

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Last Sunday, we heard a few of Jesus' words: "*Put out into the deep ...for a catch*"; "*Don't be afraid; ... you will be catching men*" (Luke 5:4, 10). Today we hear a bunch more. We hear some of His preaching. We hear some of that good news that He was sent to proclaim. It's a surprising gospel, to be sure.

Right before this proclamation, Jesus had been on a mountain and had been praying. He had many disciples with Him. It's not clear that they had prayed with Jesus, but they would hear His preaching.

Jesus came down the mountain with His disciples and found a level place for the disciples and a crowd to gather — people from all over ... Judea, Jerusalem, even Gentiles from the coast, from Tyre and Sidon.

They came to hear Jesus preach, but before He preached, He prepared the people to hear His preaching by doing some mighty works, curing people troubled with unclean spirits and healing people with various diseases.

And then with special attention to the disciples, Jesus preached what is sometimes called "The Sermon on the Plain" as contrasted with "The Sermon on the Mount"; the two sermons have similar themes — this one will sound familiar to you, I think — but they were delivered at different places. Our own David Scaer called "The Sermon on the Mount" "The Church's First Statement of the Gospel." "The Sermon on the Plain" is surely Gospel, too, for Jesus came for that purpose, but it is a surprising Gospel.

Indeed, Jesus so often surprises. In the days after the miraculous catch of fish that we heard about last Sunday, Jesus healed a paralytic, but only after forgiving his sins and being charged with blasphemy for it. He called a despised tax collector to follow Him, and He ate with tax collectors and other manifest sinners. And He defended all this, saying, "I came as a physician to the sick. *I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance*" (Luke 5:32). He defended His disciples for their feasting with the Bridegroom, as contrasted with John the Baptist's disciples. He claimed a superiority over God's law, saying, "*The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath*" (Luke 6:5) and by healing on the Sabbath (Luke 6:9-10).

So, perhaps, Jesus' preaching shouldn't be so surprising; but it does surprise us, for it says the opposite of what we expect, or of what we hope for. "*Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.*" "*But woe to you who are rich,*

*for you have received your consolation.*” How do you think about the rich and famous? Do you think, “oh, how blessed are they for their luxuries and lifestyle and travels,” salivating after the same thing, discontent with the situation you find yourselves in? And what about the poor and disregarded? Do you look down on them? Do you think, “what did they do to deserve these woes,” as you seek to avoid them?

Similar things could be said about the hungry and the full, and the weeping and the laughing. Jesus says, “*Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied.*” But, “*Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry.*” “*Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.*” But, “*Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.*”

What is going on? What is it about being poor that gets them the kingdom, while the rich are left out? What is it about being hungry now that makes for being satisfied in the future, while the full will become hungry? What is it about weeping now that makes for future laughing, while the laughing weep and mourn?

I don’t think that it’s all about poverty and riches themselves. There’s nothing intrinsically good about being poor, any more than being rich is intrinsically evil. Neither is it ultimately about hungering versus being full, or weeping versus laughing. Rather, I submit, these are the temporal things that Jesus uses so that his hearers might do a self-evaluation ... consider their own hearts ... consider who or what is their god.

“*For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing,*” Jesus will later say (Luke 12:23). And He’ll tell us not to worry about “*what [we] are to eat and what [we] are to drink*” (Luke 12:29). Rather, our pursuit should be on the kingdom of God, which is ours as a gift (Luke 12:31). It “*is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom*” (Luke 12:32); it’s a gift received by faith in Christ Jesus.

Here Jesus is calling on His disciples to consider their attitude with respect to riches, and being satisfied, and laughing. If these things are “all important” to them, then they will strive after them, and their pursuit will be for a treasure that perishes. But if they set aside these things and pursue a heavenly treasure, through faith, then “*these things will be added to [them]*” (Luke 12:31) for eternity. It’s as Jesus says, “*where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*” (Luke 12:34). For this is what “*the righteousness based on faith says*”: “*The word is near you,*

*in your mouth and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved" (Rom. 10:6, 8-10).*

Therefore, *"Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man!"* — because of your faith in Jesus, the self-acclaimed Son of Man, the incarnate Son of God. *"[S]o [the] fathers [of the Jews] did to the prophets";* and so scoffers do to us in our day. Nevertheless, *"Rejoice in that day,"* — rejoice when it happens to you — *"and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven."* Rejoice, for what lies ahead of us is feasting and laughing in the kingdom of God.

But, *"[w]oe to you, when all people speak well of you,"* Jesus first told the disciples, ... when they speak well of you because you scratch the people's *"itching ears"* (2 Tim. 4:3) and don't call out and condemn sin. The *"fathers"* of old loved it when *"the false prophets"* told them what they wanted to hear, and did not warn them because of their unfaithfulness. Woe second to us pastors when we do similarly for the sake of being loved. It is a temptation!

And woe to us as Christian people when we assimilate to the ways of the world, when our speech is indistinguishable from the world's speech, when our positions on moral questions are contrary to God's word, when, as we live in the world, no one can recognize us as Christians by how we act, when our fruits bear witness to a bad tree. For *"each tree is known by its own fruit."* *"The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil"* (Luke 12:44-45).

For the treasure of our Christian hearts is neither poverty nor riches, neither hunger nor plenty, neither weeping nor laughing in this vale of tears. With St. Paul, we can be content *"in whatever situation"* we find ourselves: *"brought low"* or *"abound[ing],"* *"facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. [We] can do all things through [Christ] who strengthens [us]"* (Phil. 4:11-13).

Through Christ, for Christ is the Christian's treasure, He who *"became poor"* *"for our sake"* even *"though he was rich,"* so that *"[we] by his poverty might become rich"* (2 Cor. 8:9). Christ is our treasure, He who endured hunger and want in the wilderness as He did battle with the devil and defeated Him, that His

righteousness might substitute for our unrighteousness (Luke 4:1-14). Christ is our treasure, who wept for Jerusalem as He prepared for the final battle with mankind's great foes: sin and death and the devil. Christ met them on the battlefield called Golgatha, and He triumphed over them. Still, He wept for the city because of its unbelief, because they did not know "*the things that make for peace*" (Luke 19:41-42), because they did not recognize "*the time of [their] visitation*" (Luke 19:44), the visitation of the "*sunrise ...from on high*" (Luke 1:78).

It is a surprising gospel that Jesus preaches to us today, a gospel filled with beatitudes and woes. It is a surprising gospel in which we see Christ and are built up in our faith in Him, whether in plenty or want.

God grant us the Holy Spirit that in the knowledge of Christ, our treasure, we might rejoice in the kingdom He promises and the feasting and laughing that await us in eternity.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.