

**The Lessons Appointed for  
Use on the  
Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany**



Year C  
RCL

Jeremiah 17:5-10  
Luke 6:17-26  
Psalm 1

**The Collect**

O God, the strength of all who put their trust in you:  
Mercifully accept our prayers; and because in our  
weakness we can do nothing good without you, give  
us the help of your grace, that in keeping your com-  
mandments we may please you both in will and  
deed; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and  
reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for  
ever and ever. Amen.



*Jeremiah 17:5-10*

Thus says the LORD:

Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals  
and make mere flesh their strength,  
whose hearts turn away from the LORD.

They shall be like a shrub in the desert,  
and shall not see when relief comes.

They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness,  
in an uninhabited salt land.

Blessed are those who trust in the LORD,  
whose trust is the LORD.

They shall be like a tree planted by water,  
sending out its roots by the stream.

It shall not fear when heat comes,  
and its leaves shall stay green;  
in the year of drought it is not anxious,  
and it does not cease to bear fruit.

The heart is devious above all else;  
it is perverse--  
who can understand it?

I the LORD test the mind  
and search the heart,  
to give to all according to their ways,  
according to the fruit of their doings.

*Psalm 1*

***Beatus vir qui non abiit***

1 Happy are they who have not walked in the counsel of the wicked, \*  
nor lingered in the way of sinners,  
nor sat in the seats of the scornful!

2 Their delight is in the law of the LORD, \*  
and they meditate on his law day and night.

3 They are like trees planted by streams of water,  
bearing fruit in due season, with leaves that do  
not wither; \*  
everything they do shall prosper.

4 It is not so with the wicked; \*  
they are like chaff which the wind blows away.

5 Therefore the wicked shall not stand upright when  
judgment comes, \*  
nor the sinner in the council of the righteous.

6 For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, \*  
but the way of the wicked is doomed.

*Luke 6:17-26*

Jesus came down with the twelve apostles and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

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

“Blessed are you who are hungry now,  
for you will be filled.

“Blessed are you who weep now,  
for 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.”

“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.”

## SERMON

This coming June marks the end of my 12<sup>th</sup> year as your stated supply speaker and the beginning of my 13<sup>th</sup>. I held the position of Commonwealth's Attorney for Kentucky's 32<sup>nd</sup> Judicial Circuit for 13 years, so a potentially significant anniversary for us is now in sight. I thought it might be a good time for us to think about what it means to live as a Christian in a world in which lives of faith are viewed as mere personal options. Why do we bother with such a thing? Is it all about getting to heaven when we die? Is it all about a comfortable tradition which soothes us and calms our anxieties by its regularity, or is it, rather, the rocky path of uncomfortable Christianity?

Some many years ago, I preached a sermon titled "Uncomfortable Christianity". The point of it was to show that though our time together each Sunday is in-



tended to strengthen us, it is not our calling. We are not people who circle the wagons once a week in a comfortably familiar building to sing comfortably familiar hymns following a dependable, familiar order of worship. We are the people called to carry the Gospel into all the world, outside our comfortable and familiar church house, but ... it's so warm and comfortable here that it's easy to lose sight of our calling as we revel in the dependable tick-tock of our church and take ownership of our space within it. I remember Dad telling me of visiting a church in Myrtle Beach. They had seated themselves when a very old woman walked to them and stared. Dad understood instantly, "We're sitting in your seat, aren't we?", he asked.

She nodded in silence and Dad and my step-mom moved. I can't help but compare this story to the opioid crisis – both habit-driven church attendance and opioid

addiction are characterized by repetitive performance of some action which does you no good, but which nonetheless feels good. Is that all there is?

Jesus had little to nothing to say about the virtues of regular church attendance. Rather, Jesus spoke of faith which challenges us in the way Jesus challenged the great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon who came to hear Him.

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

“Blessed are you who are hungry now,  
for you will be filled.

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

“Blessed are you when people hate you, and  
when they exclude you, revile you, and de-  
fame you on account of the Son of Man. Re-  
joice 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.”

“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.”

There is NOTHING comfortable about Jesus’ charge to us. Measured against the historical record, everyone here is wealthy beyond the dreams of avarice but Jesus teaches

But woe to you who are rich,  
for you have received your consolation.

We tend to see our wealth and comfort as a divine comment on our worthiness in comparison to others, yet

Jesus insists:

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

It has been said that in Kentucky, one in five children are food insecure. Food insecurity refers to USDA's measure of lack of access, at times, to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members and limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods. Food insecure children are those children living in households experiencing food insecurity and that's one in five Kentucky children. That's horrifying to me, but Jesus teaches:

Blessed are you who are hungry now,  
for you will be filled.

We revel in our friends who join us in worship, but Jesus challenges us

“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.”

I think this is not the sort of Christianity with which most of us grew up. As I reflect on my childhood at First Presbyterian, I remember church socials, and Sunday School coloring books and sleepy services among people who all seemed to like one another. I don't recall anything that might have been called a challenge.

There. THAT should make you uncomfortable and that is my intention. I'm reminded that the first step to true improvement is to recognize the need for improvement. That doesn't happen without discomfort and it's only human for us to avoid that discomfort with consid-

erable stubbornness. We need to remind ourselves that if we keep doing what we've been doing, we'll keep getting what we've been getting. Is that good enough and if it is not good enough, what would be better, reminding ourselves that:

**“The story of God, contained in these pages, revolves around a Person, not a set of principles. The closer we get to Jesus, the more we discover our true identity and purpose in life.”<sup>1</sup>**

What is needed, it seems to me, is a quest for a Jesus-centered life, a challenging life which Jesus tells us will not lead to a comfortable life. What is needed, it seems to me, is for those of us called to the Christian life to stop Googling up Bible passages which agree with our prejudices and biases and instead devote ourselves to the advice of Jesus:

<sup>1</sup> Rick Lawrence

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

We need to be more clear about what we are about. We need to be seen less as up-tight moralists besotted with the sins of others and more as seekers after a life patterned upon the teachings and life of Christ. We need to be less as the people who circle the wagons and more as the people who open themselves to the suffering of others.

Jesus' instruction to "Take up your cross and follow me" is a call to leave behind the sanitized, feel-good, boutique, therapeutic spirituality, that makes no demands, calls for no sacrifice, asks for no conversion, entails no battle against sin, but only soothes and affirms<sup>2</sup>, and turn to the self-denying path shown us by Jesus.

<sup>2</sup> Timothy Dolan

AMEN



## BENEDICTION

I asked at the beginning if this might be a good time to reflect on where we're going. Clearly, we do not have a promising future. We are living in a comfortable bubble, a traditional worship form precious to all of us, but one which does not speak to younger people. Nevertheless, this church and its worship form is the soil from which springs Edd's and Pat's work with the scouts, the church's outreach to our soldiers and those in our reach who are food insecure, Jean's work with the Neighborhood, and so much more. God works with the clay that He has created. Never forget that. You can't be good enough. You are enough.

The Lord bless you and keep you;  
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;  
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

---

---

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

The Bible texts of the Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel lessons are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Church of Christ in the USA, and used by permission.

The Collects, Psalms and Canticles are from the Book of Common Prayer, 1979.

Sermon Copyright 2018 J. Stewart Schneider