

Burdened with a Glorious Purpose: Luke 6:17-21

By Reverend Katie Hambrick

What do you think it means to be blessed? Tuesday night for youth bible study, I went downstairs with the intent to have the youth interpret the Blessings and Woes from this passage of Luke into different terms that would ring powerful to the modern ear. This is a tradition done by Christians for centuries, we even see evidence of this practice in the old testament with the laws written in leviticus and deuteronomy. I thought this would be a fun and insightful activity for both the youth and I-

However, as always I was blown away by the wisdom of our youth. We ended up spending over an hour discussing what Jesus may have meant by the word blessed in this sermon he is giving. They raised powerful questions about how we as a society look at the idea of what blessing meant- that we see blessing as more of a materialistic sort of transaction- But then how Jesus is referring to spiritual gifts, fruits of the spirits if you will, in this passage.

They then went deeper into the depth establishing how Jesus is referring to those who engage in kingdom work, have the curiosity to learn, and engage with the process of faith are the ones who are blessed. We also discussed how these things are actually really hard and can sometimes be unpleasant, yet the reward for doing this work is what will sustain you through the good and the bad.

Then after a slight pause in conversation, one of our youth says, "We are burdened with a glorious purpose." This made the youth and I

giggle, because for those who are not aware- the quote “I am burdened with a glorious purpose” is a quote from the villain in the Marvel Movie The Avengers, Loki.

Loki is an adaptation of the Norse God of chaos and mischief, yet here, after this deep theological discussion, his famous quote fits so perfectly into what we are talking about-

If we ever needed proof that God has a sense of humor, there it is for you. We even decided that that statement was a summation of everything we discussed.

We are burdened with a glorious purpose. That purpose is to put kingdom things ahead of ourselves and ahead of worldly things. I say that as if it is that easy. The burden comes from this being really hard. The glorious part comes from seeing the kingdom of God and promises of God in action— of being blessed.

As we discussed in youth, When Jesus is not referring to being blessed in the same sense as society does. A youth brought up the idea of prosperity gospel, that some people have this warped sense that if they just do good or look the part then God will bless them with material goods. Another youth also brought up that people in our society also equate being blessed with happiness, which is not always the case.

Being blessed in this sense refers to a person’s theological standing with God. When we truly put everything we have-
Every bit of faith,
Every bit of hope,

Every bit of strength into trusting God and walking the path of righteousness and love he has called us to, then we will be blessed.

These blessings though are not material goods as we have said, but they are holy curiosity, wisdom, hope, joy, peace, love, goodness, and so on. They are the gifts that will actually sustain you when the world shuts down with COVID. They are the gifts that will truly enrich your life and faith. They are God's glorious promise to those who really pick up their cross and follow God.

Here is what the blessings adapted for modern ears and based on discussion may sound like:

Blessed are you who have nothing but faith in God, for you will find the
joy of the kingdom of God.

Blessed are you who hunger with curiosity to know God and to love your neighbor as yourself, for you will be satisfied with the wisdom of
the spirit.

Blessed are you who are struggling in life and faith, for you will be
filled with the peace and hope of God's promises.

Blessed are you, who follow the radical path of righteousness set out by God through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, for you will know rejection for God's name sake, but you will also find that the kingdom
of God is all around you.

It would be beautiful if Jesus stopped with the blessings. The blessings to me seem to bring great comfort when we are attempting

to stay on the path, but Jesus hits us with something else. He hits us with these woes- which seem to be interpreted as Jesus condemning people. However, I wonder how the woes would feel if we looked at them like a grandparent warning us.

In the south, we have a great tradition of porch sitting. Y'all might have this out here too. Porch Sitting is normally a spring and summer event, mind you our spring will start about the end of february and our summer will not end until about the end of november... if we are lucky. But, we would go sit on the porch right around dusk, after supper, when the fireflies would just start coming out at night, and share stories. Sometimes we would also be doing things like shucking corn for the next day or what have you, but really it was a time when our grandparents would share stories and lessons from life that were always followed by some form of a warning or advice.

The energy of those stories and moments always felt more calming and loving in nature, yet was stern and would stick with you forever. I kind of feel that is the kind of message that Jesus is giving us with these woes. They are loving yet stern warnings and invitations to come back to the path of love. He is not saying rich people cannot follow this path or be blessed, but what he is warning people away from is putting your faith in worldly things above god. Because then you miss out on the opportunity to fully engage with god. You are separating yourself from god when doing this.

Here is what these warnings adapted for modern ears and based on study would sound like:

Woe to you, who put your faith in worldly things more than God, for you have received your happiness and comfort.

Woe to you, who do not seek with holy curiosity the workings of God and God's kingdom, for you will not know or see.

Woe to you, who are reluctant and scared to engage in the process of faith, for there may come a day when you wished you had.

Woe to you, who put more stock in being well liked by peers than walking the path God has invited us on, for that reward is only skin deep.

Every Monday after whichever pastor, Dan or I, preached we teach the brown bag bible study group that meets on Mondays. This is always a fun time, where we get to dive a little deeper into a sermon topic and also have a discussion about any questions that come up. After my last sermon, someone asked during the brown bag group if I could preach a follow up sermon because there was so much to unpack. I said I didn't think I would get to, especially being out of town the next week.

But, every commentary I picked up on this passage relates this passage back to Jesus and the Nazareth Manifesto. To refresh our memories, the Nazareth Manifesto is when Jesus stands in the temple in his home town, reads from the scroll of Isaiah, and is declaring that

his ministry is going to be one that brings good news to the poor, that frees the oppressed, and overall be a ministry filled with radical compassion.

See, the Nazareth Manifesto is Jesus declaring what he is going to do in his ministry. The sermon on the plain is his call of action to the disciples to join him fully on this path of love and righteousness. And more so, it is a call of action to those of us who have chosen to be Christ followers.

One of the signs that is telling us that Jesus is making a divine call to action is that in Luke, he is not on the mountain side giving the sermon to the crowd. He is on level with all the people around him, yet he is looking directly into the eyes of the disciples as he is giving these blessings and woes.

He is not addressing the crowd at large. He is addressing the disciples directly. He is addressing those who are choosing to be Christ followers. He is saying that if you are going to choose this path, then you need to choose to put God first and to be ready to go against the grain of the world.

He is calling them to look beyond what society asks and requires of us, and to see what God really asks of us. To love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind and to love your neighbor as thyself. God is constantly asking us to go against the grain of society.

He is calling us to not sit in the comfort of tradition, wealth, society, or prestige that we gloss over or ignore that the kingdom of

God is here now. That we are being called to love and act in love now. We are being called to be a blessing to those around us.

To seek to show love rather than be loved, To console rather than to be consoled, as we heard from the words of saint francis during our call to worship this morning. We are being called to follow this path of love for our own sake yes, and we will learn a lot and see god's kingdom on full display, but also to share the blessing that is the love of god with all of those around us.

To be the hands and feet of god in this world. We are called to be a blessing more than to be blessed. That is to go against the grain of the world. That is the type of behavior that Jesus is encouraging in this scripture. He is not wanting people to focus on what they will receive for following this path, because if you are doing it for that then you probably are not really following the path that well to begin with. Jesus is encouraging the people who choose to follow him to seek to be a blessing to others instead of seeking your own blessing.

“For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.”

God is always calling us back, inviting us back to the path of love and liberation... because on this path is where we find our own freedom and are empowered to live a life beyond the confines of what society says we should. A path where we do love the lord our god and

neighbor. A path in which we seek to be a blessing more than we seek to be blessed.

So our youth was right to quote Loki, we are burdened with a glorious purpose. This is not an easy path to walk. Especially when the act of just living is hard at times. The good news is we are not alone on this journey; we are not called to do it perfectly either, and the gifts that are received and the lessons learned will be plenty to sustain you. Even if it might not feel like it in the moment. God's promises are true. You are loved and cherished. Jesus' call to action is one of love—— love for you and your neighbor.

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AMEN.