

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one who levels the field for all people, Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

I don't usually compare Gospel stories from one Gospel to the other. I prefer to allow each Gospel to stand on its own and to try to get the meaning out of the story the author wanted his original readers to understand and then to relate that meaning to our lives today. This Gospel text is a little different and today I'm going to break my rule and do a little bit of comparing Luke's version of Jesus' Sermon on the Plain, to Matthew's version of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

I guess the first thing I notice is Luke's version of Jesus' sermon is the location. It's not an insignificant thing that Luke brings Jesus down from the mountain to the level of both the crowd and his own 12 handpicked disciples. Luke's Jesus isn't going to elevate himself above the people he came to save. He gets right down on their level with them. Many of you know that I'm the baby of the family and have 4 sisters. I should say I had 4 sisters. Three of them have already gone ahead to be with Jesus in the Church Triumphant, but growing up I have great memories of all four of "The Sisters." I have one very special memory of my sister Pam. I guess I was about 4 or 5 years old and I loved to play with my cars and trucks. The other sisters would read to me or play games with me, but I can only remember Pam ever getting down on the floor and playing with my cars and trucks with me. Each sister has a special place in my heart, but that memory of

Pam will always be among my favorite memories and I will never forget that she was the only one willing to get down on the sometimes-dirty floor and look me in the eye and play with me on my level.

I think that's one of the great messages Luke gets across to his disciples back then and still today. Our God is willing to get down here on this very dirty earth and live and play with us humans right here on our level. He doesn't stay up on Mount Sinai as he did when he gave the 10 Commandments to Moses. He isn't stuck in heaven so far away that God can't relate to the human condition. No, he's right here on the plain and Luke even tells us Jesus lifted his eyes and looked right at his disciples. Jesus lived and taught and showed us what life can be like under God's reign. God comes to everyday people on the plain where the everyday work is done and where everyday life is lived.

That brings me to the second major difference I noticed between Luke's Sermon on the Plain and Matthew's Sermon on the Mount. In Luke's version Jesus speaks very plainly. There isn't any sugar coating or softening the Word of God. Matthew spiritualizes Jesus words, but not so in Luke. In Luke's Gospel, when Jesus says "blessed are the poor" or "blessed are the hungry" he's talking about real poor people and actual hungry people. On the other hand, Matthew has Jesus spiritualizing and softening these prophetic pronouncements when Jesus says, "blessed are the poor in spirit" and "blessed are those who hunger and thirst

for righteousness.” There is no denying Luke’s version of Jesus has a definite preference for the poor and the hungry as well as those who weep and who are reviled and spoken about in bad ways. If that’s not enough of an offence to our sensibilities Luke has Jesus restate these blessings as woes. Not only are the poor blessed, but woe to the rich. Not only are the hungry blessed, but those who have eaten their fill are cursed. These words were meant for the Disciples and for those who want to be followers of Jesus. They are words of challenge and a description of what a Christian life looks like.

How many of you are poor? How many of you know real hunger, like the kind where you go for more than a day or two without food? Many of us know what it’s like to weep? We’ve all shed tears over the loss of a loved one or when someone has hurt us badly. Probably many of us also know the sadness and isolation of being excluded and maybe even some have been spoken of badly behind our backs when you tried to share your faith. These blessings and woes are not an instruction or a prescription of how to be blessed by God; rather, they’re a description or an explanation of how God’s blessings flow. The poor don’t have to wait for judgment day for their reward. Theirs *is* the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus isn’t promising them some pie in the sky, by and by future reward. Theirs *is* the Kingdom right here and right now. The same is true for those who have been hated, reviled, defamed, and excluded. Their reward *is* great in heaven. Again,

present tense right now! I guess hunger and weeping are conditions you have to work through. You can't get full until you eat, and you can't begin to laugh until you begin to deal with your grief. By placing the blessings in the present here and now, Luke wants us to realize that through our baptism into Christ's death and resurrection, we have already become members of God's kingdom, here on earth. The good news for those of us who weep and those who hunger is, God is with us right here in the midst of the junk we're going through and will never abandon us in our suffering and pain. There's no mistake, in this passage from Luke, we're being called to live today, as members of God's kingdom, to pattern our life after Jesus, who not only spent time in prayer discerning his relationship with God, and following his Father's will, but also cared and ministered to people in need, especially those we often ignore.

I thought about how we answer this challenge and what more might we do to reach out with the love of God to those who are often ignored. You're going to hear a lot about the Lutheran World Relief Quilting ministry next Month when National Quilting Day comes, but this week I received some information from LWR about the quilts that were distributed in 2018. First off, there were more than 600, 000 of them and they went to 25 different countries. They were beautiful reminders of God's love and presence to refugees and to the poorest of the poor in places like Tanzania, Kenya, the country of Georgia and many other places where

poverty is the only way of life. This congregation already shows God's blessings to people who would otherwise be excluded and possibly never know about God's love for them. You're doing a great job living out Jesus' challenge to discipleship!

Part of me just kept wondering, what more we might do... As I listened to the news over the past couple of weeks and heard so many of you express your disapproval of the expanded abortion laws in some of our states, I realized there are so many people who make the decision to abort their baby because they can't see any other good alternative. With my latest grandchild being just over 1 month old I can't stop thinking about all the potential grandparents that will never experience the joy I've been able to feel. Then, God put all the information about Lutheran World Relief in front of my eyes this week and I read about the Baby Kits some churches are putting together. Bringing a baby into the world is a difficult and scary thing for every parent, but for those living in poverty it can be overwhelming. Keeping a new baby healthy, clean and comfortable takes a lot of resources. The items included in a Baby Care Kit provide the basics a family needs to care for their new members in the way they hope! Worry will always be present for all parents, but having some essentials allows them to enjoy and get to know their little ones and introduce them with pride to the world. On the communication table across from the Church Office I have several copies of the instructions for putting LWR Baby Care Kits together. Please take one and let's

start caring for the poorest newborns in the world as Jesus challenges us to do.

This is one way we can counter all the negative news about mothers making the tough decision to give up the life of their unborn baby with a bit of positive Good News and a way for us to share God's love.

I have one more random thought that kept coming to me as I pondered this Gospel text. I asked earlier how many of you are poor and not many raised their hands. The thing I couldn't get out of my head this week was the note found in the pocket of Martin Luther's bathrobe or pajamas after he passed from this life. The note he kept in his pocket all the way to his death read simply, "We are all beggars..." When it comes to our salvation, in the final analysis, it isn't about the rich or poor, fasting or satisfied. It isn't about preaching about Jesus until you become so annoying people revile you, or even about how much you weep when you're sad. The *only* way to enter the Kingdom of Heaven is by the pure and free Grace of God. For that Grace we all come before a generous and merciful God as beggars hoping to find the bread of life...

May you hear God's Word speak to you on your level today. May God's Word inspire and challenge you to rededicate your life to follow in our Lord's footsteps. May you come to understand as Luther did, we're all poor beggars and we're all blessed by God's grace with the incredible gift of eternal life that begins immediately as we take our first steps to follow where our Master has trod. Amen.