

Sermon 11-02-2025 All Saints Day
 Rejoicing in hard times? – Rev. Markus Wegenast
 Luke 6:20-23a

²⁰ *Then he looked up at his disciples and said:*

*“Blessed are you who are poor,
 for yours is the kingdom of God.*

²¹ *“Blessed are you who are hungry now,
 for you will be filled.*

*“Blessed are you who weep now,
 for you will laugh.*

²² *“Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you^[d] on account of the Son of Man. ²³ Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven,*

1)

Jesus invites us to know him. Jesus wants us to know who he is, what he did for us what he continues to do for us. In Jesus, God became knowable.

But knowing Jesus does not mean that we always fully understand him. Right? No matter how long you live in a relationship with Jesus, there will always be new things that you find out and that will surprise you, maybe even provoke you. That provocation keeps a relationship fresh and interesting.

Today we heard words of Jesus that do just that – they provoke us, they provoke us in an area where we might feel we shouldn’t be provoked.

Who wants to be provoked when you are going through a hard time – yet this is what Jesus does in his words:

“Blessed are you who are poor...”
“Blessed are you who are hungry now...”

Living in real poverty and being hungry is not fun. This week I had the opportunity to visit Operation Give Back just 5 minutes north of our church. They specialize in offering a free after school program for kids and have a food pantry + for anyone in the Sycamore/Sharonville school district. Their number of individuals they care for has gone up from 1500 to 5000 in the last 5 years! It’s a wonderful organization and I’m so glad COS is in partnership with them. I was so proud when I saw some of our youth fundraiser pumpkins that they donated to help some of the kids that go to OGB carve a pumpkin this year.

I’m glad we have groups like OGB but it is also a sad reminder that poverty and hunger are not just something far away but also right here where we live.

It’s hard to hear that Jesus calls us blessed when we’re poor and hungry.

I don’t know if you have experienced hard times of poverty and hunger in your life. Maybe, maybe not – I have little doubt, though, that you have experienced hard times of grief for that is just part of life no matter how rich or poor you are. And Jesus has a provocative word about that too:

“Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

He goes even on to say:

**“Blessed are you when people hate you and exclude you because of me...
Rejoice on that day...”**

No matter how well we know Jesus, he often surprises us, he turns ordinary human expectations upside down? How can you feel blessed when you weep or feel excluded?

On this All-Saints Day weekend each and every one of us is invited to remember and to celebrate people in our lives that are no longer with us in person. For this reason I want to focus on the first part of Jesus’ provocative words regarding weeping.

What do you make of this? It can be a bitter and biting thing to go through the notions of grief and you may not feel blessed at all.

For some of us the grief is so fresh and so powerful, it paralyzes at times. Even if you ***didn’t*** lose a loved-one recently, on this All Saints Day weekend you may be reminded about the tragic death of persons in your wider environment – the child of a coworker or the parent of one of your kids’ friends from school. Some of us are worried about people who are still fighting for their lives and may not make it.

How can we feel blessed in such situations?

When we’re confronted with death it affects us. It does something to our spirit, to our soul, our inner most being but also to our outer most being. Sometimes we can feel grief in our body. Weeping is a physical expression of something that is going on deep inside. Our body is involved when we grief.

And that’s when Jesus speaks into our hard-time-reality and wants us to hear:
“Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.”

It is important that we realize that in this provocation Jesus is not rude.

Jesus is truly caring and he wants us to care.

He is doing more than just comforting us with the prospect that in the ***future*** we will laugh again. That is not good care. Imagine you have a friend who grieves and you tell her: “Oh come on, it’s bad right now but soon you will laugh again – get over it.” That is not helpful and that is not what Jesus means when he says that we will laugh.

There's no doubt, it feels provocative of Jesus to say this, but the thing is, in his provocation, he comes close to us – he acknowledges where we are in life, and he is with us. And friends, that's the best way to help someone in grief.

We can't take away grief, we can't make hard times just disappear. What we can do is being present with each other in the hard time, in the grief, in the weeping, and this presence makes all the difference.

For example: When our Stephen Ministers here at COS enter into a relationship with people who are going through hard times in their lives – they don't come with a magic box that takes a hard time away – such a box doesn't exist. That's why they come with something much more realistic than a magic box: they come with their hearts and their ears and their feet – ready to walk a little bit, and to hear a little bit, and to absorb in their own heart a little bit of that hard time to pass it on to God, our healer.

I'm sure you understand, you don't need to be a Stephen minister to be in the business of hearing, walking and absorbing hard times of others. Everybody can do this because there is no magic pill that can turn a hard time into a laughing time (laughing gummies!).

When we care for each other something “magical” is going to happen though. You want to know what that is?

When we care we turn a hard time into a heart time!

When we care we let God's love take on form in ever so subtle ways until indeed that care will produce laughter and joy.

*“Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.
“Blessed are you when people hate you and exclude you because of me...
Rejoice on that day...”*

Right here, here in life, where the world still spins and the good and the bad goes side by side, right here, Jesus empowers us to care and share our heart when others weep.

2)

You can weep about many things. You know that. Grieving tears are not limited to the painful loss of loved ones. In life, you can also grieve about bad situations, sad situations, injustices, violence, war.

Are you grieving about a situation other than death? Are you mourning the fact that one of your kids gets bullied in school or has a hard time making friends? Are you weeping about a colleague who lost her job? Are you grieving to see your parents age and not keeping up with their daily chores? Are you upset about the destruction that Hurricane Melissa caused in Jamaica? There are so many areas in your life that can cause you to weep and make your spirit feel drained.

How do you deal with that? How do you move away from hearing the words of Jesus just as provocative and instead let them turn you to offer realistic help?

It is an old Christian practice to lean into Jesus for help. When we do this, when we lean into Jesus, something happens. It gets us in touch with a source that is greater than all the hard times of our lives. And it gets us in touch with our neighbor. You can lean into Jesus whether you hard pressed or feel super happy.

There are passages in the Bible that encourage us to pray always. I've been thinking about this instruction, as I was preparing for today's sermon.

A long time ago, Christians who were inspired have taking this seemingly provocative instruction to pray always to heart. They developed a prayer that they would pray at all times – whether they were happy or sad, weeping or laughing, stuck in hard times or in good times.

It's called the breath prayer or the Jesus prayer – maybe you've heard of it, maybe you are already practicing it.

The Breath/Jesus Prayer

“Lord Jesus Christ, son of God” – “Have mercy on me, a sinner.”

breathe in

breathe out

It's called a breath prayer because you're supposed to pray silently and be intentional about your breathing. That way you can do it any time – even when you're in the middle of doing other things. You pray the first part while breathing in, and the second part while breathing out. *demonstrate*

I want to encourage you to pray this prayer – especially (but certainly not limited) in times when you weep; when you feel stuck in mourning about many things. Try the breath prayer and see if it helps you lean into the heart of Jesus.

[Evtl. why the sinner part is meaningful...]

3)

Today is All Saints Day weekend – it's a time to let our grief flow freely. It may feel provocative to hear that Jesus calls us blessed but in it we hear the Lord's ability to move into our mourning with blessedness that moves us forward.

May you find comforting laughter in your weeping.

May you find that rejoicing and relying on the Lord does not betray your integrity but that it connects you with the deeper reality of your life.

Grief can't be taken away magically – grief, no matter what it's about, can only be processed and we process it best when we lean in on the one who loves us so dearly: Jesus Christ.

May his power and grace be with you always. Amen.

