

Proper 15 (20) - August 17, 2025

Ezekiel 19:1–3; 10–14; Psalm 30:1–12; Romans 12:14–21; Luke 6:17–25

“Good for you”

1. My pastor, Mike Mather, published a book a few years ago titled *Having Nothing, Possessing Everything: Finding abundant communities in unexpected places*.
  - a. Mike served in Indy in a neighborhood that faced economic issues and crime, but Mike challenged us all to see things differently, as he had, when he saw the blessings in the people he met even as they encountered challenges.
  - b. Mike makes this point: *I began to see the power and agency in the people I came to serve. And I began to ask myself some important questions that shifted how I was seeing my calling, my work. What if I were to start treating the poor as if they were real people – people like me in every respect, except with less money? That would mean recognizing the abundance and power around me – and if I took that first question seriously, I’d hear it asking additional questions of me.* p.8-9.
  - c. He had been seeing people as a “bundle of needs,” as people in poverty who needed so much to help them not be poor – if only they did this or knew that -- But his moment of change was when he was able to see them as a bundle of blessings, as people who are whole – just with less money in the bank
  - d. In his journey to that realization, Mike tells the story of Adele Almaguer.
    - i. He met her when he was serving in a church in South Bend, also in a very challenged neighborhood. At the church pantry, the church asked questions of the people coming for help.
    - ii. A parishioner challenged Mike about that practice. The questions were about how they qualify for the service provided, in other words: asking “how poor they are rather than how rich [in God’s gifts] they are.”
    - iii. So, Mike changed the process and they started asking questions which were meant to raise up their talents and leadership in their families and community.
    - iv. Adele had three generations of her family living in her home and she worked at a nearby university as a part-time cook. She came to the church food pantry, and when asked where she shined, what she as good at, she said she was a good cook.
    - v. Mike said to her: Prove it! Make lunch for the church staff and we’ll pay you. And it was delicious!

- vi. What's more, when a group of community leaders was going to meet at the church, the church secretary told them they had to use the church caterer, and so they paid Adele to cook for them.
  - vii. The church went on to continue to invest in Adele, by buying her \$20 worth of business cards and allowing her to use the church's commercial kitchen so she could start a catering business.
  - viii. Adele went on to start her own restaurant.
  - ix. Mike reflects: *I had stumbled into an awakening. A revelation. We hadn't created anything. We hadn't taught Adele how to cook. She knew how to cook. We hadn't given her "life skills." She already had those. What we did was invest in her. We paid for her to share her gift and then we found others who were looking for someone with that gift.*  
Ibid. p.14-17
2. When Jesus said "Blessed are the poor" it's hard to know how those who were poor, hungry, weak, etc. felt when Jesus told them they already had the Creator's blessings
- a. In our passage for today, Jesus is gathered with his students and general followers, and he is both healing and teaching
    - i. If you're familiar with the "Sermon on the Mount," located in the gospel of Matthew, this is the version called the "Sermon on the Plain" and it is very much a parallel here in the gospel of Luke
    - ii. It could be a collection of different bits of teachings that Jesus had offered, or it could be a single sermon as such
    - iii. What's important to recognize is that it offers a distinct view of the scriptures and of how to follow God which stood in contrast to how the people were being asked to follow
    - iv. Or perhaps what we could say is that it got back to the original meaning of how to follow God, and Jesus set the example
    - v. Also important to recognize is that Jesus was in relationship with the people who heard the message
      - 1. He had healed many of them, and they stuck around to listen
      - 2. He had known them for some time (some had been his students of a while) and so his teaching is not just given to strangers walking past him on a busy city corner
      - 3. These are people he knew and cared for.
  - b. I wonder if you've ever read this passage and thought to yourself: but is it cruel to say to someone who's poor and hungry that they are blessed?
    - i. Or to someone who is in mourning that they are blessed because their mourning will eventually end?
    - ii. I'd say that we need to consider that Jesus was speaking to people he was actively supporting, in partnership with them.

- iii. He wasn't just saying:
      - 1. God loves you, but I love you
      - 2. Not just saying: Joy will follow your sadness, but I am here to support you
      - 3. Not just saying: You're being attacked like prophets of old, but I'm standing right here with you as the arrows fly
    - iv. Jesus was not only saying these folks were blessed by God, but Jesus (and those with him) were actively channeling blessings from God to each other
  - c. What puzzles me even more is how those who were rich and satisfied heard the warnings
    - i. Everyone who might be saying "well, others have it worse" may need to reconsider that sense of relief or perspective
    - ii. Those in the midst of difficulty rely on God through community, while the ones on easy street may convince themselves they can go it alone
  - d. In a way, Jesus was saying: we all are blessed, and those blessings cannot stop with us, and that is true whether today we are hungry or full
    - i. The question is how do we recognize God's blessings in each of us, and how we then bless one another with the same care and concern with which Jesus did it
- 3. Two things are important in understanding this passage: It is about community, not individuals, and it is about involvement, not about watching from a distance
  - a. There are people out there who would like to have the Ten Commandments posted everywhere in a community, and yet they wouldn't think of chiseling today's passage on the same stone monument.
  - b. I think Brazilian Archbishop Dom Hélder Câmara had a notion why. He once wrote: When I give food to the poor they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist.
  - c. Today's passage calls us to be a daring community of care
    - i. It doesn't stop at offering "right beliefs" (orthodoxy) but challenges us to "right actions" (orthopraxy)
    - ii. Asking the Archbishop's question is uncomfortable if we unthinkingly benefit from a system which keeps the poor and working poor struggling to make ends meet.
    - iii. It's uncomfortable to ask the question for those who think being hungry is the fault of the INDIVIDUAL, their choices, etc., instead of recognizing how the system constantly works against those with the biggest challenges.
- 4. Jesus is calling us to see God's blessings in each of us (even if at first we may miss them), to share our blessings generously (being in solidarity with each other), and to be the kind of community which truly feels Creator's blessings.

## Reflection questions

1. Think back to a time when you were in significant need (in terms of finances, health, grief, etc.) and someone came alongside you in that difficult journey.
2. What jumps out at you when you read Luke 6:17–25, especially the part we usually call “The Beatitudes” (and the “Woes”)?
3. What would it look like if we saw the beatitudes (and woes) as being for the whole community, not just some individuals? How would it change the way we function as a society?

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/sixth-sunday-after-epiphany-3/commentary-on-luke-617-26-3>

<https://www.southbendtribune.com/story/news/local/2017/11/13/former-south-bend-pastor-focuses-on-assets-rather-than-deficits/45707931/>