

Luke 6:20-36, The Message

Then Jesus spoke:

You're blessed when you've lost it all.
God's kingdom is there for the finding.
You're blessed when you're ravenously hungry.
Then you're ready for the Messianic meal.
You're blessed when the tears flow freely.
Joy comes with the morning.

“Count yourself blessed every time someone cuts you down or throws you out, every time someone smears or blackens your name to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and that that person is uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens—skip like a lamb, if you like!—for even though they don't like it, I do . . . and all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company; my preachers and witnesses have always been treated like this.

But it's trouble ahead if you think you have it made.
What you have is all you'll ever get.

And it's trouble ahead if you're satisfied with yourself.
Your *self* will not satisfy you for long.
And it's trouble ahead if you think life's all fun and games.
There's suffering to be met, and you're going to meet it.

“There's trouble ahead when you live only for the approval of others, saying what flatters them, doing what indulges them. Popularity contests are not truth contests—look how many scoundrel preachers were approved by your ancestors! Your task is to be true, not popular.

“To you who are ready for the truth, I say this: Love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer for that person. If someone slaps you in the face, stand there and take it. If someone grabs your shirt, giftwrap your best coat and make a present of it. If someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life. No more tit-for-tat stuff. Live generously.”

Ephesians 1:20-23

²⁰ God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. ²² And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

November 6, 2016

Luke 6:20-36; Ephesians 1:20-23

Love Your Enemies! Christ Has This!

Kerra Becker English

OK folks, this is the last Sunday before election day. I know that you all are tired of the mud-slinging and exhausted by the divisive language. I know that many of you are anxious about the outcomes. This election cycle has beat us up as a people. The whole world is watching, and wondering, and waiting to see how America, a great nation among nations, will handle how this popularity contest has seemed to bring out the absolute worst in us. Scripture sends us a message of hope today that the popularity contest isn't what life is all about. I like how the Message reminds us, "There's trouble ahead when you live only for the approval of others, saying what flatters them, doing what indulges them. Popularity contests are not truth contests—look how many scoundrel preachers were approved by your ancestors! Your task is to be true, not popular."

Our task is to be true. I'm not sure exactly what that means for Tuesday, but maybe we can start to see what it means for every other day. In both today's reading from Luke and in Matthew, Jesus delivers a sermon, this powerfully prophetic message for his own time, that speaks volumes still, today. That truth doesn't change. Blessed are the poor, the ones who have lost it all. Blessed are the hungry. Blessed are the ones who cry out with tears. Why is that? What makes those who are desperate the ones who can envision the kingdom, and taste the Messianic banquet, and recognize the power of joy in the morning sun? In all the battles going on at the top of our politicized pyramid, these are the forgotten and forsaken ones. They are the ones taken advantage of at every turn, the ones completely forgotten by our law makers, and policed by our

law enforcers, and ignored by the judges who rule in favor of those with enough money and power to make their case. And the truth is – God will give them the kingdom. Wow. The kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

In Luke's gospel, the one that emphasizes that Jesus came to take the powerful down from their thrones, we also have the "woe" sides of the beatitudes. Some will be blessed, but for others, there's trouble ahead. Woe to those who think they have it made, for that's all they will ever get. Woe to those who are satisfied with themselves, your self is not enough to satisfy. And woe to those who are too happy go lucky, luck runs out and suffering enters every life. We are reminded by this text that those things the world values are fleeting. Power, and authority, and dominion in this world lose their glitter and are won and lost, won and lost, won and lost on a daily basis. In that way, the poor have the advantage of having nothing left to lose. And in that, they gain the power of the good news to change us, to transform us, to make us into the new people Christ is calling to himself.

Richard Rohr speculates, "Historically and to this day, it seems that when a new level of maturity is found, there is an immediate and strong instinct to pull backward to the old and familiar." I tend to agree with his observation. When we take an evolutionary leap forward, inevitably it seems we panic and slide back to what was once more familiar and often more tribal. Rohr continues, saying, "Thankfully, within churches and society at large there is always a leaven, a critical mass, a few people who carry the momentum toward greater inclusivity, compassion, and love. This is the Second Coming of Christ: Christ embodied by people who know that hatred and greed are always regressive, and who can no longer live fearfully and violently. There are always some who have touched upon Love and been touched by Love, which is to touch upon the Christ

Mystery. This is the shape of salvation.” (Center for Action and Contemplation email, November 3)

Our task is to be true, AND when we are ready to live into that truth, then our job is to love our enemies. That’s not so easy right now. Well, it’s never really been easy, or perhaps we’d be better at doing it. Show love, show the kind of confusing, crazy, unheard of kind of love that will let people know that you are followers of Jesus. That’s what that small group of poor, insignificant, unpopular lovers of the world who took Jesus’ teachings to heart have been doing all along. Sure the big-mouths of popularized Christianity have spouted some different teachings from time to time – conquering with the cross of Jesus on the front lines, telling people that they knew who Jesus would hate. We know better. Jesus loves even the people that we hate, those who have been our bitterest enemies. It’s humbling, sometimes almost humiliating how ridiculously loving that Christ is in the world.

Which brings me to WHY we can be so confident even when the world is telling us we are too small, too insignificant, too poor or too foolish to make a difference in this old world. It’s what is written in the book of Ephesians. Christ is the ruler of this world. Hidden to some. Not as obvious as we would like it to be. But the power, and authority of this world are nothing, nothing, when compared to the cosmic Christ who has it all under his own control. Christ has this! This election. This world. All of it.

Now for me, that doesn’t mean that you can skip out on voting, or quit caring about the environment, or assume that God is making great plans for the poor to inherit the kingdom, so we can just sit home and do nothing in our own little cocoons. We still have our human work cut out for us. What it does mean is that rather than stress out about it, we can do something, begin

cooperating with God's work in the world instead. It's hard not to stress though. This election has been ridiculously anxiety producing – even to the point where elementary teachers are noticing differences in how their students interact. It's been rough. I'm ready for it to be over. But whether you love or hate the outcome on November 8, November 9 will be another day in this beautiful world God loves. Show that. Live that. Be that love in the world.

That's how it's always been, that's how it will always be. That's God's promise of presence shown to us in the living Christ who defeated the power of death so that we would know, really know that new life is always springing forth out of the decay. Today, as I remember the saints before me, and realize I'm in that middle of life where there are today's lovely children who will become the saints of 100 years from now, I am confident, sure as I've ever been that God's love is a constant presence.

I feel like I haven't said much for today. But what can one say on a day that feels like there are such weighty implications looming right around the corner for the future of our nation? I can remind you to vote. A lot of pastors are going to get up and say that today. I can remind you to pray. Even more pastors will probably remind you to do that. But I'm glad that the texts for today reminded me that Jesus, whenever he gets the chance to get worked up about something says this, "Love. Love one another. Love even the most difficult ones to love. Love even when it hurts to love." That's my plea for the United States of America. That we will continue to open our eyes to what it means to love one another. And it's hard. Really really hard. It means giving up our comfort. It means hearing from those who have been broken. It means challenging those who have had it all. It means listening, and more listening.

Saints of Ashland Presbyterian church – you are praying people, so pray. You are loving people, so love. The election of a President may not be as important as we have been taught to believe that it is. Christ has this! And even when it looks like love has taken a real beating, ultimately love always, always wins. Amen.