

A Reading of Luke 6:17-26 (The Sermon on the Plain)....

“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” near and far, Jew and Gentile, a representation of a variety of cultures and ways of life, a people of means and a people of want, a people who lived hand to mouth and a people who could afford to miss a few meals, a people who set the standards of social acceptability and those who found themselves unwelcome and excluded from much of what we ourselves would take for granted each and every day of our lives.

In contrast to Matthew’s account of Jesus’ “Sermon on the Mount” with its extended list of those blessed, Luke only speaks of four kinds of people who will find themselves blessed... while adding four warnings that do not appear in Matthew... four warnings of woe to those who have the means to make a difference in the lives of others but who choose to ignore the needs others have of them.

But of what concern is any of this to us? After all, this was a time and a place and a culture and a people quite different from us... weren’t they? Even Jesus wasn’t just someone that Sunday School teachers and preachers talked about... he was **real** to them. For as we have already heard:

“They had come to **hear him** and to be **healed** of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to **touch him**, for power came out of him and healed **all** of them.” [vs.18f.]

Isn’t **this** the Jesus we would **like** to know? (Pause)

Yet if this is not, then do we really know Jesus at all?

Do we really care to know this Jesus...

or does our apparent ignorance offer us an excuse to continue to live our lives as though his word has little or no meaning for us or anyone else in this world today? If one were to ask another who is close enough to see, to hear and to touch us on a daily basis, what do you think they would say of you or me? Would they see Jesus within us?

Would they see in us someone whose love for them and for others is genuine... someone who honestly cares about others no matter if they are rich or poor..., or if they have a roof over their heads or homeless..., or if the color of their skin or lifestyle is different from our own... and thus see in us someone who looks upon them as Jesus would... someone who is willing to stand with them in the midst of where they are rather than wait until they come to where we think they ought to be?

If we are honest with ourselves, most of us would probably prefer **not** to know what others think of us... as we are afraid they will tell us what we do not want to hear: The truth! For the lives we live day after day say more about what we believe than all the professions of faith we could ever speak.

Perhaps few have understood this as well as Paul who found his life forever changed after his encounter with the living Christ along the road to Damascus... as he came to preach the message he once sought to silence... and to live his life for the sake of others – even as another did... the one he now called his Lord and savior.

Perhaps it is not too late for even some of us.

Hear now these words from Paul’s first letter unto the church at Corinth.

A Reading of 1 Corinthians 15: 12-20 (NRSV).....

“A pastor’s small son who was less than clean after playing outside was told by his mother that he should wash his hands because there were germs living in all that dirt. On his way to the sink, he began ranting, “*Germs and Jesus! Germs and Jesus! That’s all I ever hear around this house, and I’ve never seen either one!*”

By the sound of Paul’s letter, these could well have been the words of more than one member of the church in Corinth. Yet even though it had been twenty years since the death and resurrection of Jesus, Jesus was as alive and real to Paul as he was that day some 17 years or so earlier. Which is to say, Paul did not speak of one who once was... but rather, of one who is and who is to come!

Likewise, even though 2,000 years have now come and gone, the Jesus that Paul *knew* is *not* the Jesus I *remember*. For as with Paul, he is the Jesus I *know*! And if he lives, then his word remains the same and as true for us now as it was for those who came to hear and to touch him... and who, in turn, found their lives touched and made whole.

Thus the poor, the hungry, those who mourn, and those who find themselves excluded by others from what could be their own as well... they will continue to be blessed... especially if we allow the Lord to use us to be a blessing unto them.

But woe is us if we decide not to follow Christ’s example unto us... for we will never fully know the joy of life that can be ours if we deprive ourselves of the opportunities we have to share our lives and the love of Christ with those who need it the most!

But then again, it really is not about us... but our calling to be disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ... to do the “right thing” no matter what it may gain or cost us... to do the “loving thing,” that which Jesus himself would do.

Thus each and every day we need to ask of ourselves:

Are we living the faith we have professed... living our lives as Jesus lived his own... helping the poor and the homeless, feeding those who are hungry in body and soul, welcoming those whom others would as soon forget? Is what we do for others more important to us than what we expect others to do for ourselves?

If we can honestly answer “yes” to these questions, then we should already know what it is to be blessed and a blessing unto others.

But if not, then maybe it is time to really for you to get to know *my* Jesus..., and to heed his call to follow him... while the choice is still ours to make!

Although our closing hymn is entitled, “*Rise Up. O Men of God,*” may it be a call unto all of us this day!