

Sermon – Luke 6:17-26
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Grace Lutheran Church
6 Epiphany – Year C
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“Plain Dealer”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. Of the many things I’m bad at – and I assure you, the list is extensive – downhill skiing is probably the worst of all. My experience is mostly limited to time spent in the Einstein Junior High School Ski Club, a club which I’m not sure why I joined. Four or five times each winter, we’d hop into school busses for the trip to Nordic Mountain. I did not like it. I did not like riding in chair lifts. I did not like standing atop the hill prior to a run. I did not like turning, or at least I never learned how to do it. It isn’t so much that I’m afraid of heights. I’m just not a fan of falling at high speeds. I was always happy, relieved, to reach the bottom. Say what you’d like about mountaintop experiences, but sometimes you can’t beat good old level ground.
2. Level ground, not lofty heights, is where we live our everyday lives. And level ground is where Jesus finds us this morning, we who are part of the multitudes who have come out to hear him preach and teach today. His sermon is similar to the one on the Mount recorded by Matthew, but here in the Sermon on the Plain, Jesus tells it straight. He speaks of real-world issues: poverty, hunger, weeping, and hatred. He speaks of those who suffer such things, and of those who don’t. And while it is true, on the one hand, that we all suffer such things to some degree some of the time, it is also true that Jesus seems to be recognizing a line between the haves and the have-nots in this world. This matches up well enough with reality as we see it. Except

Jesus does a funny thing. He says that it is blessed to be on this side, not that, of the line. Blessed are you who are poor, hungry, weeping, hated. Blessed are you even now, for the blessings of God are yours. What the world calls blessed, Jesus calls woe. What the world would avoid, Jesus calls blessed. It seems a change is a coming.

3. The dividing line of Jesus' time is still present today, of course. It grows more solid all the time. Many of us have watched with heartbreak as lifesaving programs are suddenly defunded. The withdrawal of our dollars from the work of USAID has had an immediate impact, sometimes fatal, upon those who already existed at margins. The withdrawal of our funds from agencies like Global Refuge, until recently known as Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, is part of a push to harden our borders, even to people who are here or would come here legally, and to cause more suffering to people whose only crime is doing whatever they can to find a life of dignity and safety. And where will this money go? Seemingly to fund tax cuts for the wealthy. There are lots of ways to imagine the difficult work of addressing the great needs of so many throughout the world, and no person or party has a monopoly on the right way. But to simply turn our backs? Woe to you who are rich, Jesus says, for you have received your consolation. And it's not so much that we want a government that is ostensibly Christian; it is that we, who follow and worship Christ, desire the collective good to be good for all.

4. Jesus' words on the plain proclaim that the dividing line does not get the last word. Weeping lasts the night, but joy cometh in the morning. It is true that, when we're in the midst of it, it seems like it will never end. I remember the early months of parenting, of holding a child at bedtime, trying to calm them so that they could sleep. Bounce and shush and bounce and shush while they would cry and whimper. But the weeping never lasted forever. Whatever they were feeling that they were also held safe throughout the experience. The same is true for us, for all who suffer and for all who would faithfully

choose to locate ourselves with those who suffer, knowing that, much worldly evidence to the contrary, this is where the blessings of God are found. And so, Church, we continue to work, in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. The headwinds shift and blow harder, but the call is the same. Be of good courage, friends, and know that the great reversal will one day come.

5. The prophet Jeremiah speaks of parched, wild places of the heart, where we in devious sin trust ourselves instead of the Lord. But it is exactly here, in dusty death, that Jesus takes up his cross and plants in in the plain. Rome had no use for him, just another person of no account to be tossed away. But God would not abide losing the Son forever, and in his rising the rough-hewn cross of Calvary has become the Tree of Life, from whose leaves living water flows. In your baptism, you were grafted onto this Tree. Drink deep of the lifegiving water with which Jesus slakes your thirst and washes you clean. As Jesus is the first fruit of the resurrection, so does resurrection fruit blossom in your life as the Spirit falls upon you with blessings of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Gifts that are more than enough to help you meet this moment in time.
6. The plain truth of the matter, Jesus proclaims, is that the faithful will be blessed in caring for those who are blessed. The poor and hungry, and the weeping and hated. If you want to see God at work, be among these blessed. And when you are poor or hungry, weeping or hated, know that God is with you, and that God's people have your back. And know, finally, that the dividing line is not final. A great reversal is coming, for this world's ways are not the ways of the Kingdom. The last shall be first, and the out will be in, and those who sought to keep others in suffering will see the foolishness of their ways compared to the goodness of our God. Fullness and laughter will mark our living as we all, sins forgiven, find ourselves in the reign of God in which

there is truly enough, abundantly enough, for all people, for each person.
Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.