

The 6th Sunday after Epiphany: Holy Trinity Church: February 13, 2022

Luke 6: 17- 26: The Beatitudes & Love & Valentine's Day

Preached

By

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.

Monday/Tomorrow is Valentine's Day. I believe most people fall into three camps when it comes to Valentine's Day. There are the folks who love it, plan for it, spend lots of money for it. Then there are the folks who shrug it off.

Just another day of the year. And finally, there are those who roll their eyes at it. They hate the idea of a made-up holiday that promotes romance and shopping.

However, it's a shame that we don't celebrate, and embrace love every day of the year. It's too easy to take our loved ones for granted. No matter which of the three camps you fall into, I hope you take some time every day to notice and appreciate the people who love you. My sisters and brothers don't let a day go by without letting someone know that you love them and appreciate them.

I read an article that I thought was especially appropriate for Valentine's Day. One of the most famous landmarks in the world is the statue of Jesus with outstretched arms that overlooks the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. It's called "Christ the Redeemer," and it stands 125 feet tall. It has inspired many visitors to that city. But there is an organization in the tiny town of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, that is funding an even bigger Jesus statue in their town. The "Christ the Protector" statue will stand 141 feet tall—16 feet taller than the statue in the capitol city.

One unique feature of the "Christ the Protector" statue is that there will be a lookout room with wide windows installed at about the height of the Jesus statue's heart. Did you catch that? Wide windows installed at about the height of the Jesus statue's heart. An elevator will transport tourists up to this spot, so they can see views of the city below, from Jesus' heart.

Can you imagine what the view would be like from Jesus' heart? That's the goal of the Christian life, isn't it? To continually grow in our ability to view life through Jesus' heart. It changes our perspective entirely when we realize that the purpose of our life is not our own fulfillment and happiness. The purpose of our life is to live as Jesus lived. That means sharing God's love with others. The purpose of our life is to do good thoughts, good words, good deeds, good works God created us to do. The purpose of our life is to

represent Jesus' character, mission and message to the world. And you thought buying the right Valentine's present was difficult, Indeed!

And that's why today's Gospel from Luke is appropriate for Valentine's Day.

Because Jesus' teachings come from a place of grace because it is pure, unmerited, unearned love. Even his toughest teachings, the ones that make us squirm, the ones that offend us, the ones that challenge our worldview come from a place of love. Jesus' words might seem challenging, even harsh, in this scripture. But, what if we were to view these words through Jesus' heart?

Think about this question, would that change how we respond to them?

Before we understand this in Luke's Gospel, we need to look at who Jesus was speaking to. Jesus had been teaching out in the countryside and healing people. A great crowd of people had come from all over Judea, and even from the Gentile towns of Tyre and Sidon. Jesus was popular! His ministry would be the envy of any rabbi in our day . . . right up until the time they crucified him. And, amid all this excitement, Jesus turns and directs these words quite surprisingly *to his disciples*:

“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now,

for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.

“Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets. “But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.”

I want you to think about this question. Why did Jesus direct these words specifically toward his disciples? What did he want them and us to know? Let me suggest that the first thing Jesus was telling them was don't judge your life by your current circumstances. Write that down. It's important. Don't judge your life by your current circumstances. Don't set your heart on the things of this world. That's not what you were made for. You're healthy, wealthy, popular and powerful now? Good for you. But don't base your happiness, self-worth or security on these things. Or, perhaps you are poor, grieving, unpopular or persecuted right now? God be with you. But don't base your attitude or your self-worth on these things. Your circumstances don't define

you. Whether your circumstances drive you closer to God or further from God is what's important.

Remember, this is a moment when Jesus' star is rising. Crowds of people follow him wherever he goes. They hang on his every word. They go home and tell their friends and family about him. But Jesus didn't let his popularity go to his head. And he didn't want his disciples to think that following him was a great way to reap earthly rewards. In fact, the opposite was true.

It's so easy to let the good things in life, good health, happy relationships, social acceptance, status symbols become the foundation for our attitude, our worldview, even our identity. But these pleasures, rather than drawing us closer to God, often drive us further from God.

In April of last year, the chairman of a New York-based hedge fund with billions of dollars in assets under his management, committed suicide. Charles de Vaulx founded the hedge fund International Value Advisers in 2007. He was the chief investment officer for the fund. At its peak, IVA had more than \$20 billion in assets under management. But in 2020, some of his major investments lost money. According to one of Charles de Vaulx's friends, "It was never about the money. The IVA fund was an embodiment of de Vaux's personality and when it began to unwind, he took it personally." A few weeks

after the IVA board voted to close the fund and liquidate its assets, Charles de Vaulx, a married father of two, jumped to his death from a skyscraper in midtown Manhattan.

How tragic. I feel for this man and his family. He defined his self-worth, his happiness, his purpose by the value he returned for his investors. Don't set your heart on the things of this world. Circumstances change; God's character and promises are the same yesterday, today and forever. Jesus knew his disciples would experience times of great power *and* great persecution in their ministries. And so, the first thing he wanted to teach them is, don't judge your life by your current circumstances.

The second thing Jesus was telling them was God is working in your most painful circumstances. That's the perspective we gain if we view our painful circumstances through Jesus' heart. If we search for what God is teaching us in our circumstances, if we rely on God's power to sustain us in our circumstances, if we open ourselves up to receiving God's mercy in our most painful times as a beggar holds out his hands to receive bread, then we will eventually see God at work in our most painful circumstances.

Rev. Robertson McQuilkin served as President of the Columbia Bible College and Seminary for 22 years but gave up his prestigious and active ministry

when his beloved wife, Muriel, developed Alzheimer's disease. Many people close to McQuilkin urged him to put Muriel in an assisted living home. But he was determined to take care of her right up until the end. It was incredibly painful watching his wife decline. In one of his books he wrote, "... it was a slow dying for me to watch the vibrant, creative, articulate person I knew and loved gradually dimming out."

And yet, McQuilkin reports that he learned so much about God from his years of caring for Muriel. Robert wrote, "Muriel is such a delight to me. I don't HAVE to care for her: I GET to care for her. One blessing is the way she is teaching me so much about love, for example, God's love." God did not rescue Robertson and Muriel McQuilkin from their circumstances. Instead, God taught them more about His love for them in their circumstances.

John Irving, the best-selling author and screenwriter, begins every new novel by writing the last line of the book first. Once he has captured the last line of the book, he is ready to begin telling the story. Because he already knows the ending, he is fully in control of the rest of the story.

That's the secret Jesus tried to teach his disciples too. Jesus already knows the ending to the story. Jesus already knows that he will die to reconcile us to God and give us eternal life. Jesus already knows that God has a kingdom

prepared for those who love Him. And he already knows that every painful circumstance we face in this life can be used to draw us closer to God's heart and God's will and God's purposes, if we will only let it. That's the second thing Jesus is telling us in Luke's Gospel.

And the final thing Jesus was telling them was to find their fulfillment in living for him. There are many places in this world you can seek fulfillment. But there is only one place you can truly find it. As the old gospel song says, "This world is not my home." This world is not your home. You were made for eternal life with God, living in a world ruled by God's values, God's priorities. But, what happens when worlds collide? What happens when you live the values and priorities of God's world in this world? You won't fit in. Your habits and your lifestyle will look different to your family, your colleagues, your neighbors. People will question you. Perhaps talk about you. Reject you.

The disciples didn't know it yet, but Jesus was calling them to make the ultimate sacrifice, to eventually die for the sake of following him. And he is calling us to do the same. Even if we never lay down our lives for Jesus, we are called to sacrifice our own priorities and values and will and replace them with the priorities and values and will of God.

My brothers and sisters, here is the challenge for this week from Jesus and His Beatitudes, we can find happiness in chasing success, health, wealth, status, comfort, and security. But, we will never find our fulfillment or our God-given purpose in those things. God made us to find our fulfillment, our purpose, our life in living for Him. It's not going to be easy. Jesus was very clear about that. So, don't set your heart on the things of this world. Set your heart on knowing God and living in God's will, and you will discover the life that God made you for, a life that is both abundant and eternal in its blessings and live this out in your life and embrace good thoughts, good words and good deeds. AMEN.