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Sermon – Luke 6:17-26
February 17, 2019
Meeting God

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be reflections of your word to us this morning.. Amen.

Um

Blessed are the snowed in, for you will be set free. Blessed are the lonely, for you will know connection. Blessed are the hard working, for you will have rest. The first day or so of snow is magical, isn't it? It's heaven for an introvert. I padded around in comfortable clothing with the wood stove going, keeping my snow clothing by the door for when I needed to do chores outside. I took horses for a walk in almost a foot of snow, I don't think I'll do that again, though I love playing in the snow and then coming in and getting warm. The snow loses its charm as the days wear on and our unmet needs begin piling up. Groceries, dog food, prescriptions, exercise other than bringing in wood or doing chores around the property that take way too long; particularly those of us who live alone were going without connection. Meetings were cancelled, perhaps even daily coffee gatherings were smaller than usual. Living on the main road I thought it would be easier to get out and about, but when the snow plow comes by and heaps snow on my short, but already hilly driveway, it was impossible to get my car out. As I stood there coming to terms with reality, I imagined myself picking up my car and placing it on the road or simultaneously driving it and pushing it up the driveway. Reality is, I cannot do this by myself. Perhaps in that moment my imagination turns to God.

We live our lives in relative comfort: our homes, we have enough to eat, we have as much community as we want, we are blessed by creation all around us. Though there are aspects of our lives that are out of our control and sometimes we find ourselves in situations where we are out of options, where we have exhausted our resources. How do these circumstances alter our relationship with God? If you're anything like me, being out of options effects the quality and frequency of your prayer. Why is

that? Why should we more faithfully, more earnestly put ourselves in God's hands when we are in need? What is it about our comfort that causes us to be insulated from God? We'll come back to that.

In Luke's version of the Beatitudes, Jesus goes up to a high place to select his disciples, but he comes down to level ground to meet the people from all around who come to hear him. James (my husband) tells the story of going to Rich Mullins concerts in the 90's – we've played several of his songs here – he's a favourite song writer of ours – after the concerts Rich used to sit and talk with people. There would be a line going out the door, but he would be present with each and every person in their turn until he had spoken with everyone. Our need is enormous. Jesus meets each person, perhaps not quite each in turn, as they aren't very polite or orderly. They are all reaching for him, trying to touch him, even cling to him. Everyone is suffering in some way, and as we've heard about life in 1st Century Galilee, people literally have nowhere to turn, because their neighbours and their community also have nowhere to turn. All they have is God . . . as they meet God face to face and look into his eyes. This is the character of God we expect, you know, present, caring, healing, bringing us into wholeness. When Jesus has healed everyone, he lifts his eyes to his disciples . . .

Blessed are you when you have nowhere to turn but God. When we hear these beatitudes, we get the impression that God is offering a blessing only to the needy, setting the needy apart. They are echoes of Mary's Magnificat in the first chapter of Luke: "the Mighty One has done great things for me . . . he has brought the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty." It's a hopeful image for many, though in this instance Jesus doesn't use the definitive word for blessing; perhaps you have also heard the translation, **happy** are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. More and more Bible translators are using "happy" to characterize Jesus' choice of words. He sets happiness up against something that is decidedly unhappy . . . woe is an onomatopoeia, it's also one of those words that has a vague definition, but you know just by saying it out loud that it isn't good. He lists the afflictions by importance: happy are the poor, actually beggar, the most poor and vulnerable – the most important, woe to the rich; and then hungry, full;

weep, laugh; hated, admired. And this is where we start scratching our heads . . . God's kingdom is upside down from the norms of this world. (pause) Particularly for believers in things like the prosperity gospel or the doctrine of election, the idea that the wealthy have nothing good awaiting them and beggars inherit the Kingdom of God is completely mind-boggling. But God never said I will show you favour by giving you a comfortable earthly life. And I think it's a proven fact that things don't make us happy. God does say, you are my own; I will be with you and there is no place you can go from my love. Happy are those who put their lives in God's hands; unhappy are those who isolate from God.

The God we met in the field is the one we expect: the one who loves, heals, sees us, brings us into wholeness. But when Jesus lifts his eyes to his disciples who have been watching all along, we realize there is much more to God than we knew. Meeting God for real means letting go of everything we thought was true and listen to what God is actually saying.

When we have nothing, we still have God; sometimes we even cling to God. Could it be that the more we have, the more we tend to rely on those things instead of God or at least forget to include God in the conversation? I wonder if relying on what we can see insulates and isolates us from God. We are drawn to what we can see; we are only human after all. The good news is that no matter how many layers of insulation we have around us, we **have** choice. It is Christ who wakes us up from the norms of this world and sets us free from the walls we create and the stories we tell ourselves. Christ teaches us that the things of this world are not our ultimate reality; there is more to life than what we can see, and these are most important.

I'm reminded of the story of the jailer in Acts of the Apostles: there is an earthquake while Paul and his friend are in jail and the doors are flung wide open. The jailer wakes to find the doors open and panics for fear of what his superiors will do to him. Then he finds Paul and his friend in the cell, singing. He wonders on what they place authority, because it certainly wasn't the bars keeping them in. The jailer is converted that day along with his family and realizes he too has been giving authority to his superiors – he has been giving them power over him – he now honours the power God has in his life.

God is always here to meet us where we are, revealing more and more of who God **really** is with each encounter. Thanks be to God.