

Epiphany 6-February 13, 2022
Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish
Luke 6:17-26

“Yours IS the Kingdom”

Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

This afternoon there will be a great crowd of people full of energy waiting for the Bengals and the Rams to come out onto the Superbowl playing field. This great crowd of people will be coming from all corners of the United States, and I would guess from several other countries. The number of charged up people is estimated to be around 70,000. I suppose around half of them will be loudly cheering on the Bengals and the other half will be cheering on the Rams. You have probably experienced a time when the energy from the crowd of spectators made a difference on the outcome of a game. Playing on homefields have been known to have an advantage when the team they are routing for feel the energy from the crowd which seems to charge them up to do good things. At critical times in games, you often see players waving to the crowd to stand and cheer to express their energy so the team can sense their support as they hope to execute an important play.

There was a great crowd of people that had already gathered waiting for Jesus to come down on the playing field with his disciples. I doubt if there were the number of people that came to hear Jesus and to have him heal their illnesses that will be at the Superbowl this afternoon, but Luke didn't tell us how many people were in this great crowd. When Jesus came down to the level place with his disciples, we didn't hear any cheers coming from this great crowd who came from a large area to see and hear Jesus. This crowd that came to see Jesus was not like a crowd of spectators at a sporting event that were filled with energy. This crowd of people that came to see and hear Jesus had all their energy sapped out from them. Luke tells us the direction of the flow of energy that day when he said, “All in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came **out from him** and healed all of them.” Jesus didn't need the crowd to motivate him to do something. When Jesus saw the crowd, he had compassion on their emptiness and the only power that was on display that day came from Jesus so that everyone was healed in body and in spirit.

Then Jesus looks at his disciples and gives to them a promise that he knows they will need to have before they go out and preach and heal just as they just witnessed Jesus do. They will not be invited to be the main event like a half-time show at a Superbowl as they go out and proclaim Jesus. People will not be cheering them on for what they will be doing or saying. People with needs will come to them and they will have energy sapped out from them just as this large crowd sucked the power out of Jesus. Knowing that discipleship is not glamorous and there are no trophies or medals given at the end of this game, Jesus delivers to his disciples the one promise that will sustain them and cannot be taken from them.

Jesus said, “Blessed are **you** who are poor, for **yours** is the kingdom of God.

This promise is not like all of the others that Jesus gives following this first one given to his chosen disciples in what we now call the Beatitudes. This promise is not one that is off in the future. Nor is this promise one that has expired. Jesus told his disciples that the kingdom of God is theirs. Today and forever.

Jesus goes on to tell the disciples what they will experience for themselves and see in others, hunger, weeping, hatred, and exclusion because of him. None of these experiences will feel like the excitement of a Superbowl Sunday that is charged with support for teams, plenty of food to munch on for several hours, thousands of dollars spent for a place to sit at the game, millions of dollars invested for a 30 second

advertisement, or simply relaxing in the comfort of your own home. But despite what the disciples will experience, the promise of the kingdom of God that Jesus promised to them is theirs and no one can take it away from them.

Jesus also tells his disciples to not be discouraged when they meet people who seem to have whatever they want in this life. They appear to be wealthy, well fed, and full of laughter. Jesus says “Woe” to people who experience such things in this life, because these things that we often desire ourselves do not last and will come to an end. The treasures and pleasures of this life are not transferable into the next life. Jesus never condemns those who have what they want and are enjoying this life, but he does condemn the idea that the things of this life are as good as it gets. Jesus doesn’t sort those who have the kingdom from those outside of the kingdom of God by letting the poor in and keeping the wealthy out. Jesus gives the kingdom of God to those who hear and trust that his promise of the kingdom is for them.

This promise that the kingdom of God is for you today is so clearly delivered in the second lesson for today. Paul points to the one event in the life of Jesus that makes all the difference for each one of us. The resurrection of Jesus Christ. Without Easter, I would simply be standing before you as a teacher telling you about the history of Jesus. Without Easter, as Paul stated, my preaching would be in vain. The story of the crucifixion of Jesus without the resurrection of Jesus would leave you dead in your sins. If Christ has not been raised from the dead, no one else would be raised from the dead and then the best things you would ever have would be the things of this life. Without the message of Easter, we would be a people most to be pitied. But Christ was raised from the dead and therefore we are already alive in Christ whether poor or rich, hungry, or full, sad or happy.

One of the blessings from the Moses Project that I have been a part of since last August is meeting new people. On Tuesday morning I sent a long text using this scripture from Corinthians to one of my closest acquaintances that I have made through the Moses project. He is about my age. Ministry is a second vocation for him also. He serves two congregations in North Dakota. One in a small town and the other in the country. We both have our children and grandchildren living very close to us. We have much in common except he is a good tennis player.

Last Sunday after leading worship, he and his wife drove into their yard and noticed that one of his son’s vehicles was there. They were hopeful that they were dropping off their grandchildren to spend some time with them. But when they entered the house, they could tell that something was terribly wrong. They saw their son’s picture on the dining room table and quickly asked, “What happened to James?” They learned that he had taken his life.

My friend and his wife are not feeling blessed this week. They are the ones that Jesus told his disciples that they would encounter, and it would be their new calling to deliver good news to people who were surrounded by news that was anything but good. As I told my friend, we are people who are not to lose hope or to be pitied. Jesus has been raised from the dead and has delivered this promise of eternal life that cannot be reversed once Jesus has claimed his children through the waters of baptism.

The words “Blessed are you who are poor” will have a deeper meaning to my friend and his family than they ever had before. It will not be my friend's strength that will get them through this difficult time. They will be sustained because of their faith that has been given to them. They will experience what it is like for a tree that is planted near a stream. They will draw from Jesus what they cannot produce themselves and they will also hear and trust in what Jesus gives to you today, “Your IS the kingdom of God.”

Amen.