

Working Backwards
Epiphany 6 2019, Wall of Gifts Exercise
St. Andrew's Kelowna

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I speak with you this morning in the presence of God and the beloved people of God. Amen.

This morning we are given Luke's version of the Beatitudes. These are so familiar that they are often oversimplified and given names like the be-attitudes, the attitudes we're supposed to have as Christians. What Jesus is communicating through the beatitudes however is far deeper and for more exciting than an attitude.

Just prior to this passage Jesus has called 12 of his disciples to become apostles, to be the ones sent out to witness to all that God is doing. And as they begin this life as apostles he offers them, and the crowd who is listening, this absolutely bizarre list of blessings and curses. This idea of pairing blessings and curses is not new, there are multiple chapters in the Book of Deuteronomy that clearly lay out the idea of the blessed and the cursed based on whether or not someone is obedient to God's laws. The trajectory of the logic there is simple: you obey and you are blessed with all kinds of fortune and well being but if you do not, woe to you, as all kinds of destruction and poverty come your way.

But..... Jesus says it is the poor who are blessed and the rich who are cursed....the logic everyone is familiar with doesn't work. And it doesn't work for a reason.

What Jesus is saying to those apostles who are sent out, those trying to figure out what on earth that means, is that through the new thing God is doing the poor and the hungry are blessed because God's justice is coming; God's kingdom cannot be separated from God's justice. The rich and the full who have it all now and like the status quo just as it is, aren't going to be happy at all as God's kingdom is revealed, as the captives are set free, as sight is brought to blind as the law is deeply fulfilled, not just obeyed but fulfilled, through Jesus the Christ (Luke 4).

And so Jesus tell us the signs of the kingdom, we will know it's the kingdom being revealed when the poor and the hungry are the blessed ones, when those exclude belong, when the hungry are fed, when those who live in a state of mourning begin to laugh, when the very rich and mighty start to think they might not actually be all that blessed and start to get hungry... look for that, be about that, witness to that new thing at work!

And so when it comes to obedience and faithful lives, Jesus asks us in a way to work backwards: if the signs of the kingdom look like this then how do I need to live in order to be able to see them and name them and help the Kingdom come to birth? It's a different way of thinking than the obedience communicated in Deuteronomy. Perhaps it's even a more demanding one because we don't do things to be rewarded with the Kingdom, the Kingdom *is*, because of Christ's death and resurrection, and

we live our lives striving to discern how to be better doors and windows to that new creation than walls. This work of discerning how to shape our lives, inside and outside, to participate in the Kingdom of God is the very constant and fantastic work we are each called to do. We are called as a community to also discern this together, as the ones sent, as part of the church sent, to witness to the Kingdom of God inaugurated in Christ's death and resurrection.

One way we can start working backwards is to hold that big picture and name together the gifts we have been given in order to do this work. And so in just a few minutes we will all take sheets of paper and markers and write down really specific gifts and assets we see in the parish and tape them to the wall.

For example.....

After church we will collate them to see what themes comes together for us as we head into 2019.

So let's take a moment for silent reflection before we begin, holding before us those signs: "Blessed are you who are poor for yours is the Kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry... blessed are you when people hate you because of the Son of Man...

Amen.