

## **“You Are THERE!”**

### **Dear Friends in Christ:**

Some of you, like me, are old enough to remember a television series produced from 1953 to 1957, and renewed in 1971-1972, entitled, “*You Are There*,” hosted by long time CBS newsman, Walter Cronkite. The series featured reenactments of historical events as if they were taking place in the present moment, based on information and insights gleaned from books, essays, letters and eye witness reports. There are DVD episodes available today from Amazon Prime, and I remember watching some of the programs after we got our first black and white TV. I was always enthralled as a kid by the dramatic, opening announcement for each episode: “*You Are THERE!*”

I think that was St. Luke's purpose in writing his Gospel, the focus of our Epiphany sermon series. Luke's goal was not simply to “*write an orderly account*” on the life and teachings of Jesus, but through those Holy Spirit inspired words to take us “*there*” to be “*with*” Jesus. Luke, for example, invites his readers to share the intimate experience of Mary as the birth of Jesus is foretold and fulfilled. We get to “*hear*” in the mind's ear, the “*clop, clop*” of the donkey's feet on the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. We get to “*exhale a sigh of relief*” when the expecting mother “*wrapped her child in swaddling clothes and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.*” (Luke 2:7) It is the ageless Christmas narrative that always places us “*there*” with Jesus who was born to “*save us from our sins!*”

Every incident, you see, every word, every moment with Jesus in Luke's Gospel is an epiphany, a revelation, bringing deeper spiritual insight and implication for our daily lives. When we sat in these "*pews*" three weeks ago hearing about Jesus returning to Nazareth (Luke 4:14-30) to his hometown synagogue, were you not "*startled*" that the people would "*turn*" on Jesus, "*rejecting*" the good news of God's Kingdom, ready to "*throw*" Him off a cliff, their rejection a prelude to the reality of Good Friday's horrific chant: "*Crucify Him! Crucify Him!*" (Luke 23:21)

When Luke turns another page on this One named Jesus, does not the Word "*capture*" our attention, "*amazing*" us with His authority and power, able to drive out demons, healing the sick and proclaiming the Good News that "*God reigns/Jesus reigns*" even when it doesn't look like it or feel like it! (Luke 4:31-44) And last week, when Jesus called "*ordinary, sinful*" fisherman to follow Him, did it not give "*reassurance*" to you and me that there's still a place for us to serve in God's Kingdom, so no need to be afraid, just trust him and follow Him? (Luke 5:1-11)

And now today, a new episode of "***You Are THERE,***" as Luke records that Jesus "*came down*" from the mountainside with the 12 apostles he had just named, "*and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people...waiting to hear him and to be healed of their diseases.*" (Luke 6:17-19) What a moment! What a rally! What a stirring crowd! What amazing outcomes! What a Man...this Jesus from Nazareth, the Son of God, fulfilling the Biblical, Messianic promise: "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor...recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who*

are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” (Luke 4:18-19) Oh, to have been **THERE!**

But do you think we would have been ready to **“hear”** the Sermon on the Plain that follows the healing; a parallel to the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus **“looking at his disciples,”** and challenging them to go deeper in their walk with Him? This is one of those moments when followers of Jesus realize that His Kingdom teachings are truly upside down, challenging the expectations and attitudes people have about life that is full and abundant and blessed! He challenges everything that people think is normal, and flips it over to show how things really are from God’s perspective, and how they will be in eternity.

Four blessings...and four woes! Are you ready to go **there** as Jesus *“lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said:”*

MEN READ	WOMEN READ
<i>“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.</i>	“But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.
<i>“Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied.</i>	“Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry.
<i>“Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.</i>	“Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.
<i>“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.</i>	“Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.

Those words are so contrasting and conflicting, addressing the realities that not only the disciples would face, but also the *“great multitude of people who came to **hear** him and to be **healed** of their diseases.”* I’ll just bet they really liked seeing *“those who were troubled with unclean spirits being cured.”* In

fact, Luke tells us: “*And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all.*” But “*blessed*” are the poor and the hungry, those mourning and weeping; those who are hated, excluded and reviled because they love Jesus? And “*woe*” to me if I have little stashed away for retirement; have a full pantry, happy times and the regard of my peers? I wonder, if we were “*there,*” what our reaction and would have been? What our response is today?

Jeremiah, in today’s Old Testament Lesson, captures the same contrast in reverse: *Thus says the LORD:*

<i>Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD.</i>	<i>Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD.</i>
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Jeremiah 17:5-8 English Standard Version (ESV)

What in the devil is this all about and *what does this mean?* A good Lutheran question, right? And the answer that came for me in studying this text, is that as long as we live in a sinful, broken world, competing with mixed up priorities, God’s people, disciples and followers of Jesus, are always called to higher principles, greater values, deeper trust and faith in God’s kingdom plan fulfilled in Jesus, no matter what life in the “*plains*” throws our way. Life cannot be all about “*here*” – or about us and what’s happening to us - if we believe in eternity’s “*there!*”

So, when things aren’t going well; struggling to make ends meet, down on your luck, poor in spirit and possessions; hungering for something more, grieving losses, desiring healing, tired of the daily pressures of trying to live as a Christian in these crazy times; feeling guilty about the class warfare between the haves and the have nots, the right and the left, wondering and worried about the next stock plunge; failing health or

shattered reputation...**through it all** there is this overwhelming Kingdom of God promise by the King of Kings and Lord of Lords: *“Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward in heaven is great!”*

I think the essence of the tension we all face...and the blessing we all are promised, is captured in this prayer: *I asked God!*

I asked God for strength, that I might achieve;  
*I was made weak, that I might learn humbly to obey;*  
I asked for health, that I might do greater things,  
*I was given infirmity, that I might do better things;*  
I asked for riches, that I might be happy,  
*I was given poverty, that I might be wise;*  
I asked for power, that I might have the praise of others,  
*I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God;*  
I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life,  
*I was given life, that I might enjoy all things;*  
I got nothing that I asked for,  
*But everything that I had hoped for;*  
Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered,  
*And I am, of all people, most richly blessed.*

(Creed: Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine, NYC)

That’s the *“be-attitude”* of hope and faith, perseverance and trust, that I hear God calling us to embrace today by His grace through faith in Christ. Life here in the *“plains”* for followers of Jesus is challenging, it’s a topsy-turvy, upside down, messy, hurting place; and we all experience good times and bad; joys and sorrows; gains and losses; life and death. That’s why Jesus in the Bible always comes down from the *“mountain”* to the *“plains.”* The Son of God takes on human flesh to be One *“with us”* and *“for us,”* our Emmanuel! Luke, later in this Gospel, will take us to another Mount called

Calvary. “*There*” on Golgotha’s Hill, nailed to the rugged beams of a Cross, Jesus will be reviled, ridiculed and persecuted; stripped bare of his clothing, hungry and thirsty, mocked by the crowds and a crown of thorns placed on His sacred head, living the life we couldn’t and dying the death our sin deserved!

“*There*” He will pray, “*Father forgive them!*” “*There*” He will give His perfect life for our imperfections, love so amazing, so divine that a thief next to Him will pray, “*Remember me when you come into your Kingdom.*” Jesus’ reply is our daily hope, “*Today, you will be with me in Paradise.*” And then to “*seal the deal,*” Jesus comes down from that mountain, buried in borrowed tomb, rising three days later to give “*strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow*” to all who believe! Oh, how I pray “*you are there*” to claim that blessed victory!

In the name of Christ. AMEN.

