

February 16, 2025
Osler Mennonite Worship
Luke 6:17-36
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Okay disciples... here's your first task...

Ever since Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness he has been busy;
Having coffee with villagers,
chatting in the fields as he walks around the Sea of Galilee,
sitting on the hard benches of the synagogues,
preaching and healing any who approached.
So much so that a report about him goes viral.

What an achievement!
Mary and Joseph would be so proud.
This is ministry. This is what Jesus came for
To teach, preach and heal.....isn't it?
Can't we all close our bibles now at the Gospel of Luke chapter 5?
Wow! Jesus! And it is a "Wow" kind of beginning.
But this beginning - this "Wow" beginning doesn't
actually say that much about who Jesus is and what he is about.

We know he teaches, preaches and heals but these are big, general, familiar words
that don't say much about *what* is being taught, the content of sermons, who he is
preaching to or what motivates him to heal.

In chapter 6 Luke finally slows down the action in order to get inside
the head and heart of Jesus.
To show us what Jesus is about. We call it the Sermon on the Plain.
In the Gospel of Matthew we have the Sermon on the Mount.
Luke's version has many similarities to Matthew's so we know that they must have
had a common source for their material. While Matthew sets his on the mountain
as a way to connect Jesus with Moses the law-giver, Luke sets his on the plain.
A level place which reminds us of Isaiah's prophesy that we sing about every
Christmas: every valley shall be exalted and ev'ry mountain and hill made low,
the crooked straight and the rough places plain.
In other words... there will be a levelling out.

For our anabaptist ancestors, these two sermons in Matthew and Luke
have stirred up, fired up and been instructions for following Jesus
for the last five hundred years.
A sermon that made its way into the everyday speech of our Anabaptist ancestors
as they were grilled by authorities about their faith and life.

A sermon that is sprinkled throughout our Confessions of Faith since the first one in Schleithem, Switzerland in 1527 - till the 7 Shared Convictions adopted by the Mennonite World Conference on March 15, 2006 and OMC at our AGM just last week.

The sermon begins right after Jesus has chosen 12 apostles from the many disciples who are following him. He looks at his disciples and begins with very similar words: Blessed are you who are poor, blessed are you who hunger, who weep and blessed are those who hate you.

I want to pick out 3 things from this passage that might help us see into the heart of Jesus.

First is: Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. There has been a lot of weeping in our lives in these last months with friends and family deaths, difficult diagnoses, loss of jobs, many stresses large and small. Jesus offers a promise to those who are weeping. Sometime in the future you will be able to find something to smile about and perhaps even laugh.

Luke's version of the beatitudes shortens the list of blessings to four instead of nine.

Then, Luke turns each of the four statements into an opposite: From poor to rich, from hungry to full, from weeping to laughing, from persecution to popularity.

Each opposite statement begins with woe. w.o.e.

Woe to you.

I wonder how Jesus actually said this?

This is how we read our Bible: (*show reading to yourself*) But that is not how the Bible came about. It started off as stories told around a campfire, in groups, in worship. And these stories were passed from generation to generation until they were written down. The Bible is meant to be read outloud. That is one of the gifts of the Anabaptism at 500 Read-a-thon.

We heard the entirety of the Bible read, outloud!

So, how did these words actually come out of Jesus' mouth?

I've asked Stephanie and Ruth to experiment with these words and try out some possibilities of how Jesus might have spoken them.

See which ones you resonate with.

(angry, sarcastic)

But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.

‘Woe to you who are full now,
for you will be hungry.

(teasing and grief)

‘Woe to you who are laughing now,
for you will mourn and weep.

‘Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

Which did you resonate with? We heard anger, sarcasm, teasing and grief. There are probably other ways you can think of to say these words.

Unfortunately, in my experience, we tend to use these woe's as weapons. Pointing fingers, or as a way to bring someone in line. We tend to read them in categories, as if we are the blessed and you over there are the ones who are not. I think there is an alternative way to think about these woes so we fit into both categories.

Maybe Jesus is warning people about where to put our focus. like this:

SLIDE: This is a warning to you: if you focus only on money and ignore the poor then you already have what you want.

SLIDE: This is a warning to you: If you focus only on filling yourself and ignore your neighbor then maybe someday your food will run out and your neighbor will ignore you.

SLIDE: This is a warning to you: If you focus only on laughing and entertainment and ignore the plight of your neighbor you will be the one who will end up crying.

SLIDE: This is a warning to you: If you focus on developing your popularity and ignore the wisdom of God you will be easily led astray.

To me the heart of Jesus invites us to observe our behaviour; the times we are blessed and the times we lose our focus.

Right after all these passive statements we finally hear a call to action which is the 3rd thing I want to highlight. This part comes after the text that is printed in your bulletin. Jesus says:

SLIDE: love your enemies.

Who is Jesus looking at when he says this? v20 says Jesus is looking at the disciples. The disciples are those 12 men he has just singled out from the crowd and who are probably now sitting in the front row, shoulder to shoulder wondering what they have gotten themselves into!

Jesus is looks at them and says: love your enemies. He says a bunch of things about love and then, in case they were trying to ignore this unbelievable request: repeats it: love your enemies.

Who are these guys who have just met and will spend quite a bit of time in close quarters?

I thought movie characters would show you how diverse this group really is!

SLIDE: We have fishermen, 4 for sure;

SLIDE: a rambo type character called a Zealot,

SLIDE: a wall street type called a tax-collector

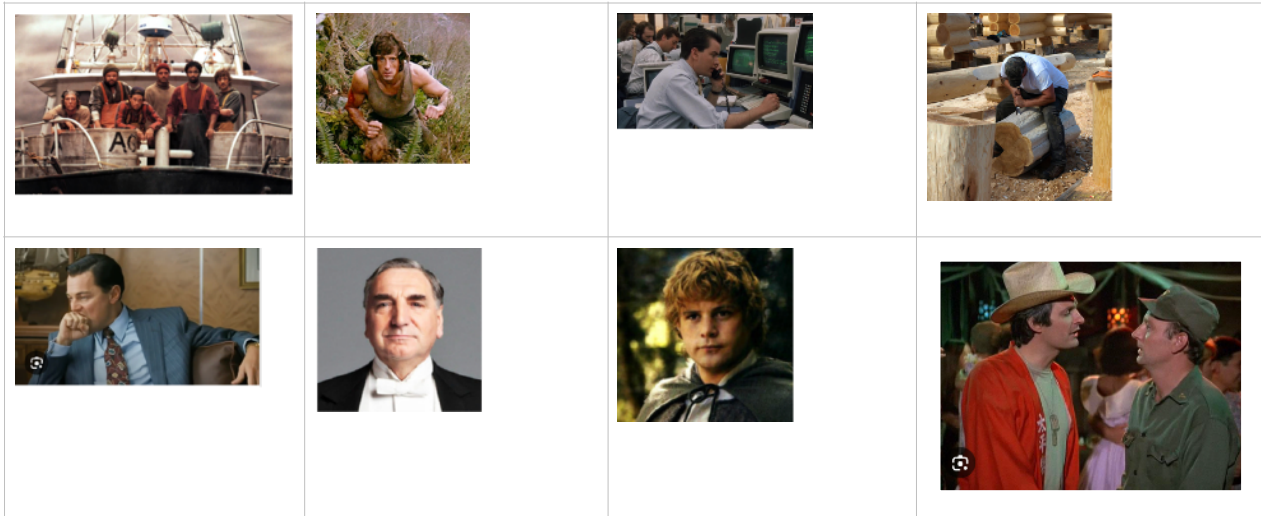
SLIDE: Thomas is called a carpenter in sources outside of the Bible

SLIDE: Judas Iscariot looks like the Wolf of Wall street to me.
The rest we don't know for sure so I'm going to guess that there was

SLIDE: someone who took control of the help
SLIDE: someone who was a friend to everyone

SLIDE: someone who followed the rules;
someone who loved to break the rules.

SLIDE: (images)



Jesus, *looking at his disciples* who are about to spend a lot of time together, says:
Okay disciples, here is your first task:
FINAL SLIDE: love your enemies. We're going to have to figure out how to get along. But don't worry...I'll be there to help you get through it!

This is also our challenge as we try to navigate these days of polarization. As our blood boils over looking at what some people are doing. What we need, what I need right now in our discipleship, is to take Jesus's warnings about where we focus our energy and time seriously, along with .. plain old courage.

And then there's the age old question, HOW do we love our enemies? How DO we love our enemies? How do WE love our enemies? How do we LOVE our enemies? How do we love OUR enemies? How do we love our ENEMIES?

Here is one practical idea from a documentary called "Join or Die" about Robert Putnam.

The way to build community and foster relationships between diverse groups of people is simple, he says:

Join a club, and I might add, a church.

Book club, golf club, walking club, young mom's club... whatever.

If you don't have a club for your interests, start one.

Show up. Pay attention. Tell the truth. Don't be too attached to the outcome.

Let's end with a song that is also a prayer to take with us through our days:

Take my life and let it be, consecrated Lord to Thee.