

Prayer of the Day: Lord God, in mercy receive the prayers of your people. Grant them the wisdom to know the things that please you and the grace and power always to accomplish them; through Jesus Christ, your son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day: Alleluia. Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Alleluia. (John 6:68)

Sermon Text:

There is a bicycle out there that has been intentionally set up to steer opposite of what we are used to. When you turn left, you go right and when you turn right you go left. It might seem like it shouldn't be a very big deal to figure it all out and ride off but it's harder than you might think and our brains, especially adult brains become so set in our ways that anything slightly different, well it's **UPSIDE DOWN AND OPPOSITE** impossible without some amount of effort for us to overcome. You can look it up online. It's actually pretty interesting stuff.

Why are we talking about a bike this evening/morning? Well, it is commonly used to discuss neuroplasticity, our ability (or inability) to change the way that we think. Jesus is challenging us to do something similar as we turn our attention to the sermon on the plain in Luke chapter six. It turns out that the truth, yes, God's Kingdom is **UPSIDE DOWN AND OPPOSITE** from the ways of our world.

Many read the opening words of our lesson and consider them to be little more than scene setters. While they are certainly that, God is always telling us more. Think about it: a large crowd of disciples, a great number of people from all over the place. And what is Jesus up to? He's healing diseases, casting out evil spirits. In fact, power is flowing out from Him to such an extent that people are simply trying to touch Him because those who are are being healed.

Isn't this the scene that we have yearned for in this world of ours? I'm relatively sure that if this were the scene in every WELS church we probably wouldn't have to think about marketing. Evangelism would be easy and we might need to move it outside not for Covid but because the space just wouldn't be big enough. That is what success looks like. Right!?!

Then Jesus opens His mouth. Amid all this visible worldly success, what does He say? Blessed is everything this world would call cursed and cursed is everything that this world would call blessed. *"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. ²¹ Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. ²² Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. ²³ Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets. ²⁴ But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. ²⁵ Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and*

Text: Luke 6:17-26

¹⁷ He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coast of Tyre and Sidon, ¹⁸ who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by evil spirits were cured, ¹⁹ and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all. ²⁰ Looking at his disciples, he said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. ²¹ Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. ²² Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. ²³ "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets. ²⁴ "But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. ²⁵ Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. ²⁶ Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets.

weep. ²⁶ *Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets.* It turns out that **GOD'S WAYS ARE OFTEN NOT OUR OWN.**

Martin Luther, as He penned the Heidelberg Disputation wrote in Thesis number 21, "A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls a thing what it actually is." Why does Jesus, and Martin Luther right along with Him, speak as they do?

I would venture to say that it is because they see things as they actually are. The earthly realities in which we live are often steeped in sin. *The whole creation, we are told, has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time (Romans 8:22).* As a result "*In this world you will have trouble,*" says Jesus. "*But take heart! I have overcome the world.* (John 16:33)" So when we read the Beatitudes, whether they are in Matthew or here in Luke, we must understand that Jesus is placing these two realities physical and spiritual in opposition to one another.

Often being rich spiritually will mean poverty in the world around us as we battle against the consequences of sin and the Greed which rages against us, placing money second, third, even far down the list rather than in first place which can only belong to God. Being well fed spiritually may mean we hunger for any number of things in this world as place a priority on the time spent with Means of Grace rather than the means which lead to worldly happiness. As we hold out that Word in the world around us it will more often than not mean weeping at the rejection that is experienced not only by us but by our loving Savior. Yes, we may be hated, excluded, insulted, rejected because sin hates the One who defeats it. The world hated Jesus. Should we be shocked when it treats us, His people, in a similar fashion?

Now before we dive into depressions so deep that no one can rouse us from it. This does not mean that we will never experience happiness in this world of ours. God still blesses His people, sometimes in very physical ways in this world as well but the point here is that we will bear crosses. Not self-sought like some monk cloistered up and depriving themselves so that they can show the world just how holy they are, but crosses will find God's people, will be a reality for us as we live in a world, yes, even in our own flesh, overcome by sin. What's more, when we experience a world that is **UPSIDE DOWN AND OPPOSITE** and are forced to see that God's ways are often not our own, it is most definitely a good thing!

How so? Earthly trouble often leads us to an understanding of just how powerless we really are. When I come face to face with the consequences of sin in this world, whether self-imposed or because I live in the reality of a sin-filled world every day, it will often lead me to despair of myself and turn to the only one who has any power to save. That's why people were flocking to Jesus in our lesson. He had healed others and so they reasoned would be able to save them too. In His great mercy and compassion, that's exactly what He does.

Yes, it was for this that Christ came into the world. He endured poverty in this world that you and I might be richer than any amount of wealth in this world could ever make us. He endured hunger in the desert even facing the temptations of Satan that we could be satisfied, filled with things far more lasting than physical food. He wept for Lazarus knowing that the sting of death might be defeated by His own and for Jerusalem because they would be the catalyst, the very people who hated, excluded, insulted, and rejected Him all that we might have the joy of knowing that through Him and His cross, our sin was paid for in full. Yes, His resurrection the promise that sin, and death, and devil had all been defeated and heaven is now ours for all eternity.

Dear friends blessed are you! Oh not because we will experience earthly triumphs and know victory after victory in this world. Even if we do, may it not be the thing that defines us or to which we cling. No, may we rejoice that our reward is in heaven and eagerly await the day when we behold it.

I've never tried to ride the bike I talked about earlier. I imagine watching the video online, I would fall over pretty quickly. Everyone else seems to. What's even harder still is remembering what Jesus tells us here. The principles of the Kingdom of God are **UPSIDE DOWN AND OPPOSITE** from the principles and ways of our world. I know there are times that I have fallen down as I tried to walk in step with God. But in thanks for his saving love, displayed in Jesus my Savior on the cross, I can say it with confidence. **GOD'S WAYS ARE OFTEN NOT MY OWN, AND THAT IS MOST DEFINITELY A GOOD THING! Amen!**