

Our Sunday Readings

JEREMIAH 17:5-8
 PSALM 1:1-4,6
 I CORINTHIANS 15:12,16-20
 LUKE 6:17,20-26

Blessings & Woes

JEREMIAH 17:5-8

Reading closely

1. What are some reasons God's people would be wrong to trust in human beings?
2. What imagery does Jeremiah use to describe those who don't trust in God?
3. What imagery does Jeremiah use to describe those who *do* trust in God?
4. How powerful do you find this imagery?
5. Which image seems to fit Jeremiah? Why?
6. How might the people have reacted to these words?

Living the word

7. Describe a time you trusted in God. What did that require of you?
8. When might it be appropriate to trust in human beings?

THE FIRST READING

Clear and present danger

Jeremiah lived when the southern kingdom of Israel was constantly threatened by stronger nations, from Assyria to Egypt to Babylon. The northern part of Israel fell to Assyria in 722 BC, so Jeremiah knew full well the dangers faced by the people of the remaining southern kingdom.

Familiar imagery

Writers of this era frequently used imagery in which they contrasted dead or dying vegetation with flora that was healthy and flourishing. They used such imagery in order to inspire people to live virtuously. The reward of virtue is a good and long life.

In Psalm 1, for example, the healthy trees represent people who uphold God's laws. These people, *the just*, enjoy a long, prosperous life just like trees that are near flowing water.

Trusting in God

For Jeremiah, the healthy trees are those who trust that God will not let them be defeated by foreign nations or tribes. Israel shouldn't ask Egypt to help them fight Assyria, for example.

Other Israelites did want to form such alliances. Whenever Israel formed a military alliance with a foreign nation or tribe, however, the Israelites inevitably began to worship the other people's gods and goddesses. By not entering such alliances, the people were far more likely to be obedient and faithful to God, who had promised to protect them.

LUKE 6:17, 20-26

Reading closely

1. What might be some differences between the *great crowd* of disciples and the other people who gather around Jesus?
2. Why do you think Luke notes that Jesus taught the people on *level ground*?
3. How are the first three beatitudes interconnected?
4. How are the first three beatitudes related to the fourth beatitude?
5. How are the woes interconnected?
6. How might people have reacted to these beatitudes?
7. How might people have reacted to the woes?
8. Did Jesus condemn the rich?
9. How do you think Jesus wanted the rich to respond?
10. What does this passage reveal about God?
11. What does it reveal about God's kingdom?

Living the word

12. Does anything in this passage surprise you?
13. How does this passage invite you to think and live a little differently?

THE GOSPEL READING

Jesus' teachings

By this point in Luke's Gospel, Jesus' ministry is well under way. He has expelled demons, cured the sick, and called disciples, including the Twelve. Now we'll begin hearing some of what Jesus preached. These passages parallel Matthew 5–7.

There are notable differences between the beatitudes in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Although the Gospel-writers modified the words of Jesus that had been passed down to them, Jesus himself probably did not say the exact same thing every place he went.

Beatitudes and woes

Beatitude comes from the Latin word for *blessed*. In the Old Testament, people are happy because God has *blessed* them for being good and acting well. (See Psalm 1, Proverb 3:13, and Sirach 14:1-2.)

Woe to you is an expression that many prophets used to warn people that they would be filled with *sorrow and great distress* because of their sins. (See Isaiah 5:8, Amos 5:18, and Zephaniah 3:1.)

The Great Reversal

A major theme of Luke's Gospel is the lifting up of those who are poor, suffering, or in otherwise vulnerable positions. God simultaneously humbles those with wealth and power. This theme is in Mary's Magnificat, for example (Luke 1:46-55). Luke thus includes these particular beatitudes with their corresponding woes.

Poverty

Luke's beatitudes differ from the ones in Matthew's Gospel. First, they are in the second person; Jesus speaks them directly to his listeners. Second, they refer to the economically poor, to those who are physically hungry and who suffer because of it. God favors these weaker members of society.

God's concern for the most vulnerable members of society is evident throughout the Bible, yet society tends to favor the rich and powerful. Jesus insists that God welcomes into his kingdom those whom others have neglected or excluded. Jesus then strongly rebukes those who take comfort in their wealth and status.

PRAYER

by St. Clement of Rome

We beg you, Lord, to help and to defend us.

Deliver the oppressed,
 pity the lowly, raise the fallen,
 show your face to the needy,
 heal the sick,
 bring back those who have gone astray,
 feed the hungry, lift up the weak,
 and deliver captives.

Let all nations know that you alone are God,
 Jesus Christ is your Son,
 and we are your people,
 the sheep that you pasture.

We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.