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Good morning,

Each gospel is written with a specific audience in mind. A group of people that are living out their lives as the author shares with them the story of Jesus, and makes real for them these teachings. Our Scripture text today is the Sermon on the Plain, the less famous partner to the beloved Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew. But as prairie people it feels appropriate that our lectionary texts fell on the Luke 6. A small link to the context of this story. Inspired by this connection I've decided to start by playing out a little bit with biblio-drama, having us enter into the text and look around. First we have to arrive, pull out the scripture reading in your bulletin, get comfortable in your seat, and take a deep breath.

The first line we read sets the tone for the entire passage, vs.17 **“He came down with them and stood on a level place.”** This is the first large section of teaching to show up in Luke. It directly follows the choosing of the twelve disciples. Jesus takes his disciples and goes right into the thick of things. Jesus came down bringing the disciples in tow and waded into the crowd of people who are seeking answers, and seeking healing.

Stepping into the role of the disciples, this feels like a very frustrating learning process. I imagine myself with a notebook and pen in hand trying to stay somewhat near my teacher and write down any bits of wisdom that are coming out. I'm inconvenienced by the masses all trying to get the same attention I was hoping to receive. What is the point of picking me out as a disciple if all of these people are flooding in to learn the same things as me? Wouldn't it be a better learning atmosphere if we found a quiet temple somewhere and sat down, or even if we could have just stayed up on the mountain so I could at least have a front row seat.

But Jesus steps in and verse 19 **“all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.”** So I'm not feeling particularly special. Jesus is with everyone, taking time for all of these people, so what does it even really mean to be a disciple anyway, if everyone here gets the same favoured attention as me.

I haven't said any of this out loud, but my other disciple buddies are giving off a similar vibe, and now we're hanging back in a little group trying not to let on that we're a bit disgruntled. Suddenly vs. 20 **"He looked up at his disciples"** and he starts talking directly to us - I don't even have time to pull out my notebook again before he starts talking so I just lean forward to try and catch everything he says:

"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.

Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

**Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you,
and defame you on account of the son of Man"**

I guess that's nice to hear, I mean I did just give up everything to follow this guy. Following Jesus meant giving up my whole life and if this outing has been any indication, it means tying my life to the poor. I start to jot down the blessing to study more later, but he keeps going:

"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.

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."**

I feel my heart sink into my stomach. Wait a second which group does Jesus think I'm in here. He was talking right to me - well us really. I look around at the other disciples maybe some of us are poor and some of us are rich? Wow I hope I'm not rich, I mean I'm not hungry exactly but I'm definitely less full than John so where does that put me. I start to open my mouth for some clarification here but the moments already passed and Jesus is onto the next thing, so what do I do with this.

Later that night when I'm trying to sleep I just keep turning these words over and over in my mind. Am I blessed or am I doomed. And what does that mean anyway. Or was it even about me. Maybe it was theoretical. It didn't feel theoretical. It's not like he said **"blessed are the poor in spirit."**¹

¹ Matthew 5:3

Okay one more deep breath. We may not really be physically present inside this story. But we have chosen to step into the world of discipleship, and so in vs. 20 Jesus is looking up to us with a teaching. Our job now is to wrestle with what exactly we are suppose to be learning.

Anyone hearing this passage, then or now who has any relative amount of wealth can hardly feel comfortable while hearing these words. Our reactions might range from dismissal to anxiety about our place in God's kingdom. If we don't count ourselves among the poor then this chapter either mystifies us or leaves us feeling guilt rather than the joy promised in vs. 23. This is emphasized by the way Luke uses second person 'you' rather than Matthew's 'they' in the text. This gospel is constantly reiterating the dangers of wealth.

It is important to remember when reading these verses that this is an honour culture. Honour is a cultural good, and seeking out honour is a daily and fundamental task of life. The system is set up so that in order to acquire honour for ones self, it must be achieved at the expense of someone else's honour. The rich are privileged not just for their possessions, but for the power and honour they hold in society. There is an underlying knowledge that those who hoard what the poor need are held responsible by God. The woe, and grief come in when the rich become so preoccupied with their status that they fail to respond to Jesus' invitation in this teaching. Instead they snuggle into their apathy and slip back in the privilege of being able to look the other way.

These verses don't seem to leave much hope for the rich, but this is the story about a teaching, not a final judgement. Jesus is showing the way for the rich to enter into discipleship. Richard Baukham observes that this will take **“more than just charity, which was a well-recognized duty. It means treating the destitute as one's social equals. On these terms, but only on these terms, Jesus did not confine the kingdom to the destitute.”** Repentance for the rich requires more than just generous gifts, it means divesting one's self from our privileged.

Jesus's speech echoes his mother's proclamation in the magnificent. But who are the poor, the weeping, and the hungry in the crowd? These are three descriptions of the same group of people. To be economically poor would be to live in shame, those who can no longer maintain a position of respect in society. Exclusion is a powerful weapon of destruction in life. There would be a great overlap between the sick, the poor, and the lonely that have come to Jesus seeking both teaching and healing.

Draw your attention once more to the blessing:

**“... for yours is the kingdom of God
... for you will be filled
... for you will laugh
... rejoice and leap for joy”**

This blessing is both an affirmation of what is now, and a proclamation of hope and faith in what is to come. These promises ring true not only for the future but for the present. **“Jesus came down with them and stood on the level place ... and healed all of them”** Those in the crowd who were poor were comforted by this blessing because they already experienced acceptance, they had received tangible support through Jesus and this community of disciples. The blessing is conducted in the context of a love and relationship that already exists. This moment of teaching is both a time to listen and a time to be healed. Teaching and healing come together. It is both. And always both. An anonymous Indigenous elder is credited with the wisdom that “A teaching is simply a remembering of a truth your soul was born knowing.” We circle again and again what it means to love. To live as we are created to live.

It is important to remember that the suffering of the poor is not justified by the coming of a far off blessing. The blessing of the poor does not idealize or glorify poverty as if it were somehow virtuous to suffer. Instead it is a declaration that one of the pillars of the kingdom is the redemption of the poor, that they will be released from their degradation. The teaching for the disciples is an extension of what Jesus has already been doing, the blessing is putting words to a lived action.

The blessing can be embraced or rejected and we see the result of each. Nicholas Wolterstorff notices that often in the bible to be blessed means to live a life of character. The following piece is his reflection of what it means to develop a life characterized as the poor, the hungry, the weeping.

[Blessed are the Mourners]

Who then are the mourners? The mourners are those who have caught a glimpse of God's new day, who ache with all their being for that day's coming, and who break out into tears when confronted with it's absence.

They are the ones who realize that in God's realm of peace there is no one who is blind [to their neighbour] and [they] ache whenever they see someone unseen.

They are the ones who realize that in God's realm of peace there is no one hungry and who ache whenever they see someone starving,

They are the ones who realize that in God's realm of peace there is no one falsely accused and who ache whenever they see someone imprisoned unjustly

They are the ones who realize that in God's realm of peace there is no one who fails to see God and ache whenever they see someone who is unbelieving

They are the ones who realize that in God's realm of peace there is no one who suffers oppression and who ache whenever they see someone beat down

They are the ones who realize that in God's realm of peace there is no one without dignity and who ache whenever they see someone treater with indignity

They are the ones who realize that in God's realm of peace there is neither death nor tears and who ache whenever they see someone crying over death.

The mourners are aching visionaries. Jesus says: Be open to the wounds of the world. Mourn humanity's mourning, weep over humanity's weeping, be wounded by humanity's wounds, be in agony over humanity's agony.

But do so in the good cheer that a day of peace of coming.

This morning as we worked our way through the teaching of discipleship in Luke 6. We remember once more the power of the blessing. We think through the teaching that brings all who hear it to a decision. We are called into discipleship, into the reality of God that we have before us, and we are invited to step into the journey of living out this blessing.