**Luke 6:17-26 February 13, 2022**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson, Luke chapter 6 here re-reading these words. “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! Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It was in 1969 that Congress passed the Public Health Cigarette Smoking Act which required that a warning label be put on every pack of cigarettes sold from that point on. Every pack of cigarettes would come with the words, “Warning: The Surgeon General Has Determined that Cigarette Smoking Is Dangerous to Your Health.” Later the words would be changed and there would be a bunch of different warnings that you could find on the package like “Cigarettes are addictive,” “Tobacco smoke can harm your children,” and “Cigarettes cause fatal lung disease,” just to name a few. These are all serious warnings. I myself am not a smoker, but I was somewhat familiar with cigarettes after my time working at a 7-11 in Auburn, Michigan. No matter what the brand was that people bought one thing was always true about these warnings, they weren’t on the front of the pack, they weren’t flashy like other advertisements or branding on a pack of cigarettes or on other products, they were always on the side, I never found that any smoker who was coming to the 7-11 after buying a pack of cigarettes would actually read the warning and then hand the cigarettes back to me to get a refund, but also, in my experience with all of the smokers I’ve known in my life I can’t say that any smoker was ignorant to the dangers of smoking, they knew what the warnings said and the risks, they just didn’t care.

The Beatitudes that we find here in Luke chapter 6 are a shorter version than what we find in Matthew chapter 5, but Luke also includes right after them the “Woes” or “Warnings” that Jesus says that parallel the blessings. If the blessings are the benefit, the woes are the warning. The blessings are the good, and the woes are the bad. It’s like the marketing of any product, I used the example of cigarettes earlier, but think about anything else you buy and use. The benefit of it is right in the front, it’s in the advertising, it may even be in the name. The consequences of using it are hidden on the back, near the nutrition information, or written in very small tiny print at the end of the advertisement. The warnings may also be speed red during a radio or television ad because it’s a requirement by law, but it’s just a formality, the real message, the reason you are hearing or seeing the advertisement is to emphasize all the good stuff and to ignore the consequences and woes and warnings, they are hidden away. Focus on the good, hide the bad. We want to hear about the blessings we’d rather not hear about the woes.

So how are we blessed before God here in Luke chapter 6, “Blessed are you who are poor, blessed are you who are hungry, blessed are you who weep, blessed are you when others hate you, exclude you, revile you, and spurn your name as evil on account of the Son of Man.” Being poor, hungry, in a state of weeping and being hated don’t actually seem like blessings…not in the way that we interact with the world around us, if anything they seem like curses from God, but these things are what Jesus says will bring blessings in our lives. It seems kinda strange, but then what are the warnings? What things should we avoid? Well, just take all of the blessings and flip them around. “Woe to you who are rich, Woe to you are full now meaning you have enough food, woe to you who laugh now, and woe to you when people speak well of you.” So let me get this straight. God wants me to be poor, hungry, sad, and rejected and is warning me against being financially secure, having enough food, enjoying my life, and other people liking me? That’s the message? That’s the biblical teaching and example for my life this week?

And the answer is….yes. But perhaps not in the way you think. Last week was unique because we didn’t have divine services at Norwalk Lutheran Church or Trinity Lutheran Church in Onekama. Sickness had come to the Sherry house and for the safety of everyone we didn’t get together for worship. It wasn’t your fault there wasn’t worship, but there is a consequence from neglecting the Word of God, even for a week. There is a warning about attending church and being regularly in worship. It says “The more you miss Church, the less you miss Church.” Why is that? What drives us away from hearing the Word of God? It’s a blessing, it’s a time of rest and relaxation, it’s a time to sit back and receive, why wouldn’t we come? Because we feel there are better things to do with our time, and those better things are focused on me rather than God. Missing Church opens up the time, suddenly I have the whole morning, I can do what I want, and suddenly, I miss Church less and then I don’t go anymore at all. The warning for missing Church is the detriment it has to your soul, to your faith, to this wonderful blessing from God that must be fed because You rely upon God for it to exist and without it you have nothing that can receive the wonderful gifts that God is giving here in His Divine Service to you. Without your faith you have no means of being blessed by God, but faith can be very fragile. That’s the warning. To only focus on the blessings and ignore the warnings can mean dire consequences. Life changes, the regular routines can’t always be maintained, but you have to know the risks and dangers of getting off track and neglecting the Word of God.

Is being poor a blessing? It can be in the sense that you have less to keep track of and that you can lean on your family and friends to help you. Can being rich be a curse? Absolutely in it leads to pride and ego and an inflated sense of the wealth coming from you and not from God. Is being hungry a blessing? In so much that it focuses you on your own mortality and reminds you of the daily bread you need. Fasting is a part of focusing our minds on our sin and our need for salvation and it’s a practice that we may do during Lent. Is always being full a curse? Look at our country, are there not dangers from overeating and being full all the time? Warnings about the adverse effect it has on our health as well as the mindset that we constantly need to eat more when others are in need. Is weeping a blessing? It is in the sense that you’ll be comforted, that you will know joy again after your sadness, that you will be brought from a place of anguish to a place of joy, that you will deal with the hurt and the loss that you are experiencing. Is laughing all the time a curse? If you can’t ever deal with the bad things that happen in your life and you’re in denial about the loss that you experience or the pain that you’ve gone through.

But the last ones are the most interesting and profound, and I think they get at the heart of our own failure when it comes to serving the Lord. We crave acceptance and attention from others, and we enjoy being in the good graces of others. The warning that Jesus gives is that you should be wary of when others speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets. If I am a false prophet then I obviously speak and teach falsely, I take the Word and twist it for my own ends. What would I be twisting? What would I be changing? Well, I want people to think well of me, speak well of me, and like me. So whatever it is that God is saying that the people don’t like, I will just say the opposite and then they will like me! I don’t want to say stuff that will cause people to hate me, or exclude me, or revile me, or spurn my name as evil. And obviously being hated and reviled and having your name spurned is serious and horrible and no one would want that, but the one that sticks out the most to me that we are most guilty of is we don’t want to be excluded. We don’t want our friends to exclude us from things because we have told them it’s wrong, that God’s Word says it’s wrong. Because then they won’t like us, and it’s not our fault, it’s what God says, it’s just being a faithful witness to the Word and bearing His name. But we will be hated, and we will be excluded. From events and gatherings of our friends and even our family. And that isolation from the adulation of the world around us, causes us to sacrifice our beliefs and instead to say things that we know they will like. To ignore the clear teaching of God’s Word to simply go with the flow and be liked, to seek only the satisfaction of others and be seen well in their eyes. It’s that complacency and appeasement of others that I must stand before you today and call for what it is. Dangerous. There should be a warning label on seeking other’s approval all the time and only wanting to be liked, because it is detrimental to your faith and will lead only to your destruction.

Is the lesson for today that you are blessed when things are bad and cursed when things are good? It seems so simplistic to say it that way, but if that’s all you remember then…well…yes. God blesses you even in the bad times, God is with you in your struggles, and if your good times turn you away from God and lead you to miss Him and His house and His Service to you less, then yes, even the good times are a curse. Look at where Jesus is in Luke chapter 6, amongst a great crowd, people who have come to see him a multitude from Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to be healed. People who were going through hardships, that’s who Jesus came to be with, and obviously it was people from both rich and poor groups because Jesus speaks about both demographics. We too are a mixture of all different types of people going through all different types of things, but the Lord speaks to us all with the message of salvation, of healing, and of his love. The healing is complete in the ministry of Christ and it is the same for us today. All are forgiven, restored, and redeemed. There is no distinction, there’s no fast pass, there’s no specialty program or perks for giving more or attending more or serving on different boards or doing different things. All are seen in the same way here by God, because all of us are poor in Spirit, and made rich. We are hungry for the Gospel and full. We are sorrowful and weeping on account of our sin, but God forgives us and we laugh and rejoice in joy over being made right again in the eyes of God. And finally, the world may hate us, revile us, exclude us, but what is the world to me? What do I care? I speak the truth of God’s Word, and from that truth comes the acceptance and love of God my Father, of Jesus my Savior, and of the Holy Spirit the Comforter. Not everyone hates me, some friends may exclude me based on my faith but then they were never really my friends to begin with. My family may exclude me and hate me, but I have brothers and sisters in Christ, a bond of faith that is stronger than even blood. You are blessed beyond belief, and don’t let anyone rob you of that joy, and don’t neglect to come when the opportunity is before you. This is the place of peace, and blessings, that God has given you. Rejoice and be glad, come and receive.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.