

Luke 6:17-26  
February 17, 2019

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

Jesus is an expert on being present, isn't he? I mean he could have just stayed on the mountain top with his disciples. This is where he was just prior to our gospel lesson. Verse 12 and 13 tell us, "Jesus went out to a mountainside and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose 12 of them, whom he designated apostles." He is present with God in his prayer, he is present with the twelve, and then we hear the words our passage opens with, "He went down with them and stood on a level place."

It would have been all too easy to stay on the mountain. Alone in the peace and quiet. Alone with only himself and God. Alone with those closest to him. But this isn't who Jesus is. It isn't who God is. Jesus knows truly seeing the other means venturing down the mountain and being face-to-face and peering into the eyes of those who have been following them. Touching their ailing bodies. Could he have healed them from the mountaintop? Sure, he is fully God after all; but, once again this is not who Jesus is. It is not who God is.

Jesus is an expert on being present. Seeing people for who they are and what they are experiencing in their life. And in order to most effectively do that Luke has Jesus coming down the mountain to a level place to stand side-by-side with those who have been following him. People seeking to be healed of their diseases. People troubled by impure spirits. People deemed sinners and outcasts. People ritually unclean. People isolated. Perhaps even lepers who were relegated to the outskirts of town and required to yell, "Unclean, Unclean" anytime someone approached them. One prevalent theology of the day held these people had incurred their place in society, the ailment they were dealing with, the plight they were experiencing because of something they had done which had caused God to curse them. They stood outside of God's blessings while those who prospered, stood secure in their positions of power, were favored by God and had attained their lofty places in society because of their righteous living.

Yet, Jesus sees them. He is present with them. They are not unworthy of his touch and love. He sees the hurt they are experiencing. The hunger they have. Perhaps, physical hunger but also spiritual and mental hunger. The hunger each of us has to be seen, loved, and cared for. To be somebody. Jesus sees those who are weeping. He sees those who have been made to feel less than human. Who have been despised and hated. He sees them because he stands among them. He is an expert at seeing and being present.

I came across a story this week, as told by Reverend Mark Larson, a Lutheran pastor in Atlanta, Georgia. It goes like this:

There's a wonderful little video that I came across years ago that I keep thinking about. It begins with a businessman going about his usual day, except the day isn't going very well. It seems as each minute passes, the day gets worse and his frustration level rises. He starts to pull out of the driveway, and almost runs over a child on a bike. He gets to his favorite coffee outlet, but a woman steals his parking place. The man in front of him in line places an order for his entire office building. When he finally gets to the counter, he's told that it will be a few minutes because they have to brew a fresh batch.

Sitting in a corner, seething in frustration, a man walks up and hands him a pair of sunglasses and then disappears. Confused, he puts the glasses on and all of sudden little bubbles, like in the Sunday comics, appear above everyone's head. Instead of dialog however, he can read what is really going on in everyone's life.

The woman who cut him off is distracted because her child is sick. The man who placed the huge coffee order is worried about a medical diagnosis he just received. The barista is struggling with addiction. And finally, returning home a bit shaken, he sees the child again with a bubble above his head which says, "Just need someone who cares."<sup>i</sup>

The man gets out of his car and walks over to help the boy fix his bike.

What would our world look like if we were able to see through the sunglasses that enabled this man to see truly what each of the people he encountered were

experiencing and feeling? How would we treat each other if we could really see what was in everyone's bubble? Might the walls and divisions we create come tumbling down. Might the fear and prejudice we harbor give way to empathy, love, and compassion. Might the kingdom Jesus is ushering in become more visible and a reality here and now.

We can only see into the bubbles of our neighbors by coming down the mountain and standing with them on a level place. Face-to-face. Eye-to-eye. Hand-to-hand. Shoulder-to-shoulder. It is only then we will truly see the other. See as Jesus sees. Love as Jesus loves.

To me this passage about many things. It is once again Jesus reiterating the words he spoke in Chapter 4,

The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to set the oppressed free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (4:18-19, NIV)

And it's also a passage in which Jesus have moved to living out those words in being present. This passage is about giving hope to those who need it most. It is about opening the eyes of those who think they have it all. But in all reality, theirs is a false sense of security that may be getting in the way of their relationship with God, with their neighbor, and limiting their ability to be see and be present with those for whom Jesus says have a special place in the kingdom of God. It is a passage who that many of us at times in our lives here as profoundly good news but at other times in our lives here as a stern warning from our Lord and Savior.

The mountaintop is not a bad place to be. It is a gift from God, and we need those moments alone with God. Alone with those closest to us. To find life. To find rest. To seek clarity. But coming down the mountain is also a gift from God. To be present with our neighbor created in the same image of God we were created in.

To see her. To be with him. To know him or her as Jesus does. Thankfully Jesus did come down that mountain, because ultimately, we all stand at the base of the mountain, broken, vulnerable, in need of Jesus' love, forgiveness and grace and that is where he meets us and assures us, we are not alone. We are loved! We are blessed! We are precious! Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> From <http://day1.org/8331-mark-larson-we-deserve-to-weep>, sermon by Rev. Mark Larson.