

February 17, 2019

Luke 6: 17-26

Rev. Larry Brown - Powell United Methodist Church

“The Deeper Healing”

Thursday mornings is the time I set aside each week to pull together a first draft of my sermon. This past Thursday was no exception but for the fact it was Valentine’s Day. I hadn’t given the theme of the day too much thought, as I sat at my computer praying for inspiration until a text message came through from my mom. My mother is fond of texting. She’s not all that savvy regarding most technology but she has the texting thing down, and rarely a day goes by without one or two or more texting sessions with her. Sometimes these texts come when it’s not exactly the right time; I’m busy or I’m in a place where pulling out the cell phone isn’t possible or it seems a phone call could have made the communication more direct and clear, but “it’s all good,” as we say. Despite what sometimes feels like an interruption, texts connect us to people who are important to us. This is a good thing. So, there I was early Thursday morning staring at a blank computer screen when mom’s text came through. It started with a red heart emoji and then the words, “Happy Valentine’s Day,” and then “I love you” followed by several more emoji hearts of different sizes. I responded right away, of course. I texted, “We love both you and dad” and then typed, “with all our heart, soul, mind and strength” and then I added a kissing lips emoji and pushed send. I followed that immediately with another text saying I was sorry about quoting scripture, explaining I was in preacher mode, to which mom texted back just one word, “Yea!” It was a good interruption and, quite honestly, an uplifting way to start the day. It’s always the right time to be reminded we are loved. Did you hear that? It is always the right time to be reminded we are loved.

As I turned back to the computer and my thoughts for this message, it was so clear, the truth which undergirds all of scripture, God’s love for us. Jesus embodied this truth. Jesus became the Christ for us because his life, death and resurrection communicates the certainty that nothing can ever separate us from the love of God. God’s love for us is THE message woven through the bible and especially within the stories of Jesus. This is the gospel, as we call it, the witness to our salvation, which is God’s saving love, a love that not only rescues us but becomes our way of life. And so, whether we are a preacher or not, whenever we read or hear a story about Jesus there is a reality out of which that story comes and it’s built on the foundation of God’s love for us. I don’t mean to trivialize what we’re about this morning but if God was in the texting business I think God would interrupt us all of the time. In our work, in our worship, in our successes and in our struggles God finds every way possible to bring the message to our attention, “You are loved. You are my beloved. You are mine.”

In today’s story about Jesus, there are at least two ways the message of God’s love comes through. The first is how the healing power in Jesus was available to all the people. I love the way the gospel writer, Luke, uses a small word like “all” to convey a very large truth. Luke writes that a “great crowd” and a “multitude of people” from “all” the surrounding territory came to be near Jesus. Luke says that “all” in the crowd were trying to touch him and he healed “all” of them. Would we imagine for a moment that all of the people there that day were deeply religious folks? Were all of them in the right frame of mind? Would it have been possible that every individual in the multitude gathered with Jesus would have understood fully who he was and what he represented. What’s more likely is that many in the crowd were questioning or frustrated or fed up. Some in the crowd were barely keeping it together. Some had barely two nickels to rub together while some standing there were at the top of the social ladder from which they enjoyed the view. Luke says all the people were there in all their various situations in life. It’s like us and what we carry in our minds and hearts whenever we gather. Just because it’s Sunday morning doesn’t mean we are automatically open to or aware of what God is doing in our lives. Just because we’re in worship doesn’t mean our relationship with God is always the most important thing in life. We’re here but we’re not all in the same place, spiritually speaking. The good news of our reading in Luke is that Jesus connected with all of them, and it is no less true for us today. The Lord sees us and the Lord knows our need, even if we are not fully in sync with how God is moving in our lives. So, this is the first way God’s love is communicated to us this morning. No one is excluded. Everyone is included, and that means you and that means me.

The second way Jesus communicated God’s love is through his words. Luke tells us the crowd stood with Jesus on a level place. This is a direct way of making the point that when Jesus is around all of us are on equal footing. And so, standing with the people on common ground, Jesus named the blessings God bestows. The poor are blessed, he said, and some in crowd felt their hearts lifted. The hungry are blessed. That was welcomed news for those who had a gnawing ache in their empty bellies. Jesus went on, those who grieve and those who are hated, all these are blessed in the eyes of God. I can just imagine how encouraging that word sounded to those who could barely stay on their feet because of everything that weighed them down. Jesus names the blessings and it sounds good, but just as we are ready to say “Amen” to the truth Jesus speaks the whole thing takes a hard turn. The

blessings become woes, and it feels like the rug is pulled out from under us. “But, woe to those who are rich,” he says. “Woe to those who are filled up with good food. Woe to those who are laughing, and woe to those whose reputations are solid and admired. None of that will last,” Jesus says. How do you suppose some in the crowd reacted to that word? How do we? They may have thought what we are thinking? Where is our blessing? We’re not the poor. We certainly aren’t hungry. We aren’t happy all of the time but there are plenty of times when it’s good, and who among us doesn’t like it when others have something positive to say about us. Is Jesus saying the others are blessed but woeful trouble is what God has in store for us? In our bible study this past week my colleague and friend, Pastor Dave Woodyard, laid the issue right on the table. He asked in regards to these blessings and woes, “Does this mean God loves poor people more than others?” If so, that’s good news for them, but what about us?

The poor, the hungry, those who grieve and those who are persecuted, they are loved by God. I think Jesus is saying this love comes to them as blessing because they so desperately need it, and they know they need it, and they receive it with open hearts. A blessing isn’t a blessing until it’s received. The rich and the full and the happy and the admired aren’t loved any less by God but their longing for God can be diminished. If I have so much of what the world gives than I may not long for what God is ready to give. What is potentially so woeful about this is I may not even know or think about it or recognize how much God loves me or how deep my need for God really is. In my success and achievement and fullness in life I count my many blessings but I can miss the greatest blessing all. It’s always the right time to be reminded we are loved.

We aren’t the poor, the hungry, or those who are forgotten and pushed aside. That isn’t us, but remember, all in the crowd were healed. God doesn’t love us less. God loves us more, more in the sense that God’s love is like a flowing stream of healing and peace that touches every aspect of our lives. God doesn’t love us less. God loves us more and more and more until all of who we are is captured by that love. What we have, what we do, who we are, and what others think us, all of us, every part of us, is loved by God. When we recognize our longing for this we receive it as joy and we, too, are blessed. God doesn’t love us less. It’s because of God’s love for us that Jesus identifies the potential and woeful brokenness in us, so that we will recognize our deep need for what is the truest blessing in life.

We often say to each other, as we leave our worship and move out of the church building, “Have a great week. Hope everything goes well.” This is our sincere wish for each other, that life would be good and happy and fulfilling. Jesus wants us to remember God’s place in all of that. And so this week, in what you do and through what you share with others around you, be aware of God’s not so subtle interruption in the midst of it all. “You are loved. You are my beloved. You are mine.” When you hear it or when you think it or when you sense it and when you know it, become aware of how blessed you are because of it.