



Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany
February 13, 2022

Ascension Lutheran Church
Edwin Aparicio, Pastoral Intern

Grace and peace of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

After spending the whole night in full prayer on top of a mountain, and in the morning Jesus and his disciples came down from the mountain and a large number of people from many places had gathered to listen to his teachings and to be healed. Many of the people tried to touch Jesus because he was beginning to gain a reputation as a powerful healer.

As Jesus sees the fruits of his early actions in his ministry, he stands before them and tells them the implications of following him. It seems from the beginning, Jesus wanted the disciples not only to have an idea of what was to come by being a part of his ministry, but also what he was offering to them.

This speech represents the essence of Jesus' teaching throughout his ministry. Jesus was giving an introduction to the principles of the kingdom of God, but with his words he was turning the world upside down. He was literally saying that what is good in this world is bad in the kingdom of God. To have misfortune in one is to be viewed with grace in the other. The kingdom of God had come to earth with a new world order, and this was difficult to understand.

Jesus knew what kind of people had come to be healed and to hear his message. Many of those present did not need physical healing, but they did need words of encouragement, comfort, strength and hope in the face of the tribulations they were going through in their daily lives.

Jesus begins his speech saying, blessed are the poor because the kingdom of God belongs to them. I imagine that when Jesus said these first words, everyone was surprised, even his apostles because these words literally contradict the divine teaching that they had received from their religious leaders. They had been taught that suffering was the product of God's punishment.

The Gospel of Saint John tells us that Jesus saw a man who was born blind and then they asked him, Master, who sinned, this one or his parents? Apparently, the blessings were only for those who obeyed the law, and the curses were for those who did not comply, as it was written in the old covenant between God and Israel. And that was the context in which all those who had come to listen to Jesus lived. That is why surely everyone was surprised by his words,



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This idea that suffering on earth is God's form of punishment isn't only an ancient idea. That idea is still common around the world. When I was living in El Salvador, playing soccer was a significant part of my life. Church in Llano el coyol was at 3:00 on Saturdays, but somedays, so was soccer. I remember a time when I decided to skip church in order to play soccer. During the game, I ended up getting injured and needed to get 2 stitches next to my eye. The next morning, I showed up to church in Usulután to help Pastor Julio lead worship.

He never commented on my injured eye, but I felt like my stitches were God's punishing me for skipping church. Although I felt the anger of both God and Pastor Julio, I didn't learn my lesson. The next month, there was another soccer game at the same time as church in Llano. I decided to play soccer instead of leading worship. I was injured again, in the same area near my eye. But this time, instead of 2 stitches, I needed 5. After a lifetime of believing that earthly injuries were a sign of sin, I believed that if I missed church again to play soccer, I may lose an eye! I never missed church again to play soccer.

Going back to Jesus's sermon, Jesus added more examples to be sure everyone understood what he was saying. He added three more blessings. Blessed are those who are hungry because they will be satisfied, blessed are those who cry because later they will laugh, and blessed are you when they humiliate you, discriminate against you and discredit you. Rejoice because you will receive your reward.

A new code had arrived. Jesus was teaching a new way to see God. Good news had arrived, for the poor, for the hungry, for those who cry. For those who make bad choices about choosing soccer over church. With these words Jesus is not saying that the rich will not be blessed, in reality Jesus is speaking out against injustice.

We can be rich but at the same time poor in spirit. We can be financially poor, but at the same time rich in spirit, when we let the Holy Spirit guide our lives.

Brothers and sisters, in today's Gospel, Jesus calls us to be filled with hope. When he says "blessed are the poor, those who hunger, those who cry, those who suffer" he is speaking to all of us. It is his way of reminding us the Holy Spirit walks alongside us during all of our times of tribulation.

May the grace and peace of our Savior, Jesus Christ be with each one of you. Amen