



Blessed Woes – TouchPoint for February 13, 2019

Luke 6:17-26 [The Message]

You're Blessed *Coming down off the mountain with them, he stood on a plain surrounded by disciples, and was soon joined by a huge congregation from all over Judea and Jerusalem, even from the seaside towns of Tyre and Sidon. They had come both to hear him and to be cured of their ailments. Those disturbed by evil spirits were healed.*

Everyone was trying to touch him—so much energy surging from him, so many people healed! Then he spoke:

You're blessed when you've lost it all.

God's kingdom is there for the finding.

You're blessed when you're ravenously hungry.

Then you're ready for the Messianic meal.

You're blessed when the tears flow freely.

Joy comes with the morning.

"Count yourself blessed every time someone cuts you down or throws you out, every time someone smears or blackens your name to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and that that person is uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens—skip like a lamb, if you like!—for even though they don't like it, I do . . . and all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company; my preachers and witnesses have always been treated like this.

Give Away Your Life

But it's trouble ahead if you think you have it made. What you have is all you'll ever get. And it's trouble ahead if you're satisfied with yourself. Your self will not satisfy you for long. And it's trouble ahead if you think life's all fun and games. There's suffering to be met, and you're going to meet it. "There's trouble ahead when you live only for the approval of others, saying what flatters them, doing what indulges them. Popularity contests are not truth contests—look how many scoundrel preachers were approved by your ancestors! Your task is to be true, not popular.

Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

"Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh... Woe to you who laugh now, for you will weep."

Well, that clears up everything. Those who weep will laugh, and those who laugh will weep. But then, once they weep does that mean they will start laughing again? And once they laugh does that mean they will start weeping again?

I don't know if you noticed, but on the sheet of paper that we write the words to the songs and the order for our service, I use the phrase *Bible Passage* to talk about the Bible reading. And I use that phrase *Bible Passage* because a *passage* is something that takes us from one place to another, one point to another. So after one reads a *Bible Passage* one should ask oneself, how am I different after reading this? What different place, or different perspective am I at after hearing this, thinking or meditating on this? Where has this *passage* taken me to, as well as taken me from?

If you read the Bible simply to stay in the same spot—the same place, then you're not reading a *Bible Passage*, you're just reading *Bible Words*. So last Thursday, before I read the passage for today, I decided to add a note under the title *Bible Passage* in our bulletin. And the words I put there are, "A passage takes us from one place to another." I wish I would have waited another week.

“Blessed are those who weep, for they shall laugh. Woe to those who laugh, for they shall weep.”

It’s kind of a circular passage. I’m not really sure where it takes us. From blessing to woe and back to blessing, which leads us back to woe, which leads us back to, well, you get the picture.

Now, I realize the word *now* is in there. *“Blessed are those who weep now, for they shall laugh. Woe to those who laugh now, for they shall weep.”* But somehow I don’t think the whole point of this passage is timing. In other words, I don’t think the answer to the question is, “Why are you crying now?” I don’t think the answer should be, “So I can laugh later.” We need to see this passage as descriptive rather than prescriptive. It’s not a matter of trying to manipulate when you are happy and when you are sad.

This whole passage takes me back to Ecclesiastes, or maybe it’s Pete Seeger or the Byrds—I get them all mixed up. “To everything, there is a season. A time to weep and a time to laugh.” And when we “Turn, turn, turn,” to later in Luke’s gospel, we see Jesus spending some of his time partying with people. *“This man is a glutton and a drunkard”*, they said of him. I can only assume there was some laughter and frivolity at those parties. *“This man eats with sinners.”* And according to Billy Joel, it’s better to “laugh with the sinners than cry with the saints—the sinners are much more fun.” OK. I think I’m listening to too much rock and roll. I should probably get back to Taize music.

So what gives with all of this? If all of this seems confusing, then I must be communicating clearly, because I’m confused by it all. This is Luke’s version of the beatitudes. Matthew puts them in what we call “The Sermon on the Mount.” Jesus goes up on a hillside, above it all, above the people, and delivers his message down to the people. Some commentators describe it as Matthew’s version of Moses coming down from the mountain with the 10 commandments.

But Luke has Jesus saying these words on the level—on a level plain. It is a scene of chaos. People from all over, Jews (people of blessing) and Gentile (people of woe). Sick people (people of woe) with diseases, squeezing in on Jesus, crowding in on him, wanting to touch him and be touched by him so they can be people of blessing. And in the middle of all of this chaos, Jesus begins speaking of blessing and woe, woe and blessing. Jesus’ words seem to be about as mixed up here as the chaos around him.

What’s going on here? Well, other than life. And maybe that’s the point. In the midst of the chaos of life, in the midst of blessing and woe, there stands Jesus, there stands the Christ. And what you and I think is blessing, can easily become woe. And what you and I think is woe, can easily become blessing. Blessing and woe. I’m not sure I know which is which anymore!

I have a sister who, in response to a statement that if she just prayed hard enough she would be healed from her MS, responded “I don’t need to be healed from my MS, my MS has healed me.” I know another gentleman who tells me he’s thankful for his alcoholism, that he’s an alcoholic, because otherwise he would have been the biggest ‘blankety-blank’ jerk in the world; and his addiction has brought him to a place of compassion and empathy for all those around him.

This passage in Luke takes place in a level place, in the midst of chaos where Jesus is surrounded, and crowded in on, and pushed upon. It is chaos. It is life. And life is full of blessing and woe. And what sometimes seems like blessing, ends up as woe. When we hold it tight and grasp it and think we own it. And sometimes woe turns into blessing, when it causes us to open ourselves up to others, to the divine, to our interdependence. What is woe and what is blessing? I don’t know. I got more questions than answers on this one. But the Divine seems to be at work in blessing and woe.

This whole passage has echoes of Mary's Magnificat. Where she sings of God raising up the lowly and bringing down the powerful. For Luke, things are not always as they seem and the Mystery is working and doing things in unexpected ways. *"Blessed are you who weep **NOW**, for you will laugh. Woe to you who laugh **NOW**, for you will weep."* This passage is an attack on our society's "Tyranny of the NOW" mindset. The mindset that whatever I am experiencing right NOW is all that is ever going to be and my 'NOW' is either a punishment or reward for who I am.

This passage is an attack on our society's "Tyranny of the NOW" mindset. The mindset that whatever I am experiencing right NOW is all that is ever going to be. Those of you who have ever had a 2 year-old or a teenager know that mindset well — "Dear God, is this ever going to end?"

This passage is an attack on our society's "Tyranny of the NOW" mindset. And so, it comes as good news to those who are in pain and suffering, and comes as a warning to those who are satiated and complacent. This passage comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable. And if you want to know which one you are, look no further than your response to this passage. Where does this *passage* take you? To comfort or discomfort?

What is woe and what is blessing? I don't know. I got more questions than answers on this one. But the Divine seems to be at work in blessing and woe.

Think of this meal, "In the night in which he was betrayed" – well, that would certainly be a night of woe wouldn't it, a night of betrayal, denial, fear and doubt. I mean, if you're going to make two lists on a piece of paper, one column marked blessing and one column marked woe, I think you would put this night under woe. But what does Jesus do, he transforms it into a night of blessing! "Take and eat. Take and drink. This is me for you. In the midst of the woes of life I am with you. Take and eat. Take and drink. You are not alone. My presence will be a blessing in your time of woe."

"Blessed are those who weep now, for they shall laugh. Woe to those who laugh now, for they shall weep." It's kind of a circular passage. I'm not really sure where it takes us. From blessing to woe and back to blessing, which leads us back to woe, which leads us back to, well, you get the picture.

I'm not sure where this passage has taken me. I feel like I'm back where I started. Still in the midst of a life filled with blessing and woe. But something is different. I'm not alone in it. There's a Presence, a Mystery, a Christ who is with me — and not just for NOW but forever!

And I find myself **at** a different place while **in** the same place.

What a strange PASSAGE it's **been** .. and I have a feeling **will be**.

Amen.