

²⁰Then he looked up at his disciples and said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. ²¹“Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. “Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. ²²“Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. ²³Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. ²⁴“But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. ²⁵“Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. “Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. ²⁶“Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

²⁷“But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹Do to others as you would have them do to you.

I remember the day my brother stepped on a little kitten. He did not mean to. He came bursting out of the house and the kitten was curled up on the doormat. He never saw her until his foot had squeezed the life right out of her.

I remember his tears – uncontrollable sobbing.

No one needed to remind him he needed to be more careful. No one needed to scold him – his sorrow told the whole story.

I suppose he could have been different – shown no regret for what had happened. Then words of criticism would have been called for. But none were needed that day.

Blessed are you who are poor, yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you, revile you and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy for surely your reward is great in heaven, for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

What happened in you when those words were spoken? Joy? Hope?

Some of you have been through a lot of weeping. Some of you have just lived the worst year of your life. Some of you are not sure how you are going to make it through what lies ahead. Take heart – this word of Jesus was spoken to you.

“But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.”

Some of you have had it pretty good. Lots of entertainment – lots of restaurants – you have been able to buy things you wanted – you are highly regarded at work and in the community. Is this word of Jesus spoken to you?

A long time ago I was taught that Jesus comforts the afflicted.....and afflicts the comfortable. Jesus comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable.

I like the first part of that saying. Blessed are you who weep now, you will laugh. Sometimes we just need to hear that the weeping will not go on forever. I remember a woman joking about the pew where she sat for her first year here being warped by the moisture of all the tears she cried. When she was going through that dark valley it must have seemed that life would never change but it did – she was able to laugh once more, but not right away. Week after week, month after month, she came to talk to Jesus and hear from Jesus and to be surrounded by the people of Jesus. In time laughter was hers once more. Jesus did comfort her in her affliction.

But what if I should grow comfortable in my comforts and stop having any concern for anyone but me. Has it ever happened to you that you just stopped caring? Can we learn to walk right by one who is suffering and never give her a thought? Can our hearts become so focused on us that we are no longer moved by the suffering of our sisters and brothers? Then Jesus speaks a word to afflict us in our comforts: Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, you will mourn and weep. Jesus speaks a word that turns everything upside down – a word that comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable.

And then Jesus says, “I say to you that listen, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt.”

Before long Jesus lives those words. He prayed for those who abused him. They slapped him – whipped him – took all his clothing – stripped him naked. Jesus turned everything upside down asking for forgiveness for them all. Crucified by sinners he saves sinners from our sin and the eternal death our sin deserves.

Today we remember those who have died this past year. No matter what the circumstances of their living in their dying they became the poor. Stripped of life itself they possessed nothing but the promises of God. So it will be with each of us as well. Money and a full stomach, laughter and a good name will not save us then.

But Jesus will. That is the comfort and the hope he promises. Though all else fail us he will not. He will pray for us and dress us in the clothing of his holiness and righteousness. We will be honored as sons and daughters of the Most High God because the Son of the Most High suffered dishonor and shame for us.

This day we have hope for those who have died in Christ and for ourselves. Everything is turned upside down, the dead shall live and the sorrowers know joy. The richest one of all – our Lord Jesus became poor so that every poor one might be rich and live in the laughter of God forever.

Thanks be to God.