



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

The Power of the Gospel_ - The Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany- 2_13_2022

AudioClerk Transcription

I speak to you today as a sinner to sinners, as the beloved of God to God's beloved, as one called to bear witness to those called to bear witness. Amen.

When the clergy was discussing this incredible series that we would do, how songs help us hear the gospel, I was kind of imagining things like we did last week of, *Cats in the Cradle*, something wonderful, warm, sentimental, a little culturally relevant. It'd be kind of fun, but I didn't realize that I had been assigned to do today's gospel. There's very little music written about today's gospel. No one wants to know about people who are blessed but people who are also cursed. No one wants to know about the woe part of things. And so much of today's gospel has words of woe, *ouai* is the Greek for it.

But there was one song that came to mind as I was thinking about it. It's by Ben Harper & the Innocent Criminals. One of the greatest albums produced in the late 1990s was the last time I was culturally relevant. And it is all about today's reading from the gospel of Luke. And Claire is going to perform it. And you can find the words on the next page, right after the gospel itself.

It will make a weak man mighty
It will make a mighty man fall
It will fill your heart and hands
Or leave you with nothing at all
It's the eyes for the blind
And legs for the lame
It is love for hate
And pride for shame

That's the power of the gospel
That's the power of the gospel
That's the power of the mighty power
That's the power of the gospel

Gospel on the water
Gospel on the land
The gospel in every woman
The gospel in every man

Gospel in the garden
Gospel in the trees
The gospel that's inside of you
The gospel inside of me

That's the power of the gospel
That's the power of the gospel
That's the power of the mighty power
That's the power of the gospel

In the hour of richness
In the hour of need
For all of creation
Comes from the gospel seed
Now you may leave tomorrow
And you may leave today
But you've got to have the gospel
When you start out on your way

That's the power of the gospel
That's the power of the gospel
That's the power of the mighty power
That's the power of the gospel

It will make a weak man mighty. It will make a mighty man fall. Fill your heart and hands or leave you with nothing at all. It's eyes for the blind and legs for the lame. It is love for hate and pride for shame. I see three ways in which this incredible song helps me hear this reading today from the Gospel of Luke.

And the first is that it describes a kind of world that is upside down. And we have a tendency when we read this version of the beatitudes, where Luke has Jesus on a plane, as in some ways, the equivalent to the beatitudes we read in Matthew. And that for years and years has been something that we have constructed and made into a utopia. Into something that is far off, into something that we don't really believe to be true, but somehow represents the greatest part of ourselves that we wish was true.

But when Jesus speaks to us today in Luke, He is not so much describing a utopia as trying to describe a place out of which people would act if they were fully in line with his message, if they were somehow fully on board with who Jesus was. And you see that topsy turvy world, that world of incredible inversion and the two words that I use to explore the different ways people feel emptiness and powerlessness and helplessness and fullness and richness and happiness. Jesus uses the word *makarios*. *Makarioi* is the Greek for "blessed."

And this is to describe not just a state of favor, it's to describe a kind of good fortune that you have experienced, a kind of break in your luck that went the right way. And that's hard for us to imagine. None of us would want to describe being poor or being hungry or weeping as a moment in which luck broke our way. But Jesus says there's a kind of fortune, a kind of blessing, a *makarioi* in that state of being. And the word for woe that is used in the gospels, as I just said, is *ouai*, which is based on the Hebrew word *oy*. We don't really have a good definition for it. It can mean a kind of judgment, or it could mean a kind of sadness, almost like someone might say alas. It's meant to convey the sense in which there is a loss of luck, a kind of lack of blessing, a kind of isolation that is almost a source of pity.

So Jesus in today's gospel is describing a topsy turvy world, a time in which things have been completely inverted. Jesus is describing the state of being impoverished as blessed, the state of being hungry as blessed, as a kind of turn in our luck. The state of being hated as blessed. And this should be to us a kind of affront because none of us wants to face hunger. None of us wants to face poverty. None of us wants to face revision and revulsion and pain and rejection, but Jesus says such people are blessed because in those moments, we have a kind of chance to see that God can be greater in our lives. And the people who are full, the people who are rich, the people who have a wonderful reputation, these are people that don't know brokenness. And Christ has come to walk alongside and to transform our brokenness.

So one way that I hear this gospel, again, through the eyes of this song is I realize that we're not talking about some place out of our realm of being, but rather the reality that you and I often experience in our lives because riches and favor and fullness, these are momentary blessings in our lives. They're not things you can fully rely on, but Christ is to be found and the blessing of God is to be found in those spaces where there is brokenness, where there is lack, where there is hunger, where there is weeping. God is most present there than anywhere else.

The second thing I want you to see in this incredible song is the rhythm of it is that of a movement. It's like the songs that would be sung on the buses that would go down to protest segregation in Birmingham. People would sing those songs. And one of the great leaders in the civil rights movement was known simply because she could sing the songs that got everybody going. The movement was afloat and afoot. And we had an option. Do we actually go with the movement? Do we actually go with it or do we resist it? And movements always destabilize the status quo. They always call us into questioning the things that we take for granted. They always invite us to join in that movement so that we might be transformed.

Movements are not institutions. Institutions can replicate an identity, can confer and honor, can help you get credential, but movements are moments in which

you yourself are transformed in the midst of it. You are changed by the step you take. By the moment you hear that good news from Christ and decide that you will be with the poor and the hungry, and those who are excluded, in those moments, you join a movement in which you will be changed and transformed. So the second way that this song helps me hear the gospel is that it helps me see that transformation is what Jesus is inviting me to do. Jesus is not finished with me. At the moment Jesus tells me He loves me, but Jesus bids me, follow me, follow Christ.

The third thing that is operating this incredible song is there is this moment in which the disciples and Jesus have an opportunity to come into contact with true power. In today's gospel, there is this incredible moment. Jesus has come from Capernaum where he had done all this healing. He moved down and gathered His disciples by name. People are coming from all over to hear Jesus. Power is coming out of Jesus when people just touch Him. But Jesus tells them that the power of the gospel is not the power of just physical healing. It's not a return to where you were. It's an invitation to be transformed by God's power, working through you, making you better and transforming you and your community.

The power of God is found in those moments in which we encounter and recognize the precariousness of our lives. And we understand that God could even be present among the hungry, among the poor, among those who are rejected. It's in those moments that we encounter the power of Christ, as we read today in 1 Corinthians, to bring life out of death, the power of resurrection.

And there is a final moment that I see in this incredible song. And that is powerful because it is not entirely mentioned, but it's a kind of promise of joy because everything else that we tend to cling to in this world, the things that are confronted by the convicting words of being rich or full or popular. All of those things are merely categories of happiness and happiness is a kind of state of affairs where you get something that pleases you. And as you know, as well as I do, the things that please you, they have a kind of shelf life. You're happy for one moment, and then immediately something larger or better or shinier comes into your midst and you suddenly are unhappy until you get that.

Happiness is something that will always elude you. There will never be a source of prosperity that will truly satisfy you. There'll never be a point in your life in which you have enough acclaim. There'll never be enough people to like you. There'll never be enough people to cater to you. Happiness will always erode and fade, such is its nature. But joy is different. Joy is living into a kind of relationship in which we know why we've been placed on this earth. Joy is a kind of relationship that can see through all of the difficulties of our life, because we know that we have someone beloved alongside of us, someone who will walk with us, someone that won't let us go, someone that will accept us and work with us and be with us and believe in us throughout our lives.

And the power that Jesus speaks in today's reading from the Gospel of Luke is not only the power of resurrection, but the power of joy itself, because Jesus has come to give these words because Jesus himself is the joy of God. Jesus has come to live in relationship with us. Jesus has come to be with us and bid us, follow him. All of these things have been said to disciples, to you, to me. What will be your answer? Where will you find your power? Are you willing to join the movement? Are you ready to be changed and transformed?

Amen.