

RACIAL JUSTICE SERVICE

Trinity Lutheran Church- Leicester- Nottingham

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16 February, 2025

GOSPEL READING: Luke 6:17-26

LET US PRAY:

Creator God, thank you for this time together. May the words spoken, and the listening of our hearts, be helped and stirred, by your Holy Spirit. AMEN

Recently I had 2 different experiences with each of my children, and both of these experiences pertain to gospel reading today. First let's look at the pieces of the Gospel that I'm thinking about, and then we'll dive into how the reading sort of relates to these specific experiences of the kids, which will also, hopefully, be relatable to your lives, and the topics of Love and Racial Justice as well.

So, 1st— the Gospel: it's really early on in Jesus's ministry. He had been on a mountaintop praying, and had just chosen his 12 disciples. Our reading today picks up at the part where he came down from the mountain to stand on a level place that was full of people who had come to hear him and be healed of their diseases. The scripture said: "a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon... everyone in the crowd was trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them."

After healing, Jesus also had some words to say. And the words he said were in this familiar speech about those who have blessing, and those who have woes: blessed are the poor, blessed are the hungry, blessed are the sad; blessed are the hated, blessed are the excluded, blessed are the reviled and defamed.

And then the woes: Woe to the rich, woe to the full, woe to the laughing and to the well praised..."

Now that we've reviewed those gospel components, let's see how this relates to the kids. Kaia was recently ill, and then passed her illness on to her friend who was visiting from the US. Then later in the week, the illness passed onto Kaia's sibling Anja who also got sick.

Man would I have loved to have taken them all to see Jesus to be healed!

It's always stressful when your kiddo is sick, but doubly stressful when BOTH kids get sick, AND even more so when your kiddo's FRIEND is sick, Is also in your care, and needing to get on a 12 hour plane ride home to the states. For a few days the kids were like limp dolls, exhausted with fevers, speaking mostly in whispers because it was too painful to talk. They were coughing and congested for days and nights. Kaia missed a much anticipated pony ride. Both she and her sibling missed 4 separate days of school. They both spent many nights waking from sleep seized by coughing spasms, and subsequently we all lost sleep!

Adding to my personal level of stress is the fact that, in addition to being a mom, I am also a nurse with an overactive imagination, and so I tend to know and worry about the absolute worst case scenarios, and stress beyond what is perhaps reasonable.

If I had heard Jesus was in town, I totally would have taken them all to him to be healed!

Now I'd like to invite you to imagine: If we heard Jesus was in town, And *you and I* were to take *our* bodies to Jesus for healing today, what are the illnesses we'd like him to heal, that we are aware of? Maybe we'd like Jesus to heal our digestive system. Maybe we'd like Jesus to heal our legs. Maybe we'd like Jesus to heal our pinched nerves, our pain, our disability, our exhaustion.

But what else might Jesus be healing, not just in our bodies, but in our hearts, minds, and spirits? Things that lie just beneath the surface of our awareness? Debilitating loneliness or depression? Ancestral trauma? Addictions? Implicit bias? Greed? Unhealed anxieties, or traumatising experiences that we've put in a dark corner of our hearts, that don't physically pain us, but that impact every moment of our day?

And what of *the collective body*? The scripture says that "a great multitude of people had come to hear him, and to be healed" The great multitude came not just from one homogenous community. In addition to Judea and Jerusalem, the Gospel includes people from the coast of Tyre and Sidon— communities that were known Biblically for their "unrepentant wickedness and idolatry." They were port cities known for their wealth and maritime trade.

And in the scripture, the words are clear: "Power came out from him and healed *all of them*." As a gathered body of people— I can't help but wonder— was the community healed? How might we imagine Jesus healing their *collective body*? And how might we imagine Jesus healing *our collective body*, and communities of today— what might that look like?

Would it look like conflict resolution? Would societal diseases of racism and sexism, hunger and poverty, war and pollution be eradicated? Would justice roll like a river? In the following verses of this *very same chapter* in Luke, Jesus shares some examples of what this might look like: Love your enemies, give to everyone who asks you, do unto others as you would have them do unto you, be merciful, forgive, do not judge— first take the plank out of your own eyes, and then you will see clearly enough to remove the speck from another's eye.

Then there's the blessing and woes section of the Gospel, which pertains most specifically to my other child, Anja. Anja recently completed their mock exams at school. Kristian and I not only received their grades, but we also had parent- teacher conferences to discuss where Anja was doing well, and where Anja needed to work a little harder, in order to improve their scores for the real GCSE exams. As parents who are new to the UK, we are learning that the standards of learning here are specific, the pressure can feel high, and each of the teachers care a lot about the students' ultimate success in life, which we are also learning will be impacted in part by how well students do on these GCSE exams.

I think we all want health and success for the people in our lives, and for our community at large!! Most parents want their kids to be able to have a strong education so that when they grow up they can provide for themselves, and live a happy life. And what comprises a happy life? If we were to base our happiness on what culture and society tells us will make us happy, we might think success and happiness is equal to, maybe, what the scripture mentioned: “being rich” and having spending power—the ability to buy all the things that we’re told will make us happy. Having a robust bank account. Being able to afford lots of travel and leisure. Being the ideal body weight, so that we can look like all the people in those advertisements full of “happy successful people”. Society often views success and happiness as being able to count one’s blessings and blessedness.

But the examples of blessedness from the Gospel reading today are exactly the opposite. As they so often do, Jesus and the Gospels share messages that are contrary to what is mainstream in society. Jesus takes society’s metrics of blessedness, and turns them on their head and flips them inside out. God’s “grading system” doesn’t care about our bank accounts, or our body weights, or our spending power. And my apologies to those of us who might be competitive, but God doesn’t USE a grading system at all. Metrics of manipulation require steady and measurable quantities of fear and failure; of scarcity and lack; of division and disconnection of messages that say “you are not enough.”

But God’s love is not a metric, nor does it come in limited quantities—remember, the scripture said, “Jesus healed ALL”—regardless of where they were from, either geographically or financially speaking. God’s love and blessedness says “you are loved. Full stop.” God says: “society might tell you otherwise—society might tell you that you are excluded and hated; that you are poor and reviled; that you are just “a bit much”, or not enough.

But Jesus came to dismantle society’s metrics and injustices, in order to share God’s Love—Love that has been here, and formed you in your beautifully unique ways since before the beginning of the beginning!! A love that is stronger than debts and darkness, division and disconnection, depreciation and death.

There’s such freedom and liberation in God’s boundless and abundant love. Are we truly living in and leaning into that love? If not, what are the imposed metrics we’re living by—metrics that might be limiting God’s love in our lives and in the lives of others? that keep us captive in a harbor of perceived “protected safety”? And what would happen if we pulled up anchor from that “safe” harbor, and opened our spiritual sails to the winds of faith and breath of the Holy Spirit? If we were to let go of control and our need to “get it right”, knowing that we are imperfect - that there is no spiritual A+ or high marks we can score with God. Knowing that the journey will be messy- we will most certainly get wet and capsize, our sails might rip, and our boats need repair, but we sail on anyway, knowing that God is bigger than our worries, and our metrics, and our limitations. Knowing that if there’s a formula for God’s “bigness” at all, it’s one of exponential, expanding, and all-inclusive growth: grace upon grace upon grace. A Love that heals not just some, but ALL.

AMEN