

<sup>17</sup> [Jesus] came down with [the twelve] 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.<sup>18</sup> They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. <sup>19</sup> And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

<sup>20</sup> Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

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

<sup>21</sup> “Blessed are you who are hungry now,  
for you will be filled.

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

<sup>22</sup> “Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. <sup>23</sup> 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.

<sup>24</sup> “But woe to you who are rich,  
for you have received your consolation.

<sup>25</sup> “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.

<sup>26</sup> “Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.”

\* \* \*

The charisma of Jesus is a magnet that attracts; he teaches, and cures. Everyone wants a piece of him, for he radiates healing power.

And now, Jesus addresses the disciples. He details a series of blessings and woes, describing the paradoxical life that lies before them, and this combination of observations and predictions sobers the intoxicating atmosphere of the clinging crowds.

This realistic, yet hopeful, vision of Jesus is driven by a formidable theological vision that’s wider than what’s happening and what will happen to the followers of Jesus.

Just a quick poll: Any of you lately been feeling a little anxious? A little frustrated? ...Borderline despair?

God sent Jesus to speak and act in our world, and Jesus is very much in the prophetic tradition. Although Jesus is much more than a prophet, he shares the unyielding prophetic sensitivity to the discrepancy between God’s vision for human life, and the

way humans are actually living. And it's this discrepancy that drives the "blessings and woes," and since the present world is out of sync with God, all its judgments are provisional.

The way the world judges success and failure, or happiness and despair, is neither normative, nor lasting. These judgments are not normative, because they do not coincide with the ultimate intentions of God; and they are not lasting, because, unless the social construction of reality is built on the rock of a spiritual truth, it will crumble.

Hear how First Timothy spells it out:

<sup>17</sup>As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. <sup>18</sup> They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, <sup>19</sup>thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

"The life that really is life." That's the only foundation for followers of Jesus. And the present state of the world not only resists this Life, but it goes on the offensive to actively persecute and discredit that vision. And so, in our own day, by use of threats and violence, the Christian nationalists, white supremacists, and racists defend their own narrowly-conceived lives, and unfortunately, the present state of injustice coming from the White House supports them, and even gives them reasons why they need not repent.

In August of 2023, NPR's "All Things Considered" interviewed Russell Moore. Russell Moore is the editor in chief of "Christianity Today," and authored a book called *Losing our Religion: An Altar-Call for Evangelical America*. And he says the book was the result of having multiple pastors tell him essentially the same story, about "the Sermon on the Mount. (Now, in today's text we're on the plain – but those Beatitudes are still in there.)" "And," he said, "time and time after, again, people would come up to the pastor after his preaching, to say, "Where did you get all those liberal talking points?"

And the author says, "What was alarming to me is that in most of these scenarios, when the pastor would say, 'I'm literally quoting Jesus,' The response would be, not, "I apologize, I'm sorry, Pastor" – but the response would be, "Yes, but that doesn't work anymore. That's weak."

Even Pope Francis had to address some hillbilly theology this past week. In a remarkable letter, the Pope condemned the current administration over mass deportations, and criticized the use of a document called *Ordo Amoris* to defend nationalism.

"Condemned is the broad conflation of undocumented status with criminality." The Pope writes, "The act of deporting people places them in a state of particular vulnerability and defenselessness."

And the Doge cuts to the U.S. Agency for International Development have put \$500 million worth of food assistance at risk, not \$500 million *dollars*, but of *food* that's beginning to spoil. A former USAID official, Jeremy Konyndyk says, "This food is bound for places suffering from 'active famine' and 'major food emergencies.'" "The Trump-Musk cuts evince an extraordinarily wanton lack of concern for the global poor. They practically proclaim this *proudly*. This doesn't carefully relegate the destitute to an outer ring of obligation in any deliberative way. The idea is preposterous."

St. Luke locates Jesus' teaching on the plateau. All are on the same plain together, and while there remains a future blessing still outstanding, God's future action is to be the norm for our conduct, already now.

Because God's banquet for the poor and oppressed is promised for the future, God's people are to include the poor and oppressed in our *present* banquets. The shape of God's future, is to shape our present.

Hear me again: *the shape of God's future is to shape our present*. And in this way, there is, in God's reign, an anticipation of the future in the present.

This teaching of Jesus is to lead disciples to actions which release others from all manner of injustice and oppression.

Wealth and power, not subjected to God's call, are life in a fool's paradise.

God calls us to use wealth to care for the poor and to carry out God's work in the world. With our hands.

And if the rich do not acknowledge God's claim over their wealth, a great reversal will place them outside of blessing. Woe to them. The social, economic and political realms of life have a spiritual claim hanging over them. Money, wealth and power have always been intended by God to be a sort of "means of grace," by which all persons, including the needy, experience God's care and favor.

In his first teaching in the temple, at the beginning of Luke's Gospel account, Jesus announced "the year of the Lord's favor," in which the poor hear good news, and the oppressed are released.

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ here at Queen Anne, let us be a demonstration to the world of a community which knows the appropriate use of wealth.

Release has been inaugurated by Jesus Christ, and what will happen is, the ones who are in touch with this "real life," will necessarily be filled, be laughing, and be joyful!

Thanks be to God.

In Jesus' name, Amen.