

Sunday, February 17, 2019 – Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany
“Are You Blessed?”

Luke 6: 17-26

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Question Answered Structure

Adapted from CPR

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

Are you blessed? This simple question ties up Christian people into knots. Sure we'd all like to be blessed. We know that we hear blessings and receive blessings, but what does it even mean? Are you blessed when you're in the dumps, when bad stuff happens to you? Is being blessed a Christianese way of saying "I'm fine, nothing is especially awful about my life today?"

In Luke 6 we find Jesus out on his whistlestop tour. Preaching from town to town, area to area. You've probably heard of His "Sermon on the Mount" in Matthew 5-7. This "Sermon on the Plain" in Luke is similar – many of the same messages, but tailored to the specific audience of this place. Teddy Roosevelt did this kind of thing back in the day, traveling from train station to train station – before TV cameras and videos shared via social media it wasn't enough to give a message once and get the word out there – a version of the same speech would be given over and over... and over... so new people would have a chance to hear it. That's what Jesus is doing here with His sermon. When Jesus talks about being blessed in both the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain, he doesn't mean what we usually do when we use the word "blessed." Jesus turns our understanding of the word "blessed" on its head. We call His weird and highly original assertions about blessings the Beatitudes.

Yes, they are weird and original. Blessed are the poor? Blessed are the hungry? Blessed are those who weep? That's not what I'd call fine, in fact it sounds pretty awful. Some translations use "happy." Happy doesn't cut it. Jesus is going way deeper than feeling happy. Even the word "blessed" falls short if it's the Christianese "nothing's wrong" kind of blessing, or one of the dictionary definitions which says, "to make happy; confer prosperity or happiness upon."

Are we blessed? Are we happy? A smoker lights the first cigarette even before the coffee is started in the pot. You ask if he is happy smoking. Most likely without giving it a second thought he says, "Sure, I enjoy my cigarette in the morning."

Several years pass. The smoker nearly dies in the hospital. After two weeks on a respirator, he finally quits smoking. Now a non-smoker and on oxygen for life, you ask if he's happy and he says, "I am happy I quit. I only wish I had never started. I wish I had quit, when the doctor first told me I should."

Nine years earlier this person believed he was happy. However he wasn't. He paid a great price for what he thought was happiness. The price was his health. It took a crisis to see that his road to happiness was really a highway to unhappiness.

Our heavenly Father created us to enjoy intellectual, spiritual, and physical fulfillment. He created us to be perfect in every way. Yet sin has corrupted every aspect our lives. It is no wonder we often feel unfulfilled or unsatisfied. We might try to find this missing fulfillment on our own. But in looking for it we travel down all the wrong roads. The devil entices us to think that physical pleasure or material possessions can make us happy and if you're happy then have the fulfillment and the satisfaction that sin has taken away. Likewise our own human nature leads us to think that the road called "happiness" leads to ultimate solution to our every problem. But Scripture tells us otherwise.

Thank God that through the power of his saving Gospel we get put on the right road. He has enlightened us by his Spirit, and he guides and leads us down the right road. This is what it means to be blessed. It means living under the care and love of our gracious heavenly Father. It means having fulfillment and satisfaction in your life, because you know that through Christ and his redeeming work, you are a precious child of God, no matter what the circumstance. To be blessed is to know that, because of Jesus God will take care of you, provide for you and love you forever. The benefits of happiness last only for a short time but the benefits of being blessed last forever. If we try to do it ourselves, we fail. We might think we are on the right only to find we are on yet another dead

end. Only when our trust and faith are placed in Jesus, and we receive his forgiveness of our sins, and his gift of new life, does the Spirit place us on the road of blessedness that leads to eternal life.

Consider the ostrich. When the ostrich lays her egg, she carefully covers it with sand. Then she meticulously camouflages the location. She disguises it so no one can harm the egg. The ostrich does this innately and they're really, really good at it. So good in fact is the ostrich at camouflaging her egg that if she moves her eye from the site for even a moment, even she won't be able to find the spot again. So the ostrich gives all her attention to the egg's resting place even if it means giving up her life. If she looks away, she loses everything. The symbol of the ostrich egg hangs in many Christian churches in the Middle East. Christians use this symbol to help them focus completely upon God in their worship and let nothing distract them.

That's because when our eyes wander other directions we'll see the messes in our lives. And not just if there are messes – there are messes, for all of us! One of our temptations to feel better about those messes is to minimize them and say they're not really all that bad – maybe we'll deny the problem, or excuse it away as really being good for us somehow. We can do this with even really critical stuff – well everyone dies, so I shouldn't be sad my loved one is gone. Or maybe we see the messes and we get angry – at God for letting it happen, at the people who hurt us, at ourselves for our mistakes. Perhaps you get prideful and spiteful, filled with wrath against those who would contribute to the problem, or despondent, hopeless over the problem being resolved. That's the lesson of the ostrich – the problems are there – no need to deny, or minimize, or blame others, or pile guilt or shame on ourselves, or seek retribution or lose hope. We can tell the truth about hardships but our eyes stay on God and His promises – forgiveness in His Word and Sacraments. Eternal life. Fellowship and community with each other in His church. These things keep our eyes fixed on Jesus who says to you right while you're poor, or hungry, or weeping, or excluded or rejected – you are under the care of a loving Father. You are precious to God – so much so He sent Jesus FOR YOU. You are blessed. In Jesus' name, Amen.