over Jerusalem because he knew they would reject him (Luke 19).
- For those who are hated, excluded, and insulted, in love, Jesus willingly became hated above all. His own people traded his life for a murderer. On the cross he was mocked and insulted—“Are you not the Christ? Save Yourself,” (Luke 23).

All this because of his incredible, incomprehensible love for us. Now nothing can separate us from the love of our risen Lord.

We remain both poor and blessed at the same time—two seemingly opposing truths collide at the cross and at the empty tomb. Though we suffer the effects of sin, we have nothing to worry about because Jesus promises, “ours is the kingdom of heaven.” Though we are hated and excluded by the unbelieving world, we boast in our suffering for the Son of Man. Though we weep now, we have every reason to rejoice because our reward is great in heaven, where “He will wipe away every tear from our eyes,” (Revelation 21:4).

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.”

Jesus says all our suffering is actually reason to rejoice, because no one can take our heavenly reward away from us. So friends, seek first God’s kingdom, because in heaven we will no longer be both poor and blessed, but only blessed. There our poverty turns to pure blessedness. This promise gives us the strength to persevere through the here and now:

- When we are treated as outcasts and even losers for our faith, we praise God for giving us an opportunity to share Christ with others by letting our light shine in the world.
- When a Christian loved one is taken from us abruptly in death, we rejoice because our Lord is the Resurrection and the Life.

Today the church celebrates All Saints’ Day to remember all those who have gone before us in faith. We honor the saints triumphant, those holy ones, who have finished their race and now enjoy perfect communion with God in heaven. We honor them by remembering their steadfast trust and imitating their lives in the way we live out our faith. The New Testament writers also referred to living believers as the saints. We, too, are saints. We are the saints militant who still struggle against trial and temptation. But, nonetheless, you are saints—holy saints who cleansed of sin, and made holy in God’s sight through the precious blood of the Lamb.

We persevere, just like those prophets and martyrs who have gone before us—these men and women that we heard about in our epistle reading, who gave up everything for the sake of the gospel. As fellow saints, both poor and blessed, we still suffer, but that doesn’t make our blessedness any less of a reality than theirs.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, embrace the paradox. As saints militant, embrace your poverty and blessedness. Though we suffer the effects of sin and the abuse of the world, by his poverty, Jesus rescued you from sin and death! Rejoice! Leap for Joy! Though we are poor in the eyes of the world, Jesus promises us perfect bliss and peace with him forever in heaven, where we will never be poor but forever blessed. Amen.