

Sermon for February 1, 2026 – The 4th Sunday after Epiphany

Luke 6:20–26 EHV

Theme: Jesus' Disciples are:

1. Spiritually poor, yet very rich (vv. 20, 24)
2. Spiritually hungry, yet very satisfied (vv. 21, 25)
3. Weeping spiritually, yet full of laughter (vv. 21, 25)
4. Persecuted, yet greatly rewarded (vv. 22, 23, 26)

²⁰He lifted up his eyes to his disciples and said: Blessed are you who are poor, because yours is the kingdom of God. ²¹Blessed are you who hunger now, because you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, because you will laugh. ²²Blessed are you whenever people hate you, and whenever they exclude and insult you and reject your name as evil because of the Son of Man. ²³“Rejoice in that day and leap for joy because of this: Your reward is great in heaven! The fact is, their fathers constantly did the same things to the prophets.” ²⁴But woe to you who are rich, because you are receiving your comfort now. ²⁵Woe to you who are well fed now, because you will be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, because you will be mourning and weeping. ²⁶Woe to you when all people speak well of you, because that is how their fathers constantly treated the false prophets.

What kind of life can you expect as a believer in Jesus?

Prosperity preachers tell us that God wants believers to enjoy earthly wealth, success, and happiness. God owns everything, they say. And just as a good daddy wants his children to have a good life, your heavenly Father wants to give you health, riches, and ease. If you don't have those things, the problem must be your faith. Believe harder, and God will bless you with everything your heart desires.

But is that true?

The Bible does describe God as our loving Father who promises good gifts to His children; and He often gives us earthly blessings: daily bread, health, work, family, and more. He invites us to ask Him for anything in Jesus' name.

But is it true that we should expect a carefree, comfortable life here on earth as a sign of His favour?

No, because Jesus never promised us such a life. Instead, He said, *“In this world you are going to have trouble. But be courageous! I have overcome the world.”*ⁱ

So what kind of life should we expect as followers of Christ?

Let us listen to Jesus Himself answer that question under the theme: **Jesus' Disciples are** 1) Spiritually poor, yet very rich; 2) Spiritually hungry, yet very satisfied; 3) Weeping spiritually, yet full of laughter; 4) Persecuted, yet greatly rewarded.

Part One: Jesus' disciples are spiritually poor, yet very rich.

Our sermon text occurred during a high point in Jesus' early ministry. He had just appointed twelve of His disciples to be apostles. As He descended from a mountain, a large crowd gathered on a plateau, eager to hear Him preach.

The disciples saw astonishing things. Demons fled at Jesus' command. Diseases vanished. The crowds marvelled. It would have been easy for them to imagine a future filled with glory, popularity, and success.

Perhaps that is why Luke tells us that ²⁰ [Jesus] lifted his eyes to his disciples and said:

Blessed are you who are poor, because yours is the kingdom of God.

The word translated as “blessed” should be understood as “happy.” Jesus is saying: “Consider yourself fortunate if you are poor.”

The word translated as “poor” in our text refers to someone so helpless that he needs to beg to stay alive. Think of Lazarus in Jesus' parable—lying at the rich man's gate, covered with sores, too weak to help himself.ⁱⁱ

Understand that the poverty Jesus calls blessed is not physical, but spiritual: “*Blessed are the poor in spirit,*”ⁱⁱⁱ Jesus says in Matthew's Gospel. They are those who know they have nothing to offer God, those who, like the tax collector in the temple, cry out, “*God, be merciful to me, a sinner!*”^{iv}

Martin Luther's final written words were: “We are all beggars. This is true.” Jesus calls the person “blessed” who understands this. No one is righteous before God.^v No one can earn heaven. Our sins have so deeply indebted us to the LORD that we can't do anything but beg for his mercy and forgiveness.^{vi}

How blessed you are if you realize this. Why? Because to the spiritually poor belongs the kingdom of God. The Lord forgives your sins, rules your heart through His Gospel, and declares you a coheir with Christ of eternal life.

²⁴*But woe to you who are rich, because you are receiving your comfort now.*

Yes, woe to anyone who, like today's prosperity preachers, thinks they are rich enough in faith and good works to deserve heaven: they will not enter it! Their comfort will be in this life only. Regardless of how much they claim to have a relationship with Jesus, He will say to them on the last day: “*I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers.*”^{vii}

Part Two: Jesus' disciples are spiritually hungry, yet very satisfied.

Jesus continues:

²¹Blessed are you who hunger now, because you will be satisfied.

Again, Jesus is not talking about physical hunger, but (as the Gospel of Matthew shows) *those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.*^{viii}

Jesus' true disciples are never content with a shallow knowledge of God's grace. Instead, they echo with the psalmist: *"As a doe pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God."*^{ix}

Yes, Jesus' disciples continually hunger for God's Word and Sacraments – the only means through which God clothes us sinners in Christ's righteousness.

But,

²⁵Woe to you who are well fed now, because you will be hungry.

Yes, woe to those who think they no longer need to study the Bible. They say to themselves, "I've been a Christian my whole life. I don't need church. I can study the Bible by myself and let my feelings be my guide. I am smart enough to discern things on my own." Beware of such thinking. Why? Because God's Word says: *"Let us not neglect meeting together,"*^x and, *"Whoever belongs to God listens to what God says."*^{xi}

Jesus' disciples are never content with their knowledge of the LORD. They always want more. Blessed are you if you have such a hunger. Through His Word and Sacrament, God will satisfy your longings.

Part Three: Jesus' disciples are weeping spiritually, yet full of laughter

Jesus continues:

Blessed are you who weep now, because you will laugh.

What causes Jesus' disciples to weep? Their sins! Their sorrow is the godly sorrow of repentance.^{xii} a recognition of how their sins have broken their relationship with God. It is a sorrow that gives up all pride and looks to the LORD in faith for His promised mercy.

Those who express such repentant sorrow to the LORD will laugh. The good news of God's forgiveness will give them such joy that they can't help but smile. Moreover, they will feel the urge to share the Gospel of God's forgiveness with others.

But,

Woe to you who laugh now, because you will be mourning and weeping.

Woe to those who live only for pleasure, unconcerned about their soul.^{xiii} Why? Because the world and its desires are passing away.^{xiv} What joy will remain when everything you lived for is gone? As Jesus once said: *What good is it for a man to gain the whole world and yet forfeit his soul?*^{xv}

Yes, blessed are you who weep in this world for Christ's sake—who feel the grief of your sin, and the pain that comes from living as His disciple in a fallen world. God promises that *our sufferings at the present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.*^{xvi}

Part Four: Jesus' disciples are persecuted, yet greatly rewarded

Jesus continues:

²²Blessed are you whenever people hate you, and whenever they exclude and insult you and reject your name as evil because of the Son of Man.

The life of a faithful Christian will not be popular or easy. People will hate you for what you believe. They will insult you, slandering you as unloving, intolerant, and evil.

How should you react when that happens – when family or friends break off their relationship with you over your faith, or when coworkers speak badly of you because you follow Christ? Jesus says:

²³“Rejoice in that day and leap for joy because of this: Your reward is great in heaven! The fact is, their fathers constantly did the same things to the prophets.”

Jesus is not telling us to seek persecution or to be needlessly offensive. He is telling us not to be surprised by persecution when it comes, and not to think it means God has abandoned us. When you suffer because you belong to Him, it confirms that you belong to Him. And, just as persecutions come in fulfillment of His Word, so will His promised deliverance.

But,

²⁶Woe to you when all people speak well of you, because that is how their fathers constantly treated the false prophets.

If your primary goal is to avoid controversy by telling people what they want to hear instead of what God says in His Word, you are a false prophet who has abandoned the faith. Of what worth will your worldly popularity be as you stand before God on the Last Day? Remember what Jesus said: *whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory, and the glory of the Father, and of the holy angels.*^{xvii}

Brothers and sisters in Christ, let's return to the question I asked at the beginning of this sermon: What kind of life can you expect as a believer in Jesus?

The life of a disciple is not one of pursuing earthly pride, fortune, or fame. It's one of pursuing Jesus through repentance – constantly hungering for the righteousness which Christ gives us through faith in the Gospel. The Christian life is not about joining in with the pleasures of the world as our highest good, but about confessing Christ to it in love. To summarize more succinctly, discipleship is all about taking up the cross and following Jesus.^{xviii}

And how happy – how truly blessed - you are when you do this! Why? Because Jesus will keep His promises – giving you the forgiveness, life, and everlasting salvation He won for you through His cross. May this truth lead you to keep on following Jesus in faith – rejoicing even in what you suffer, because you know it is not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in you on the Last Day. Amen.

ⁱ John 16:33 EHV

ⁱⁱ Cf. Luke 16:20. The account of the Rich Man and Lazarus serves an excellent illustration of verse 20 and 24 of our text.

ⁱⁱⁱ Matthew 5:3 EHV

^{iv} Luke 18:13. Cf. Luke 18:9ff

^v Cf. Romans 3:10-12

^{vi} Cf. Matthew 18:23-35

^{vii} Matthew 7:23 EHV

^{viii} Matthew 5:6

^{ix} Psalm 42:1

^x Hebrews 10:25

^{xi} John 8:47

^{xii} Cf. 2 Corinthians 7:8ff

^{xiii} Cf. Luke 12:15-21

^{xiv} Cf. 1 John 2:17

^{xv} Cf. Mark 8:36

^{xvi} Romans 8:18

^{xvii} Luke 9:26

^{xviii} Cf. Luke 9:23 & Luke 14:27