

“Two Ways, But One Blessing” (Luke 6:17-26)
Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany, February 16, 2025
St. John Lutheran Church, Massillon OH

Have you ever found yourself at times looking and observing the lifestyles of high-profile pastors and thinking to yourself, “Wow, they got it made in the shade. I can’t imagine having all that money, but I sure could use it.” One televangelist’s house is worth around \$12 million. One pastor’s housing allowance, approved by the board of directors, is \$240,000 annually. One high-profile pastor allegedly spent \$900-\$1,200 for a meal at a restaurant. Over the years I’ve observed many pastors on the television and the internet laughing uncontrollably. I’ve also noticed a lot of secular people observing and giving these people in the pulpit high praise. And when someone dares to speak against them in any shape or form, they’re attacked by the followers of these pastors. Almost every one of the supporters of these high-profile men and women pastors speaks highly favorably in their defense of their favorite pastor’s extravagant lifestyle when questioned.

In our gospel lesson this morning Jesus mentions two lifestyles, or two ways of living. He says that the poor, the hungry, the weeping ones, the hated, the excluded, the reviled, and the slandered, would receive their reward in heaven. Christ also mentions that the way of the rich, those who are full in the stomach, those who laugh and are spoken well of would receive a reward now, but not in the life to come.

Jesus says those who find themselves under terrible conditions and circumstances are blessed on the last day. He also says that those who got it made in the shade receive the reward that only lasts in this life but *not* in the one to come.

Jesus speaks of two ways but one blessing.

In the first few verses of our gospel lesson, Luke gives us some information that creates some shape and form to what Jesus says about two ways but one blessing. Luke writes that along the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, people were coming to Jesus and being healed of their diseases, cleansed from unclean spirits, and wanted to touch him because healing power was coming out of Jesus.

Talk about a bunch of people whose condition resembles the first way of life Jesus mentions. The people who were coming to him for physical and spiritual sickness were looked upon as the poor and lower class. They were most likely viewed as lower in the spiritual sense because of their physical condition. Other people in their community and society would equate the physical with their spiritual condition. Their physical disease was due to their sin. Unclean spirits are oppressing these people because they're sinful and unclean on the inside. Unclean is drawn to others who are unclean. It just makes sense right?

But though their lives consist of these conditions, Jesus blessed them. Not because of their worthiness, but because they came to him in faith for their needs. Jesus didn't heal because he had to, but because it was the purpose of his existence. The Father sent his Son to preach the good news to the poor and to heal the brokenhearted. Christ has come to bless those who find themselves poor, hungry, weeping, and all other conditions Jesus talks about in his beatitudes.

The Beatitudes section should be called the Way of Blessing. Jesus blesses those who find themselves in the worst spiritual conditions. Those in the worst spiritual conditions don't have anything else to live off of. They are poor and don't have the money for spiritual gifts. Since they don't have any money, they can't afford spiritual food. They have lost everything and are weeping as a result. They are hated because of their burden on society. They're excluded from the things of this world because they can't pull their weight. They're reviled and slandered by others because they don't meet the world's standard of living.

But this way of life is a blessing in disguise. This way of living is a humiliating one. This way of living is lowly and difficult. This way of living offers nothing to this world. It's a way of life that constantly begs for help and offers nothing for payment.

Is this way of life the same as yours? Are you poor or are you rich on account of your own deeds? Are you hungry for food that lasts or are you full and don't need to eat anymore? Are you weeping from day to day, or are you so happy that you don't have anything to cry about? Are you hated, or does everyone think that you're the best? Are you excluded or are you in with the crowd of this world? Are you reviled by others or are you held in high esteem? Have you been slandered or does the world have nothing but good things to say about you?

If I'm honest with myself, I struggle at times to understand my true condition. I would like to think that I truly admit that I'm poor in the eyes of God. But at times I don't believe so. My nature just can't help itself to cling to and boast about having earned riches. I would like to think that I admit that I'm hungry consistently for the Word of God and all other gifts he has won for me. I at times believed that I have had plenty of spiritual food and I don't need another bite of it. I have arrogantly thought that I don't need to weep so much for I have joy in the Lord instead. I admit that I've worried about being accepted rather than being hated by others. I don't like being excluded from others because I don't like to be alone or feel like I'm not special enough. This thinking comes from my sinful nature that worships itself. My sinful nature doesn't like others reviling or mocking me. It doesn't feel good. There's nothing worse when your just being yourself and others don't like you for who you are. And I admit that I love people saying good things about me. I don't like it when I'm misunderstood or treated differently because I don't talk like the world.

If you're like me, understand that there's hope for us who struggle with slipping in the way of woe and death. For that's the second way Jesus mentions this morning. It's the way of death because it offers temporal blessings and nothing else. Worldly riches are temporary. Worldly contentment is temporary and will never sustain your hunger forever. Weeping is not against laughing or joy, but

when the last day comes, they will be. Those who will be weeping will be separated eternally from God. But for those who are with God, it will be proper to weep no more, only joy will be left because Christ will be our eternal Groom and we his eternal joyful Bride who's protected and taken care of. And the way of death is a life where this world speaks well of us instead of God, but in the life to come, God will speak against those who followed the way of death. He will speak against them to eternal separation.

Fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord, let us all turn from the way of death always and turn back to the way of blessing. Turn back to the Christ who became poor by humbling himself. Turn back to the one who is the only one hungry for righteousness. Cling to the one who wept not only for Lazarus but for you because of your way of death living. Friend, return to the one who was hated by his fellow people, excluded from the city of Jerusalem, and sent outside to the cross to be put to death, and whose name was slandered while hanging on the cross.

Indeed, you have repented and returned to him. You confessed that you are not fully living the way of blessing. You confessed and the blessed One blessed you with his proclamation of the absolution of your sins. Remember and remain in the waters of your baptism. In those waters, your way of death has been washed away and now you come up onto dry land and live the way of the one blessed life. And soon come to him like the crowds from the gospel lesson and receive from him the food you hunger for. Come and eat if you're hungry. Come and drink if you're thirsty.

And indeed, you will leave this place with joy. Not because you no longer will weep, but because you now are blessed amid this world that brings much weeping, hatred, exclusion, reviling, and slandering on account of you being a blessed child of God. Go in peace and bless others so that they will return to the One who calls them to himself so that he can heal them. And have joy even now because one day we all will receive a reward that brings eternal joy and laughter.

Pastor Jon Carpenter