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St. Andrew's Episcopal Church

Year C, 6 Epiphany, Luke 6

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This morning, our lectionary brings us the Beatitudes from Luke's gospel. Matthew has his own version, but Luke takes things a bit further by adding the woes. Our tendency when we hear these well-known words of Jesus is to wonder which category we fall into. Do we count as the poor and the persecuted, or are we the rich and content that Jesus condemns? As tempting as it might be to try to sort ourselves, I think that is a limited reading of the passage.

Let's start by considering the context. Jesus is in the early days of his ministry. He has called his disciples and had a few run-ins with the Pharisees. Word of his healings and miracles has spread, and crowds are gathering. Luke says, *"They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them."* Jesus speaks to the crowd that has come seeking his help, promising that those who are poor, hungry, grieving, and persecuted are blessed.

What does Jesus mean by this "blessedness?" It is not as if it is particularly appealing to be poor or hungry or persecuted. Presumably the people he was addressing came with many different challenges. What they had in common was their need to encounter Jesus. Perhaps this was the common thread; it seems that what made them blessed in Jesus's eyes was not just their particular struggles but their knowledge of their need for God. The same is true for us. Blessedness is rooted in the awareness of our vulnerability and the trust that we are dependent on God and one another. In contrast, the woes are warnings against putting our trust elsewhere - in wealth or success or contentment or a false sense of independence - things that draw us away from God.

If blessedness comes in the hard places of our lives, then we can assume that these Beatitudes are just examples of what it might look like. As I thought about this, I decided to take the liberty of adding to Jesus's list of who is blessed. It seems that there are signs of blessedness everywhere. Yesterday, my family attended the bat mitzvah of a dear family friend. Because of the recent increase in anti-Semitic violence, we were checked at the temple door by two security guards. Then, at the party last night, our friends hesitated to post "Mazel tov" for their daughter on the sign outside, wondering if that could be dangerous. "This makes my heart hurt," her mother said, and I thought *Blessed are those who live in fear because of their faith.*

Earlier this week, I heard of an old high school friend who died of a drug overdose. The covid pandemic has both overshadowed and heightened the opioid epidemic, as well as increasing the abuse of alcohol and other drugs. *Blessed are those who struggle with addiction and blessed are those who are fighting to stay sober.*

I spoke with a nurse who is so tired of watching her patients die and tired of seeing the compromised care that comes when hospitals are overwhelmed. *Blessed are all whose jobs are so much harder during this pandemic* - medical professionals, teachers, delivery workers, people trying to keep their businesses afloat.

And as I look at those I care about and the world around me, my list goes on. Blessed are those who are lonely. Blessed are those who are exhausted or worried parents. Blessed are those who are fighting for justice and equality for themselves or others. Blessed is that Olympic skier, sitting in anguish on the side of the mountain after her race has gone all wrong. Blessed are those who are victims of violence. Blessed are those who just got awful diagnoses. Blessed are those who are suffering from chronic illness and pain, and blessed are their caregivers. Blessed are those who are struggling in their marriages. Blessed are those who still grieve the loss of a spouse, even when the rest of the world has moved on.

I could keep going, and you will have your own list, of course. But the good news of this morning's passage is Jesus's promise that *we are welcomed and held in our need for him*. Though we live in a world that values success and independence, we are reminded that it is in our weakness and vulnerability that we are drawn closer to the heart of God.

This passage also calls us to see the blessedness in one another. As the bumper sticker quote says, "Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about." What would our world look like if we saw each person we encountered through God's eyes, with love and compassion first and foremost? The Beatitudes come to us as an invitation today - to see the blessedness in ourselves and every other child of God. Amen.