

17 February 2019  
The Sixth Sunday after Epiphany

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“Blessed” Is a Statement of Faith”

Text: Luke 6:17-26; Jeremiah 17:5-8; 1 Corinthians 15:12-20

*This sermon is a gently reworked encore presentation from yesteryear.*

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our world tends to judge things in a very easy and straightforward way. Often, a very surface and superficial way.

And so, blessed is the man to whom nothing bad happens. Who attains the desires of his heart, and to whom life is good. Who does not struggle to make ends meet, and who others look up to and want to be like. Not necessarily rich, but comfortable. Not necessarily religious, but kind and generous.

And the opposite, then, is true. Woe to the man to whom bad happens, for whom life is a struggle. For whom the desires of His heart remain far away, who is heaped with one misfortune after another. Who is burdened with sadness and looked upon with pity. Who no one wants to be like.

But it's not just “the world” that thinks that way. *We do it too.* For even as I was speaking those words and describing those people, I'm sure you formed a mental picture in your mind of who I was talking about. Of who is blessed, and for whom life is woe. We think we know. We think we can judge such things.

Today Jesus reminds us: **not so fast.** Or how does the old saying go: *don't judge a book by its cover!* **Blessings and woes may not be what you think.**

Actually, our world sometimes figures this out, even if it's just for a short time. Like when those who we think are so richly blessed commit suicide or spend their lives in an unending quest for something they cannot obtain. They looked blessed, but have an emptiness they cannot fill. Or, on the other side, when those we think should be sitting in the dust and saying “Woe is me” actually consider themselves blessed – like victims of natural disasters, or those who have lost everything in a fire, or a person in a hospital battling disease.

At such moments, we realize that blessing and woe is more than skin deep . . . is more

than what we see . . . is more than what we think. Events such as these – that don't seem to make sense or fit into our nice, little, well-defined world and how it should be – cause us to re-evaluate. Which is good. Which is what Jesus' words for us today would have us do as well. Re-orient. Re-evaluate. Re-think. Where is your life? Where are you going? And why?

It's interesting to think about the scene that day in Galilee, as Jews and Greeks alike had come to hear Jesus and be healed by Him. Jesus lifts up His eyes and sees people in all kinds of conditions and places of life. And He speaks of blessings and woes. But who is blessed? And to whom is woe? **Careful (again!) if you think you know!** Were the poor and hungry and sad now blessed because they had been healed? Or was Jesus now warning them of the woes that often come to those who think they are blessed? And what about those to whom the woes applied? Were they *of all people most to be pitied* (1 Cor 15:19)? Or perhaps because they had come out to hear Jesus, did they turn to Him and receive blessing? Recognizing their need, their true poverty, or the life they had spent in a quest for something they could not obtain?

Don't judge a book by its cover. And don't judge *your* life by its cover either.

And the prophet Jeremiah can help us understand this. Perhaps Jesus had the words of Jeremiah that we heard today in mind when He spoke to the crowd in Galilee that day. He did know His Old Testament pretty well. He spoke it through the prophets, after all! And was quite fond of quoting it. So what does Jeremiah say of blessings and woes?

*Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord.*

*Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord.*

Or perhaps we could paraphrase it like this: **Blessed is the man whose faith lies not in what happens to him, but in what happened to Christ.** For such faith is neither captivated *nor* distressed by the things of this world, and does not judge by that standard. But faith focused on the cross of Christ and what happened to our Saviour there, receives the promises and blessings won by Jesus for us there.

Such faith is like Jeremiah's tree planted by streams of water – that come times of green and plenty when life is good . . . *or* times of drought and want when each breath of life is a struggle and strain – is nevertheless well-watered and fed by Christ. The unseen but deep roots of faith connected to Christ strengthening and sustaining. Such a man or woman is truly blessed, though what is seen and on the surface, may seem exactly the opposite.

And *you* have been so blessed. Don't think so? Remember, don't judge a book by its

cover! Don't judge your faith or life by how it feels to you, or what you think it is or should be. And don't trust what you can or cannot do, or what you have or have not done, or what you have or have not gotten or achieved. Trust the Word of the Lord who says, *Blessed in the man whose trust is in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord.* In what He has done.

The Lord who created you, and then redeemed you, and now sanctifies you. The Lord who became man and entered this wilderness of sin for you, and took your sin upon Himself. The Lord Jesus who then entered death for you, that in His resurrection He might render death powerless. The Lord who did not pull you up by the roots and throw you into the fire because of your sin (as you deserved!), but who puts out the flames in Holy Baptism – His water which gives you the faith you need for this life. The faith that connects you to Him. That drinks of His forgiveness and life. That endures *both* blessings *and* woes, strong in Him.

And so “blessed are you” is a statement of faith, not of sight. And therefore a statement of the cross – a statement that cannot be proven or deduced, but can only be believed. **But that doesn't make it weak or uncertain, but in fact, exactly the opposite – that's what makes it so sure!** Because it is rooted and grounded not in anything of this world, which comes and goes and changes so fast - including definitions of what it means to be blessed! - but is instead rooted in the death and resurrection of Christ. The death and resurrection of Christ that has reconciled us to the Father and the Father to us. The death and resurrection of Christ that has given us new life, and provided all that we need.

And so yes, *blessed are you who are poor* – with nothing to hold onto but Christ! – *for yours is the kingdom of God.*

*Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be satisfied* – filled with Christ's own body and blood!

*Blessed are you who weep now* – in repentance – *for you shall laugh* in the joy of forgiveness *forever.*

And *blessed are you when people hate you and exclude you and revile you on account of the Son of Man!* When they see Christ in you. Christ your life and salvation. Christ your forgiveness and love. *Christ, the firstfruits.* Christ, the Tree of Life, who gives life to us trees, that we may live and produce fruit. The fruits of faith and good works. In season and out of season. In plenty and in drought. Not relying on what we see, but trusting in His Word.

*So Arise! Shine! For your light has come* (Isaiah 60:1)! Your Epiphany light today shining on who is blessed. He is. And He who is blessed says *blessed are you.* And His Word

makes it so. And so it is true. Blessed are you!

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.