

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

February 16, 2025

BLESSING

it's complicated, actually

by Drew Downs

In one of Jesus's most famous moments, he describes a collection of blessings we call the Beatitudes. They are quite jarring because none of them sound particularly like good things that God has done for us. In fact, the person who experiences poverty or mourns for a loved one probably doesn't feel blessed. But this is based on a faulty belief that blessing is related to an innate goodness or that we are being rewarded (or punished) somehow.

What Jesus describes is not a blessing based on our relationship to God, but to one another. People in poverty because their neighbors profit from their life can be assured of wealth and wholeness in God. Those who profit here and live in relative luxury will be offered more struggle in God's reign. Perhaps the struggle many of us have with this is because we adapt to more, so we never feel wealthy. I wonder if this means we don't really know blessing, either.

AFTER THE EPIPHANY

2025

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

At Halftime

You don't have to care about football to know that people watch the Super Bowl. It remains, in the era of streaming, the only thing that pulls in large numbers of live viewers. Some for the game and others for the commercials. But this year, something else: halftime. More people watched this year's halftime show than any other. And that number of viewers was seven million more than any minute of the game itself.

One of the hardest things for a lot of Americans to deal with is when they are not in the cultural majority. Some of us do it on purpose, choosing to prefer our entertainment more "high brow," we might say, even as a Pulitzer Prize winner commanded the stage. Or perhaps we don't like rap music, but the plurality of people clearly do. This can make us feel like we don't understand something.

What is most remarkable about this moment is not the stories we tell ourselves, the opinions we share, or even the tastes we defend. It is the simple fact that so many people saw it live in 2025. We don't do that anymore. And just as we might tell ourselves a story about how we ought to feel about the music, many people of faith will want to put Jesus onto that stage just as easily as they shove him into ads during commercial breaks which are designed to convince the public to buy things they don't need. An ironic, and poor association, if you ask me.

Considering how hard Jesus works in the gospels to avoid fame, prestige, and power, I don't think it would be good for us to put Jesus on a stage any more than to force him onto a throne. His place isn't to be above us, but with us, beside us, inviting us to do the work of love together.

With love,
Drew

AFTER THE EPIPHANY

2025

FOR SUNDAY

Epiphany 6C

February 16, 2025

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 commandments 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.

Reading

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."

AFTER THE EPIPHANY

"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."

Reflection

Jesus has been healing and teaching, collecting disciples and naming twelve of them "apostles". And here we see him at his most resplendent. People are gravitating to him and the evangelist describes a kind of power and authority emanating from him so that people are healed by being around him. It is hard to imagine a more potent image of a messiah for the downtrodden and the frustrated.

Then Jesus preaches what scholars popularly call *The Sermon on the Plain* which shows a startlingly similar *and contrasting* vision than the sermon we read in Matthew's gospel. Here, we get blessings which are followed by woes. And much like the Beatitudes, the blessings are for things we normally *don't* see as good and the woes are for things we usually think *are*.

Today, let us be struck, not by the particular, but the universal. Which is to say, that laughing at something funny today will not cause us to mourn and weep in the afterlife. But it is to say that the Kin-dom is for the poor and the disadvantaged and we need to adjust our thinking.

Perhaps consider it like this. If you are renting your home in this world, understand that you own in God's world. And those that own here, better get used to the idea that you are actually renters in God's eyes.

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