

Sermon Sparkler for Epiphany Six

There are two things to note about Luke's Beatitudes as compared to Matthew's.

Firstly, they do not shy away from the physical and the economic. These blessings deal with the poor, not the poor in spirit, and the hungry, not those who hunger for righteousness. The effects poverty, wealth, and social status have on people is pointed to, not spiritualized. Can we preachers be equally brave? Can we take a chance and trust God's incarnation means his Gospel also has something to say about the flesh and blood economic realities our people are faced with? How can we speak a word of blessing and dignity to the many who are marginalized?

Secondly, there are counterpoints to each blessing—woes. Like the prophets who came before him, Jesus warns the economically comfortable to not be content. Luke doesn't pull punches, but names the hard reality that, in a zero sum game, being a "Have" means there are "Have-Nots", and being a "Have" exacts a heavy, if invisible, toll in the face of eternity. If the goal of life is riches, feasting, laughing, and high status, fine, but if the goal is being in the presence of Christ, and it is, then damn, they're so far off the mark it's sinful!

Now, faced with Luke's Beatitudes you may be tempted to excoriate theoretical well-off people and then sentimentalize or valorize theoretical poor people. You may even take this to be good Law/Gospel preaching... instead take a cue from the larger flow of Luke's Gospel; think of John the Baptist's call to repentance you preached back on December 16th... In Luke's Gospel John offers repentance to Tax Collectors and other well-to-do people, they can be fruitful, sharing goods and food with poor and hungry people, they can do their jobs in a way that does not oppress the vulnerable, they can be converted by the gospel to know what is enough, what is fair and just, and in so doing, everyone can have enough, all may be blessed! In this place of generosity and fellowship, may the poor and the rich come together and all be content, the full and the hungry all be satisfied, the weeping and laughing all find the stability of joy, the hated and respected all be grounded in the dignity of God's image. May they all meet Jesus Christ!

- ✠ How can you open your congregation to take time to consider what is enough in their life, and then move to action? Does this sermon require giving "homework" and a follow-up of some sort in the coming weeks?
- ✠ Really consider your context, what are the economic realities that are obvious to everyone? What are the more hidden realities? How do they shape the day to day lives of those in the pews, and those not in the pews?
- ✠ Where have you seen a holy space where marginalized people are blessed and well-off people are re-centered, so both may be satisfied?