

February 13, 2022

Luke 6:17-26

### "Now and Then"

When I was growing up – my older sister was a mystery to me. Our age difference put us on different developmental paths. But what I did understand about my sister was she loved music. Her record player lasted longer than it had any right to. Quite naturally, her tastes in music impacted me as I heard songs through the walls of wherever we were living at the time. They became a part of me. Through the walls of the mobile home in the desert as we waited for on base housing. The rental in Spokane while my Father was in the Viet Nam war. The tiny house we lived in on the tropical island of Puerto Rico. Music was a part of each experience. All of this music influenced what I heard even after my sister went off to college. And some of that music – I felt viscerally. For example:

*"And stay right here 'cause these are the good old days. These are the good old days. Stay right here 'cause these are the good old days. These are the good old days. These are the good old days. These are the good old days. These are the good old days. These are.....are.....the good old days."*

I can remember *at a young age* thinking Carly Simon was on to something. It was too easy to miss out on the blessings around us as we imagined blessings which might exist later. It didn't really matter where we were living, what the nature of the place was or even how long we lived there. We were living in the good old days and needed to appreciate their blessings.

This opportunity to consider the blessings of "now" and its connection to the "then" which is coming is on full display in our text today.

What we have before us is Luke's collection of Jesus teaching often called "the sermon on the plain" as opposed to Matthew's version which is "the sermon on the mount." Matthew gives us all those Beatitudes – "Blessed are You when." Luke on the other hand gives us *four blessings and four matching "Woes"*. Woe to you! It kind of makes you *miss Matthew*. In Luke's version it is so much easier to appreciate Jesus healing the sick at the beginning than when it progresses to the blessings and woes *which make us uncomfortable*. But thanks be to God, in the end, these two parts of our passage are cut from the same bolt of cloth.

Before we get to this teaching in Luke, Jesus is locking horns with Scribes and Pharisees about the nature of God and how we understand God's intent in this life. This is the source of pairing blessings with woes. *It is rhetorical combat.* The blessings are all Jesus. And the woes are all aimed at the self-satisfied disposition of Jesus opponents.

They believed If God approves of you *there will be riches, food, laughter and good reputation.* Why wouldn't there be? And they were happy to work that equation backward and say – *if you don't have those things – you must have done something to displease God.* So, the matching of woes to the blessings are in direct conflict with the "God only loves those at the top" school of thought.

Back in the opening scene Luke goes into great detail about where people are from – and ends with Jesus healing all of them. *All of them.* Gentiles included. This flies in the face of the teaching of the religious leaders as well. To them, accepting and blessing those considered outside the realm of God's covenant community made no sense. And accept and bless "God among us" did.

The "now" we live in easily lends itself to imagining that the poor are cursed. Jesus says the coming Kingdom of God will turn everything upside down. So, the "then" which is coming will fulfill the needs not met in this life. And those who see over abundance in this life as the sign of God's favor are in for a shock.

Jesus teaching today turns on two things: Challenging the interpretation of God's love for us now **based upon our life circumstances** – and the task before us to live as God's children – **citizens of the kingdom of God now.** We live "now" in light of the coming Kingdom – "then." *This means we don't get to think we are better than someone else because we have more money than they do, drive a nicer car, live in a bigger house...all the things our culture tells us is true.* And neither do we get to believe all that counts is money and if someone has it, they must have done something wrong to get it. Life is not about money – life is rooted in God and pursuing the things of God's kingdom. ***When we get it right – "then" flavors "now" and "now" gives a foretaste of "then."*** These really are the good old days – ***when we live them as God's children by the values of God's kingdom.***