

Sunday, Feb 16,2025 Luke 6:17-26 "He Stood on a Level Place"

Luke 3:4,5 John the Baptist, per Isaiah, every valley filled in and every mountain made low.

Rather than on a mountain (Mt 5), Luke records the Sermon given on the plain.

A stable place, secure footing, fair, not changeable position.

Power was coming out of Christ and healing those gathered.

Israel did not seem to have a long-term change or impact from the healing and teaching that Jesus gave freely. You would think that there would be a generational change, a nationally marked healing and wholeness.

Perhaps, that happened in the growing Christian community.

It may be that God starts all over again with every person born. We're meant to hear and obey God. It is just one notch before impossible to hear God and give up our notions of the good life that we think we deserve, and live with grace in the world as God has created and allowed it to be.

As everyone was trying to have what was wrong with them fixed, Jesus taught them about the long-term blessings of being hungry, despised people loving God.

As with the other reading for Feb 16 (Jer 17:5-10; Ps 1, 1 Cor 15:12-20), Jesus is teaching that there is a Now and Later. Although rightly maligned as "pie in the sky" to keep hungry peasants from revolting, the resurrection and the continuing life to come are part of Jesus' understanding of righteousness and justice.

"And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith," Paul says. (1 Cor 15:14)

Well-fed and comfortable as I am, it is hard to proclaim this, but it is our faith. The rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31).

It may be that many Christians in wealthy countries want to focus on working for justice now, for reparations now, and are agnostic about the life to come. But today and in whatever days to come while we are still on earth, we must, however tentatively or boldly, live in the kingdom of God, and this is the teaching of the resurrection of Christ and life to come..

The careless wealthy may be overturned in this life (Ps 37,73) or they may seem to be untouchable to the end. Yet, God's justice will be accomplished. Do not give up hungering and thirsting for God in all circumstances, and living in the Kingdom.

Yes, there is a reward to come, and in the meantime, and in preparation for the life to come which is a continuation of this life, Jesus tells us of spiritual formation.

Jesus said that it was hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of God (Mt 19:23-26; Lk 18:25). The disciples were astonished, because who has a better chance of becoming a spiritual adept than the person who has more resources, who has better conditions around them so they have the flexibility to choose what is placed around them, how to spend their time? Why wouldn't the rich, the well-fed, the laughing and carefree, the respected people, be able to find the time and energy to pursue spiritual goals?

Christ tells us, however, that the conditions for spiritual growth, are poverty, hunger, weeping, being hated, being excluded, being insulted and being rejected. It isn't just that the scales will be righted in the world to come, but that these very conditions will create in us a heart that is in tune with God's will.

Now, that is what the conquerors tell the conquered, isn't it? God will bless you if you endure. The conquistadors told the people of South America that the bleeding Christ of the cross was with them and would comfort them. The pastor counsels the battered woman that it is God's will that she suffer with grace and humility.

This spiritual principle is used every day to manipulate and preserve the dominance and comfort of the rich and powerful. Alms are given to the poor with the stipulation that they must pray with gratitude for the wealthy—implying that God's ears are open to the poor in a way not available to the rich, who choose to remain rich nevertheless.

This spiritual principle is used every day in telling those who are suffering to be happy because suffering brings growth and strength.

This spiritual principle is used internally every day to defeat ourselves. "Oh, well, it's the poor in spirit who will inherit the kingdom." "It's all right that I'll never amount to anything."

Or, Christians use the idea of discrimination to explain every fault and failure as an offense against Christ.

Why did Jesus give this teaching? He saw life as it was.

Membership gym is for people who don't get a workout in their daily duties. A wilderness camp is for young people who never face danger and nature and cooperation in their usual life.

Lamaze training is training for when the experience comes, not for its own sake. Many people abandon the breathing method the minute the pain ratchets up. There is no prize for mastering Lamaze method, there is only the joy of a child come into the world, ready or not.

Our lives here are not meant to be a promise of lovely experiences and relationships, but are of joy within uncertainty and suffering. We can't untangle the beauty of God's image in us from how it has become twisted. We can't tell what is fruitful and what is a dead end. Spiritual life is keeping a focus on God while learning to respond to all of life, especially the suffering with a lightness of heart and anticipation of God's work within it.

With all the mis-uses and mis-understandings that are possible with Christ's teaching, the chosen of God are not the rich and powerful, the comfortable, the well-regarded, the entertained. The chosen of God are the poor, the hungry, the sorrowful, the hated, the excluded, the insulted, those whose name is rejected as evil, for Christ himself was such and live within his companions.