

*O. Woe! N.O.*  
25<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
All Saints Sunday  
November 6, 2016  
Gordon Wiersma

Text: Luke 6:20-31

Introduction to the Gospel Lesson: Luke 6:20-31

2 things as we listen to the Gospel lesson from Luke:

- Most people are at least somewhat familiar with the Beatitudes that Jesus spoke: “blessed are the peacemakers...blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness” and other blessings Jesus gives – those are in the Gospel of Matthew. But there is another set of Beatitudes in the Gospel of Luke that are less well known – which is perhaps because along with the Blessings (which are already a significant twist on what we’re familiar with) there are also some WOES, some warnings too.
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> thing is that this sermon is again influenced by the biblical scholar Walter Bruegemann. This Fall as we’ve read from the Prophet Jeremiah, you’ve heard Pastor Jill and me sharing some of Bruegemann’s wisdom, and today I want to use some of his insights from the Psalms to bring to this passage from Luke. To explore the Psalms he uses the very simple and profound lens of **ORIENTATION, DISORIENTATION, NEW ORIENTATION**: things in faith and life that **ORIENT**, ground you; things that **DISORIENT**, disruptions in life and faith; and things that then give you a **NEW ORIENTATION**, a renewed perspective on faith and life. And what I’ve found is that once you hear that simple pattern - **ORIENTATION, DISORIENTATION, NEW ORIENTATION** – then it’s something you notice all the time – 3 movements present throughout life; so that’s what I want to use as a way into this Luke passage – Orientation, Disorientation, New Orientation – or, in this case, you could say:

“O. Woe! N.O.”

So – “O.” - the orientation – the foundation – well, that’s Luke 1 through Luke 6:19! – it’s everything that has happened in Luke’s gospel so far – Luke’s narrative that establishes this person Jesus as the incarnation, the presence, of God on earth. You hear the stories of Jesus’ birth & of Jesus baptized and proclaimed the Son of God & of Jesus starting to preach and heal – and then just before this, Jesus picks his 12 disciples. So, we’re good to go: we have a Messiah – the promised Savior from God, check; we have the disciples, faithful followers, check; this will be great – what a foundation – an orientation you can count on – this is great – we’re all set.

You may be aware that this is the very foundation, orientation, that we have at Hope Church. This is a community organized around faith in Jesus Christ, the Messiah, God with us – not just a belief or concept, but a living foundation of faith – the living Christ who defines who we are. Gathered here, we are right there with the disciples – we are called to follow – gathered around to listen to Jesus the Son of God- this is good, this is great! – I think we’re all set.

Then we arrive at Luke 6:20 – “Jesus looked up at his disciples...” – isn’t that interesting? – you can picture that Jesus looks his disciples right in the eye - and what Jesus does right then, is offer up a big heaping helping of DISORIENTATION – which is to say that just as things are all set, Jesus turns everything upside down: ‘Here I am’, Jesus says, ‘and here’s the deal: if you are poor, if you are hungry, if you are distraught, if you are despised – then God bless you...God will take care of you’ - BUT...if you have money, if you have food, if you are happy, have comfort, if people like you – then WOE!!! – God is not with you and God will take away what you have.’ - all of which really spoils that nice Oriented feeling everyone was enjoying – WOE!

Jesus had just picked the 12 disciples - I wonder just then how many were having 2<sup>nd</sup> thoughts? Or how about us disciples? If we don’t feel a bit unsettled, disoriented, a few 2<sup>nd</sup> thoughts after listening to those blessings and woes from Jesus – if these WOES don’t make you say WHOA! - then we need to listen again.

There are many different circumstances among us, and those blessings and woes will connect to us in different ways – but for all of us to hear from Jesus that God identifies God’s self with the poor and hungry, suffering and despised ones, should be enough for us to realize Jesus is saying something meant to unsettle, to disorient and disrupt people’s assumptions – about religion – about life – about God. There’s something about faith foundations, orientations, that we don’t like disrupted – whether for Christians or other faiths, for individuals or groups, faith is a foundation that can easily become a fortress just for you; faith as a foundation of life can easily become an endorsement for your life; faith as a foundation of God’s presence can easily become God on your side. But Jesus Christ says that he is about something different: to orient yourself to Jesus as a foundation of faith, is to expect to be confronted and having things turned upside down, to be disoriented – it is an orientation that does not place God in our hands, but places us in God’s hands to be formed into who and how God wants us to be in life.

And the thing is, it’s just about impossible to know what precisely to do with these disorienting blessings and woes that Jesus proclaims. It is a disoriented world we live in – there are intractable problems of suffering and injustice; there are people filling themselves, grabbing power, and abusing religion. And we’re all wrapped up in it in ways difficult to untangle. And if that isn’t enough, sometimes plenty of other disorientation comes at us too – our own suffering and need, our own doubts and questions, our own losses and tears.

So in the midst of all this disorientation that Jesus and the world and our lives throw at us, something has to happen – and in fact we have to choose what is going to happen for us...we certainly can’t choose all our circumstances or experiences - but in the midst of the disorientation of it all we can choose where to turn: ...turn to defensiveness and self-justification – to cynicism – to superiority – to indifference – to fear – to despair... or we can turn to Jesus...it seems to me that Jesus wants to disorient us enough, and knows we will get disoriented enough, that the only place where we can turn is back to him.

And what Jesus does then, is give us a new orientation – and my paraphrase of Jesus would be: ‘are you confused enough, unsettled enough...? Good! - then here’s what to do – here’s all you CAN do: love extravagantly...love even, especially, your enemies; bless and pray for those it is hardest for you to bless and pray for; give up your weapons and get rid of your greed and don’t cling to your goods. You know what is good and right about life – do that to and for others.’ That’s what Jesus says - in this crazy life, it’s the only crazy way of life that makes any sense at all. It is a new orientation, but it’s really the same as where we started – because what Jesus says is an expression of who Jesus is as God with us – the extravagant love and grace of God that reveals who God is and who we are to be.

I had a moment last Sunday during worship, sitting over there where Pastor Jill is, during the Offertory as the Choir sang – I was looking at the Rose window and the ceiling beams – and I thought of how over the past centuries that thousands of people over generations have worshipped God here in this space- I thought of the Communion of the Saints that have gone before us – and I felt at that moment grateful for and connected to and blessed by them through God’s Spirit.

I had a moment yesterday knowing that there was a political rally going on in the shadow of Hope Church, days before this week’s election – and I thought of all that has been a part of the political, civic life of this nation, in the past and now – and I felt at that moment not sure what to make of it all.

But here’s the thing – there have been through the life of Hope Church and of this nation many orientations and disorientations - of faith, of theology, of law and justice, of politics and policy – many foundations that seemed sure but were dismantled; those foundations and disruptions have happened individually and corporately in this church and nation. And so then there have also been moments to put things back together – a new orientation – a choice, a response, a decision of how to move forward. And what we must claim – what we must be claimed by - what makes us first a part of the communion of the saints rather than of a party or a politic or even of a nation - is this: our new orientation in Christ is always

found in love – always, always, always – love that is courageous and challenging and tender, love that is costly and life-giving, creative and true; love that will let go of what is deadly and that will build up beloved community. Always love – because God in Christ is love – and love never ends – rather love always begins us again.

Orientation – Disorientation – New Orientation; or O. Woe! N.O. - ...it's happening around us and to us all the time in life; and to be a follower of Jesus does not take us away from that; Jesus tosses us right into it – turns us upside down – until life makes sense only when we echo the presence of the one who is the living foundation of this communion of the saints: love extravagantly; bless and pray indiscriminately; share life abundantly – love - always. AMEN.