

Sermon on the Plain: No Plain Sermon

6th Sunday in ordinary Time year C

Luke 6: 17, 20-26

Upon first hearing, this gospel does not end on a good note. I am not sure about you, but it does not leave me feeling very comfortable. Jesus lists those persons upon whom malediction will fall
—and I am numbered among them! **“Thank you!”**

Woe to me:

- I live in a very comfortable home.
- I daily eat good food.
- I laugh on a regular basis.
- People (uh, at least some!) speak well of me.

Woe to me: woe, *whoa*.

I am baffled.

I have always thought that these are good things.

What: is Jesus into paybacks? Does God play a strange game of justice?

Is Jesus saying that those whose lives have been unpleasant will receive a big prize—which will counterbalance their misfortune, and those whose lives have been pleasant

have already received their share and will later suffer?

Is this is a lesson in socialism? **“You should have spread the wealth...”**

Is Jesus expressing anger at the economic disparity in the world?

There perhaps should be some anger, but is this his point?

Well, *somehow* it is *good news*.

To uncover the good news,

it is important to situate at least two things:

1. Jesus always seeks to reveal something about *God*.

Although Jesus sometimes speaks as a philosopher,

his purpose is always *divine revelation*,

revelation of that which we cannot know by our own intellectual powers.

Thus, Jesus does not do politics—which we should be able to know.

2. Jesus is speaking to a crowd that is *not* wealthy.

Thus, if he were speaking only of economics,

his words would have been largely wasted.

Jesus is speaking to the humble of the land;

hence his *opening*: “Blessed are you who are poor.”

For the second part of his discourse to be relevant to these persons, Jesus needs be speaking *analogically* about wealth, about wealth that *they* have.

Wealth is not just the accumulation of material goods:
a mansion, jewelry, cars, and a big fat bank account.

Analogically speaking, wealth is anything to which we cling: opinions, fantasies, routines—like our material possessions.

Wealth is anything that leaves us feeling satisfied such that

- we seek no longer
- we seek not God
- our hearts close to the Divine.

It can happen!

What is Jesus saying?

What is the good news here?

Jesus speaks with what he brings in mind.

Jesus comes gratuitously to share God's life, *God's* life.

Jesus thus comes to share what we cannot attain by ourselves.

Recall what the prologue of John's gospel says about the divine life:

“To those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man's decision but of God.” (John 1:12)

Human life is wonderful.

Nice things, good food, laughter, and a good reputation are all good.

But we are vulnerable, and cling so easily—to these and other things.

These can easily become an end, instead of the means that they are.

We can easily fill ourselves with these; we can easily be full of ourselves.

If we are full of ourselves,

there can be no receiving of anything more, of anything greater.

If we are full of ourselves, there will be no greater desires.

Jesus speaks so strongly because he so desires to give,

to give us more than we can give to ourselves

(this, by the way, is why we come to church:

to receive what we cannot give to ourselves at home).

Jesus expresses his desire in other terms in John's gospel (15:11),

“I tell you this so that my joy might be in you, and your joy might be complete.”

What then are we to do so to experience God's joy,
joy that we know nice things, good food, laughter, and a good reputation
cannot give?

What then are we to do so to have complete joy?

We are to let go.

Jesus, however, is not primarily promoting a spirit of detachment.

Jesus is inviting us to surrender to him, to God.

Detachment is vague. Surrender is focused.

Surrender—which God mysteriously makes possible
—is our real collaboration.

Surrender is the pathway to complete joy.

Why?

Because, in surrendering, God, our higher End,
source of lasting joy, comes into focus and becomes our All.

Because, in surrendering, the Lord can awaken greater desire for him
who is joyous beyond all imagining.

Consequently, when we surrender, we

- experience the freedom of the children of God
- learn to make use of the good things of this world as means
- rejoice and leap for joy when we are excluded
because we choose what lay beyond the means.

This is, of course, a daily choice.

God is deliberately hidden and quiet, so that

- we be free to choose
- we engage him out of love and not fear or obligation or even need

Let us engage him, knowing that he sustains our hearts,
making it possible to be intimate with him even

- when we get entangled in our wealth
- in our darker moments

Resurrection is promised.

Divine love is victorious.

Let the victory ring.