



Blessing or Woe? Woe or Blessing? – Touchpoint for February 9, 2022

Luke 6:17-26 (NRSV) He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

“Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.

“Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

“Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

“But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.

“Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry.

“Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep.

“Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.”

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 a Bible “Cave.”

“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 probably should have changed the wording this week in the order of service.

Yes, 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, "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. So is Jesus issuing a woe to himself? Is he against laughter? I don't think so.

Or maybe this is what the Grateful Dead tried to teach us in "Truckin":

*Sometimes the light's all shinin' on me
Other times, I can barely see
Lately, it occurs to me
What a long, strange trip it's been*

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. The level plain isn't just a geographical statement, it's a theological statement. In the realm of God, the reign of God, the kingdom of God... there is a leveling of people. Those who experience woe will laugh, those who laugh will experience woe. There will be a leveling of people. It isn't a place where some will come out winners and some losers. The inequalities of this life do not exist in God's world.

Does that comfort or frighten you?

Jesus isn't above it all in Luke's version. He's in the midst of it all. It is a scene of chaos. People from all over ... Jews (people of blessing) and Gentiles (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. I look back to my own heart issues and brush with death at age 38, and I'm grateful for the perspective it's given me these past 27 years.

So which is it? ... Blessing or Woe?

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.

This passage is an attack on our society's "Tyranny of the NOW" mindset ... and my 'NOW' is either a punishment or reward for who I am.

And so, it comes as good news to those who are in pain and suffering, and 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 long, strange PASSAGE it’s been ... and have a feeling will be.

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taize Choir, Remember Me)

Be Still, know that I am God

Creator Spirit, Come

(Keith Duke, Sacred Weave)

Creator Spirit, Come. Renew the face of the earth.

Kindling Spirit, Come. Enflame our waiting hearts.

Anointing Spirit, Come. Pour forth on us anew.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Come O Lord and Set Us Free

(John L. Bell, The Wild Goose Collection)

Come, O Lord and set us free. Give/Bring your people peace.

Come, O Lord and set us free. Come Lord Jesus, Come.

1. And take our guilt away. Give us your pardon Lord.
2. Free from our self-obsession. Free from each fond possession.
3. Free to affirm each other...as sister and as brother

Reshape the world you made. Let what your hand created...be always celebrated.

The Meal

Lord's Prayer

(The Scottish Festival Singers)

Benediction

A Blessing

(Margaret Rizza, Kevin Mayhew Ltd. Complete Chants Vol.1)

May the Lord bless you.

May the Lord protect you and guide you.

May His strength uphold you.

His light shine upon you.

His peace surround you.

His love enfold you.

May the Lord bless you.