

Epiphany 6 2025
Church of the Messiah
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+ *Please note - these are sermon notes and not a full manuscript.*

Belfry Bargains reopened on Thursday, and the experience touched me deeply. I have heard many Belfry stories, but it wasn't until I saw it in action that I fully understood. It was a rainy morning, yet there was joyful laughter and conversation among those huddled together on the porch, waiting. Inside, the new lighting shone down on all the donations displayed with great care. The volunteers were excited as they waited to receive the shoppers.

When the door opened, it was clear that the relationship was far beyond that of a volunteer and shopper. They knew one another's names and stories and anxiously wanted to connect for updates. There was a mutual sense of blessing in the moment. I would venture to say it felt like "holy ground."

I thought I was coming for one reason - to bless... and it was me who was blessed. Funny how that works, huh?

It's similar to our friends in the Gospel of Luke this morning. They were coming for one thing - bodily healing... yet received something more - the hope of eternal life. The promise of a transformed life.

The word had spread about Jesus. He healed the sick and cast out unclean spirits. He touched people with the power of the spirit, and people flocked to him wherever he went. It's tempting to linger in this conversation, to marvel at the transformative power of Jesus' touch. The one we follow drew the masses to him then and continues to draw us now. This is not just a story. It is a promise for us, a promise of transformation and hope.

After reading this passage over and over this week, the part that stuck out to me was the power of touch. It made me wonder...

Where in my life do I need the power of the healing touch of Jesus? Where in my body, my health, my wholeness, is there a need for a sense of holy touch? What

relationships in my life could use a healing touch? Where in my work? Where in my community? Where in this church is there the need for Jesus' healing touch?

How about you? Where do you long for the healing presence of Jesus in your life? What might be different if you allowed yourself to be vulnerable and named it for yourself... and invited Jesus into that space with you? Another way to look at it would be to ask, "From what do you need liberation?" What binds you up and keeps you from living into the fullness God intends for us? Trust in Jesus, and allow yourself to be vulnerable, for in that vulnerability, you will find strength and healing.

We worship and serve a very present God who continually seeks ways to get closer to us. Today, we will begin to make space for that closeness in our lives together by offering healing prayers, sometimes called "the laying on of hands" or anointing. I mentioned this in the Friday email and will discuss it further at announcement time.

But... back to the Gospel - The good news is that Jesus didn't just touch those who were gathered and head off on his way. Teaching was a vital part of his ministry, and today, we see Jesus being very Jesus-like. He did not run from the crowds or keep himself at a distance. This passage is from a portion of the Gospel called the Sermon on the Plain. We hear more about the Sermon on the Mount found in the Gospel of Matthew, where he stood up and apart to teach. Today, in Luke, he came down eye to eye in their midst. On a level playing field, if you will, and spoke the truth of Jesus' upsidedown logic. This portrayal of Jesus in the crowd is the one I connect with more personally. A Jesus who meets me where I am.

He kept the teaching balanced when he spoke of both blessing and woe. Blessed are... Woe to...

This passage should make us uncomfortable. Jesus is very pointed here—he uses the word "you" instead of the more distant "they."

The blessings are familiar to us because they are "right where we live." Who among us hasn't felt hunger, shed tears... or had challenging relationships?

“Blessed” or “happy,” as some translations read, does not mean that it is better to be poor, hungry, weeping, or at odds with others. It means there is hope beyond that because our earthly realities are not the ultimate voice of our value. We are happy... we are blessed.. because a life in Jesus offers so much more than anything else we can concoct ourselves.

When preparing for sermons, I look for voices in the commentary, trying to say something from a new angle. A nugget this week came from a professor named Rolf Jacobson. His area of study is a careful and thoughtful translation of Hebrew. Rolf pointed out that the word “woe” is closer to the English word “Yikes.” ... or you might want to sit down...

Yikes, are you who are full now...

Yikes, are you who are laughing...

Yikes, are you who are placing your consultation in your riches...

Not because fullness... or laughter... or riches are bad. Yikes, because we shouldn't place our trust there as our source.

Rolf Jacobson suggested that Jesus utter a holy “yikes” with compassion that voices, “If you only knew what you are missing out” just beyond your own experience. There is a whole world out there beyond what you know and cultivate for yourself.

A more meaningful life.

Maybe the invitation to us in thi time is to -
Experience what it feels like not to fill every need
To allow ourselves to be a little hungry this week.
To make space for our tears.

In Jesus' words, I hear Mary's echo in the Magnificat from our readings in Advent. Her foretelling of just who Jesus would be speaks of the same themes. Lowly being raised. Emptiness will be filled. The parts of our world that do not align with God's dream will be upended. Blessed are we ... happy are we... because this is not the end of the story.

The prophet Jeremiah from the first reading understood this, too. His call was to speak of both blessings and curses. He was coined “the weeping prophet” because some of his messages weren’t easy to convey and were so countercultural that it took real courage to speak them into the world.

This should also be true of us. Our ways of following Jesus should make the world confused but curious. Hopefully curious about leaning more about how the promises of Jesus are true.

Lent is right around the corner, but we do not need to give up the hopeful spirit of Epiphany just yet in its
Awakening. Illumination. Appearing.
Knowing that we will walk the path of both “blessedness” and “Yikes” and Jesus will meet us there every single time.

If we just ask.

May we be people who ask.

Amen.