

I wonder how many of us would be interested in responding to a classified employment listing advertising the following position.

Wanted: Individuals seeking a full time position. Interested parties must be willing to be poor, hungry, and cry a lot. All applicants should understand there is a high risk of being hated, excluded, insulted, and rejected because of your affiliation with this organization.

Can I see a show of hands from those that are interested please? Does this sound like a good career move to you? When is the last time you responded to a classified ad that sounded something like that?

By the way the rest of the employment listing reads:

Benefits include the following: receiving the kingdom of God, deep satisfaction, laughter, rejoicing, joy, and a great reward in heaven.

Is there anybody interested in applying now?

Let's read our text this morning found in **Luke 6:20-23**

**Luke 6:20-23 NIV**

*20 Looking at his disciples, he said:*

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

*21 Blessed are you who hunger now,  
for you will be satisfied.*

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

*22 Blessed are you when men hate you,  
when they exclude you and insult you  
and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.*

*23 "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.*

Let's pray:

Here we are, the Sermon on the Plain, a kind of Reader's Digest Condensed version of the Sermon on the Mount. Remember, Jesus has went up into the mountain and chosen the 12 disciples; he has come down onto the plain and is thronged by the masses who seek His touch; He heals them all as they come to Him by the power that goes out from Him. Now, He looks at His students and begins to teach.

It's not that Jesus hasn't taught previously; of course He has. It's just that now He is speaking directly to His disciples, the taught ones, in a gathering of the masses and He is laying out a sequential teaching to them rather than responding to individual questionings and criticisms as he has been recently doing.

I wonder what the disciples were expecting to hear? Do you think they were expecting something like this?

The truths Jesus begins to share are bunched into what is referred to in Matthew's Gospel as The Beatitudes which means '*statements of those who are blessed/happy.*' [Luke has trimmed them down a bit].

We have the privilege of listening in on Jesus' teaching to His students; sitting in on His classroom if you will. Let's look at what He had to say:

First of all Jesus pronounces

**-You are blessed when you are poor.**

Are you kidding me? Is this where He begins? I am happy when I am poor? That's not how I have been looking at things. I think I'd rather be rich. It seems to me that the people who are rich are the ones with all of the blessings!

In Matthew's Gospel, Matthew 5:3, this verse reads '*blessed are the poor in spirit*' and so we realize that this poverty Jesus is speaking of isn't only referencing material possessions but spiritual as well.

Poor in both of these verse comes from the Greek word ***pto-khos*** which means: *reduced to beggary, begging, asking alms, destitute of wealth, influence, position, honor, lowly, afflicted, destitute of the Christian virtues and eternal riches, helpless, powerless to accomplish an end, needy, lacking in anything.*

[Is anybody interested in applying for the position?]

But remember Jesus then adds '***for yours is the kingdom of God.***'

I want to come back to this point in a few minutes, but basically, as the Message puts it: '***You're blessed when you've lost it all. God's kingdom is there for the finding.***'

Jesus' second point He makes is along similar lines

**-You are blessed when you hunger.**

Are you kidding me? Is this His next point? I am happy when I am hungry? That's not how I have been looking at things. I think I'd rather be full. It seems to me that the people who are full are the ones with all of the blessings!

Again, in Matthew's Gospel, Matthew 5:6, this verse reads '*blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness*' and so we realize that this hunger Jesus is speaking of isn't only referencing food and drink but spiritual matters as well.

This word hunger in both these verses comes from the Greek word **pi-nah-o** which means '*to suffer want, to be needy, metaphorically to crave ardently, to seek with eager desire.*'

[Is anybody still interested in applying for the position?]

and then Jesus adds '***for you will be satisfied.***'

The Message renders this verse in this manner: '***You're blessed when you're ravenously hungry. Then you're ready for the Messianic meal.***'

As if that isn't enough Jesus throws in for good measure

**-You are blessed when you weep!**

Are you kidding me? This too? I am happy when I am sad and crying all the time? That's not how I have been looking at things. I think I'd rather be joyfull, wouldn't you? It seems to me that the people who are joyful are the ones with all of the blessings!

Back to Matthew's Gospel, Matthew 5:4, this verse reads '*blessed are those who mourn*' and so we realize that this weeping Jesus is speaking doesn't only mean crying but deep sorrow of soul as well.

Two similar words are used here and both mean 'to lament' or to express grief or sorrow about something.

[What do you think? Ready to sign on the dotted line?]

Jesus does add '**for you will laugh.**'

The Message handles this verse with '*You're blessed when the tears flow freely. Joy comes with the morning.*'

I wonder what His disciples were thinking at that point? Jesus then goes on to add

*22Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.*

Therefore, *23"Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.'*

Wow! I wonder how many of them were thinking like I was after I went off and joined the Marine Corps in 1981 and was laying in my bunk that first night, rubbing my bald head and asking myself '**what in the world have I done?**'

The Gospel writer Dr. Luke doesn't let us in on what the disciples were thinking and how they were processing what Jesus was sharing. That might be a good thing!

However, I don't care how spiritually minded you consider yourself to be, whether you relate better to Billy Graham or Billy Bob, Jesus' statements are challenging to say the least, and rightly they should be.

Which I think is exactly one of His main points in starting His teaching off in this manner.

Newsflash: Jesus didn't come to earth to affirm mankind's goodness and pat us on the back and say 'you all are doing such a really good job. Keep it up. You have a lot of good things going on. Keep at it and it'll all be alright someday! It's all going to be a cake walk!'

He didn't appear to help us all feel better about our self and our way of thinking and to form our little 'feel good clubs' of churches who are called by His Name and teach us the secret handshake; give us the secret decoder ring, and say 'have a good time!'

According to **Luke 19:10** '*the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost.*' [That would be us!]

That would also be the disciples in the crowd on the Plain in this story and He begins to pour truth into their lives; challenging truth.

He also came to destroy the works of the enemy.

### **1 John 3:8 KJV**

*'For this purpose the Son of God was **manifested**, that he might **destroy** the works of the devil.'*

And He came to gather a band of brothers around Him who would surrender themselves for the sake of the Gospel, become true disciples, allow Him to be Lord, be willing to be obedient even if it meant being poor, hungry, and sorrowful; because it also meant receiving the kingdom, being filled, and joy in the Lord!

In order to mold His crew into shape Jesus had to help focus them on the mission at hand and what it would require to accomplish it. What it would require was a different way of looking at things.

Remember how Jesus constantly reminded the religious naysayers of the day that they were looking at things through the wrong set of lenses? I happen to think this is at the core of what Jesus is sharing with His disciples here. He is preparing them for the road ahead; readying them for their mission.

It's seems similar to what I learned was one of the basic purposes of Marine Corps basic training: to remove and strip away prior understandings by exposing you to new principles and methods of operation in order to form a cohesive unit, a team.

Jesus has prayed all night and came down and called the twelve disciples and now their training, their discipleship gets slammed into full gear. He is trying to whip them into shape if you will; not scare them off at all, but to let them know what they have signed up for and what to expect.

He is forming a team that He is going to invest His very life into over the next three years and then depart via the cross and His resurrection. This team is going to lay the foundation for the Church, the called out ones [that's us] and will one day be the heritage for a group who were identified as *'those that have turned the world upside down'* in Acts 17 and for us, Christ United Church!

For what many of you did yesterday at Glenn Miller Park through acts of Agape love and sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ. Awesome!

This is discipleship 101.

It's important to grasp the season and have understanding of the times in which these events occurs.

Galatians 4:4 reminds us that *'when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son,'* which means at just the right time.

At this time in Israel there have been countless other Jewish prophets and leaders, rabble rousers with good intentions who felt called to deliver the Jewish nation from the bondage of the Roman oppressors, even some self titled Messiahs and deliverers, who tried to help set the nation free with their own strength, not too unlike Moses did in the Old Testament.

The nation of Israel, God's chosen people, was waiting for a deliverer to lead them.

Certain groups such as the Essenes, the Zealots, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees to name a few each had their own idea of how God's deliverance would and should come and they were not afraid to lend God a helping hand with His plan.

However, Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the deliverer, the genuine article, and He was beginning to make His move.

Did you know that the name Jesus was fairly common in that day? We revere it and rightly so yet in that day Jesus, a variation of Joshua, was a fairly common moniker.

We are enlightened now and know this truth and His chosen twelve were trying to believe it then with a limited amount of success.

How would you have responded to His teaching? What group would you belong to? What would you believe of all that was being said? How desperate for God's plan to unfold would you find yourself in?

History records an earthquake in the region of Palestine in 31 BC which killed 31,000 people and much livestock which lead to even more desperation and destitution. The Jews of the day referred to such things as 'pangs of the Messiah' and pled with God for a

deliverer. This is the atmosphere. They are hoping for help; waiting for relief.

So now the Deliver is here, standing on the Plain with His twelve disciples and others who are students of his, and the crowd. Jesus is taking His charge seriously, of course, and has gathered them unto Himself and begins to share in order to prepare. Not only to touch them but to teach them and what does He have to say? Listen again:

**Luke 6:20-23 NIV**

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

*21 Blessed are you who hunger now,  
for you will be satisfied.*

*Blessed are you who weep now,  
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*22 Blessed are you when men hate you,  
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and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.*

*23" Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward  
in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.*

I'm thinking we might have things turned around just a bit in our understanding in this day we are living in, kind of like the group Jesus was talking to. They seemed to be kind of hoping for a knight in shining armor to ride in and dash the Romans to dust and ride off into the sunset. They had their view of the way things were supposed to be...

And Jesus had His!

I was watching Christian television last week while on vacation and the preacher was teaching on the 7 ways to unlock God's blessings in your life because *'you deserve to be blessed.'*

Well, you do, and according to Jesus, you will be blessed if ... you are poor, hungry, and crying; hated, excluded, insulted, and rejected?

Is that what they told you when you chose to follow Him? I didn't think so.

Don't misrepresent Jesus teaching here either and think that He was just trying to make a point; that He really doesn't expect us at times to be suffer poverty, hunger, and sorrow either. [maybe others huh?]

Did you know Mother Teresa spent seven years at a convent in India teaching the daughters of wealthy parents in a quite comfortable environment comparatively speaking before responding to God's calling to serve those caught up in the horrors of poverty in Calcutta's slums? 'Blessed are the poor.'

Listen to this entry in her personal diary from the early months of her first year of missionary service to the poor in 1948:

*'Our Lord wants me to be a free nun covered with the poverty of the cross. Today I learned a good lesson. The poverty of the poor must be so hard for them. While looking for a home I walked and walked till my arms and legs ached. I thought how much they must ache in body and soul, looking for a home, food and health. Then the comfort of Loreto [her former order] came to tempt me. 'You have only to say the word and all that will be yours again,' the Tempter kept on saying ... Of free choice, my God, and out of love for you, I desire to remain and do whatever be your Holy will in my regard. I did not let a single tear come.'*

Wow! If you chose to dismiss her story because 'she's a Catholic nun' you have done yourself a grave disservice. She didn't just serve the poor she became the poor and according to Jesus' teaching here on the plain and also in the mount, hers is the kingdom of God!

'Poor, hungry, and crying? Hatred, exclusion, insults, and rejection? Are you kidding me? Jesus moves on after sharing the blessings and has a few things to say concerning woes or warnings as well:

**Luke 6:24-26 NIV**

*24"But woe to you who are rich,  
for you have already received your comfort.*

*25Woe to you who are well fed now,  
for you will go hungry.*

*Woe to you who laugh now,  
for you will mourn and weep.*

*26Woe to you when all men speak well of you,  
for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets.*

More of the same. Is there anybody still interested in applying for this position?

As we prepare to close allow me to share with you what I believe to be at the heart of this discourse on the Plain.

What might the poor, the hungry, the sorrowful, the hated, the excluded, the insulted, and the rejected have in common? I would say **there is a very real sense of desperation in all of these.**

I would also have to say that I don't perceive a very real sense of desperation in the Body of Christ as a whole and in my life in particular.

EX: Pastor Angel Pilev, Bulgaria, 10 days in Provo, Utah going door to door all day long to share the good news. Pastor from Alaska, sent out 4,000 invitations and only 2 other churches responded. Over 500 people made decisions for Christ during that time.

Phillip Yancey wrote in his book The Jesus I Never Knew **'human beings do not readily admit desperation. When they do the kingdom of heaven draws near.'**

[read page 116 quote]

Now you know why I went to the end of the chapter a couple weeks ago and asked those three important questions:

1. Are you a disciple of Jesus Christ?
2. Is Jesus Christ Lord of your life?
3. Are you walking in obedience to God?

It gets really difficult trying to surrender yourself to those things Jesus is teaching to the disciples and to us while trying to hold onto all the other things in this world that we value so much:

Wealth, fullness, laughter, popularity to name a few as Jesus did with His woes which are just a representative listing I believe.

Let me tip the hand a bit and let you know where we are headed next week as Jesus goes on to teach us:

*27"But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. 30Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. 31Do to others as you would have them do to you.'*

Wow! We might have this thing kind of backwards, you think? Is this the kind of life you are living right now? Really? Me either!

This kind of life doesn't come by accident or chance; it doesn't come by your own efforts either but you have to give God something to work with. This kind of life only comes by grace through faith in Jesus Christ!

Wanted: Individuals seeking a full time position. Interested parties must be willing to be poor, hungry, and cry a lot. All applicants should understand there is a high risk of being hated, excluded, insulted, and rejected because of your affiliation with this organization.

Benefits include the following: receiving the kingdom of God, deep satisfaction, laughter, rejoicing, joy, and a great reward in heaven.

Is anybody interested in applying? The altars are open this morning for you to make your prayer known to the Lord.

Let's pray: