

February 15, 2004
Epiphany 6

"Blessed to Be with Jesus"

LUKE 6:17-26

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.

This past week the Santa Barbara News Press had an article leading up to Valentine's Day. Several important people in Santa Barbara were interviewed and asked to share thoughts about the "valentine" in their life. David Winter, retired president of Westmont College, told about the day that he met his wife at a restaurant in Phoenix. That night he could not sleep. He kept thinking of the girl who would later become his wife. Love can do strange things to you, like keep you awake at night.

Today you are here in this worship service because you are in love with someone very special to you. You are in love with Jesus, because you know how much he loves and cares for you. You want to be with him. You want to be close to him. You want to hear his voice speaking to you. The world around you does not begin to fathom the blessings you have in Jesus. It thinks you are strange and weird.

Have you ever seen someone love something or someone in a strange way. I was once standing in line in a supermarket, and there was a young lady behind me, perhaps in her early 20's holding in her hand a jar of jalapeno peppers. She was so hungry for the jalapenos and so eager to have their fiery hot capsaicin burning in her mouth, that she opened the jar and began popping them in her mouth like candy. Unless you are really into hot spicy peppers, you can never understand the craving this girl had in her life. The world cannot begin to understand the craving you have for Jesus, and the desire to wake up each morning rejoicing in the blessings you have in him. This morning we want to join the crowds gathering around Jesus to see his miracles and hear his word and we see how, **"Blessed to Be with Jesus."**

1) Blessed to see his miracles

You are so blessed because your eyes have been opened to see the miracles of Jesus that have totally changed your life. We are told in the words just read to you that large crowds of people came to hear Jesus and also to be healed of their diseases. Jesus welcomed these large crowds that came from Jerusalem, and all over Judea, and even the people from the pagan areas along the seacoast, Trye and Sidon. He purposely stood in a level place so that the people could gather around him and see him and hear him.

Jesus wants you to have a level place in your life where he can come to you and show you his miracles and let you hear the words he has to speak to you. That level place in your life may be your favorite chair, the kitchen table, or the desk next to your bed where your Bible can easily be reached and read before you fall asleep at night. Have you ever thought of getting rid of some of the high spots and low spots in your personal life so you can have more time on a level place with Jesus? You know what I mean.

The people who came to Jesus saw him perform mighty miracles right before their eyes. Our text says, "Those troubled by evil spirits were cured, and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all." I cannot imagine how awful it must have been to see people physically possessed by Satan. Don't you hear the terrible groans coming from those who are possessed. Look at how Satan caused their body to thrash around. Have you ever seen an animal writhing around in pain as it dies? Imagine humans possessed by evil spirits. Jesus showed them who was boss. The people saw with their own eyes how lives were suddenly changed when Jesus threw out the demons, or when he caused the blind to see and the deaf to hear and the lame to walk. This past week I visited Elsie Fazzone and watched as a therapist helped her take steps as she recovers from hip replacement. The people Jesus healed need no extra therapy, no extra time in bed. They were instantly healed.

That's why you are so blessed, dear Christian. You have seen the miracles Jesus has done to rescue you from the pain of eternal suffering in hell. In John 20 Jesus said to Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen and believed." We see with our faith eyes what people once saw with their physical eyes. You have seen Jesus miraculously take your sin upon you as the Bible says so clearly in Isaiah 53, "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." I don't like what I see each day with my physical eyes. I don't like seeing the trash along the freeway. I don't like seeing people hurt other people. I don't like seeing animals suffer pain. Most of all I don't like the trash I see in my own heart. I know in my heart of hearts, and you know in your heart of hearts, that what the Bible says is true, "The heart is deceitful above all things." Those words come from Jeremiah 17:9, the verse that follows our first lesson. Those who put their trust in Jesus are so blessed. As the reading said, "They will be like a tree planted by the water."

Some of you plan to see the film "The Passion of the Christ" coming out at the end of this month. As we experience the agony and pain of Jesus' suffering, Christians with faith eyes will see the pain Jesus endured to pay the price for the sin we committed. "He was wounded for transgressions and bruised for our iniquity." Do you ever get tired of seeing this miracle? No, it is the focus of your life. You wake up with it. You work with it. You fall asleep with it. Even the love you have for the valentine in your life flows from this miraculous agape love that Jesus has poured out for you.

We also live each day in the miracle of Jesus resurrection from the dead. As the psalmist

says when referring to this great historic event, "This is the day the Lord has made let us rejoice and be glad in it." Because Jesus rose from the dead, we live each day as if Christ rose yesterday, is with us today, and coming again tomorrow. Our baptism connects us to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus from the dead. "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death." We are so blessed to see these miracles and believe they are true. The human heart is always looking for a human solution to the origin of life and a human solution to escaping the judgment to come. The heart changed by the Holy Spirit lives each day on this level place and focuses on the miracles Jesus did to rescue and deliver us.

2) Blessed to hear his words

Not only are you blessed to see Jesus' miracles, you are also blessed to hear his words. Jesus had some amazing words for those who were his disciples, words that seem strange to ears that are not believers and followers. "Blessed are you who are poor for yours is the kingdom of God." The poverty spoken of here is similar to that of Matthew 5 which says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Do you ever feel empty inside, hollow, incomplete, unfulfilled? That's OK because the kingdom of God is yours. The mighty God, the creator of the universe, has claimed you for his own. You have been redeemed and rescued, and you belong to him, not as slaves, but as people who have been given the full rights of sons. Like the lost son who came home, you have your Father's ring, and that ring allows you to claim your position as a son and daughter. Jesus said, "Whatever you ask the Father in my name he will give it to you." That makes us the richest people in the world.

Listen to more of the words of Jesus. Sit down in this nice level place. Listen carefully to what Jesus says about life, because you are not going to get this information from Dr. Laura, Dr. Phil, or Oprah. Jesus says, "Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied." Are you hungry? Did you have a good breakfast, or is your stomach growling? That's not the hunger mentioned here. Are you hungry for peace, joy, contentment, and satisfaction? It's OK. The book of Lamentations says, "His mercies are new to us every morning great is his faithfulness." The word for "mercies" is that amazing Hebrew word "chesed" which means God's loyalty and faithfulness and love that will never fail you. As we say in the psalms, "O give thanks to the Lord for he is good...his mercy endures forever.

Jesus gives us more words that make no sense to someone who is not a Christian. "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh." In the article for Valentine's Day in the Santa Barbara News Press, they also interviewed the wife of Kirk Douglas. They are Jewish and she said she lives by the words of Sam Goldwyn, Hollywood mogul, "You need to take the bitter with the sour." How is it possible to accept the bitter with the sour if you do not know Jesus? No matter how bitter your life may be and how many tears are shed, you can say with Paul, "The sufferings of this present life are not worth comparing to the glory that will be ours." Joni Tada Ereckson was once asked if she ever had down moments because she lost her ability to walk after a diving accident at the age of 17. She said, "Yes, I look at my feet and see how helpless they are," but then with a smile she said, "I know that someday these feet will dance."

You are so blessed to be with Jesus, and hear his words, because he tells you things you need to hear when people get down on you for being a Christian. "Blessed are you when men hate you, and reject your name as evil because of the Son of Man." In fact Jesus

tells us to rejoice "because great is your reward in heaven." If Jesus tells me to rejoice in my future reward during times of persecution, is it not even more important to rejoice in this reward during times of prosperity? In fact Jesus tells us to leap for joy. When was the last time you jumped up and clicked both heels together because you are so happy with what you have coming in the future. Jesus tells us this morning "It's OK to do this." That's how blessed you are.

We don't want to end this sermon on a negative note, but Jesus does talk about the woes of those people who do not know about him. People who find their hope and joy in this life only with its riches and pleasures will be terribly disappointed on the last day. "Woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort." Our first lesson from Jeremiah said "He will be like a bush in the wasteland." There is nothing wrong with having money in the bank, or a home in which to live, or a car to drive, but if that is the focus of your life, then you will be terribly disappointed when Jesus returns in glory. This world will come to an end, and you will stand condemned before God.

How blessed you are to know about Jesus! If a valentine card or present made you happy yesterday, then multiply that joy a hundred thousand times, and you will not even come close to seeing how blessed you are in Jesus, every day of your life. You have the best in this life with Jesus, and something even better comes for you in the future. Amen.