

Epiphany 6C
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church
Lakeland, FL
February 13, 2022

Jeremiah 17:5-10
Psalm 1
1 Corinthians 15:12-20
Luke 6:17-26

Grace to you and peace from God and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Please pray with me. Holy Jesus, you have beckoned us to come and follow you. Show us the way, your way, and protect us from following after others. Amen.

There was that day when Jesus came down from the mountain where he was praying. That day when Jesus came down to the plain. Came down to where the people were. Came down to be among them, indeed among us. That day when he said things that were startling in this Sermon on the Plain.

But really no more startling than what he said that first day when he was in the synagogue when he was bold to say:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

This Sermon on the Plain comes right on the heels of the healings in Galilee and Capernaum

Comes right on the heels of the crowds pressing in on him, crowds wanting to hear the word of God which came in Jesus' teaching.

Comes on the heels of Jesus curing those with unclean spirits.

Comes on the heels of an amazing catch of fish that defied all fishing logic

Comes on the heels of the call to the disciples and the appointing of the twelve.

With all of that as a prequel, Jesus gets to the heart of the matter in the words of his first sermon, the Sermon on the Plain.

With the crowd around him, and he looked into the faces of his disciples, those who had left everything, and said, "Blessed are you." The words of Jesus' first sermon were words of blessing. Words that offered hope to the many in the crowd who were poor and hungry and weeping.

Jesus came to be with the people, not above them or below them, because he was one of us. He came to be with the poor, the hungry and the sorrowful people and pronounced them blessed. You won't be poor forever, he said. You won't be starving forever or weep forever. For God

will lift you up to this level place. God will bless you so that you have everything you need, just as God blessed your ancestors.

At the same time, Jesus also came to be with those who are rich, those who are full, those who are laughing and live in lofty status. He comes to them and says, “Wake up.” For all our riches, our fullness, our joy – they are blessings, they are gifts from God. And Jesus calls us to live on this level place with all our friends and neighbors who have less than we do. God calls us to use our blessings to help lift them up so that they can be in this level place, too. Not because God loves them more than God loves you, but because God loves them as much as God loves you.

Jesus comes to all who are in need. And all of us need something. And when we admit our need we begin to see our connection with others who are also in need, even if their need is different. We are joined, not by our strength or tribe or gifts or predilections or prejudices or fears or anger – this despite the efforts of many to convince us otherwise – but by our need. That’s what binds us together. We are united by God’s favor for us and all who are in need.

There’s a saying that goes, “a mother is only as happy as her least happy child.” And from everything we read in scripture, that’s how God feels about us, his children. As long as there is one person hungry, one person crying, God our Father cannot be satisfied. This doesn’t mean that the poor should be lifted up over the everyone else. Instead, Jesus is calling us all to live with one and take care of one another because that’s what the kingdom of heaven is all about.

Heaven exists when all are living in the presence of God. When the poor are lifted up and the rich help them do it. Heaven is when everyone is clothed, everyone is fed, everyone is filled with joy, and everyone is treated with dignity and respect. Heaven is when the high and the low and all live with one another and stand before God as equals.

This is why Jesus came down to be with us on a level place. This is why he lifts up the lowly as worthy of God’s regard and chastises those who ignore them. He calls us to live together in a community of honesty and love, all are valued as children of God, and all share to ensure that the basic needs of everyone are met. God sent Jesus down to live on level place with with us – not above us or beneath us, but equal to us – to reveal that God is Lord and parent to all.

It means that Jesus meets us where we are – whether we are hungry and poor or rich and satisfied with what life has offered. And it means that he speaks words of blessing to the poor and words of warning to the rich. Discipleship means that Jesus is present with us, in the midst, as he teaches to us from a level place.

A place that welcomes us at the font, feeds us at the holy table, and then sends us forth as disciples to carry the kingdom of God to the poor, the hungry, the weeping. And to the rich and the satisfied. The life of a disciple begins with a word of blessing. In the waters of our baptisms, God claims us and names us as Beloved children called to love and serve one another.