

Karen Hollis
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Luke 6:20-31

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be reflections of your word to us, in Christ Jesus we pray, Amen.

Um . . .

Sāi Wēng raised horses for a living. One day, he lost one of his prized horses. After hearing of the misfortune, his neighbour felt sorry for him and came to comfort him. But Sāi Wēng simply asked, “How could we know it is not a good thing for me?”

After a while, the lost horse returned and with another beautiful horse. The neighbour came over again and congratulated Sāi Wēng on his good fortune. But Sāi Wēng simply asked, “How could we know it is not a bad thing for me?”

One day, his son went out for a ride with the new horse. He was violently thrown from the horse and broke his leg. The neighbours once again expressed their condolences to Sāi Wēng, but he simply said, “How could we know it is not a good thing for me?” One year later, the Emperor’s army arrived at the village to recruit all able-bodied men to fight in the war. Because of his injury, Sāi Wēng’s son could not go off to war, and was spared from certain death.

Like the neighbour in the story, we are good at putting value judgements on the news of the day. Getting a gift is good; getting sick is bad. It is good to be happy and bad to be sad. But when you live a few years in the world, you realize it is just not that simple. Life is fluid, change is inevitable, and the mystery of God is our only sure foundation.

But one still wonders why Jesus chooses these specific words in this morning’s gospel. He speaks in the language and form of Deuteronomy, which clearly states how to live life in God. The text from chapter 11, verses 26-28 read: “I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today; and the curse, if you

do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God.” Deuteronomy lays out the covenant with God, clarifying God’s part and Israel’s part.

Being a good Jew, Jesus knows these texts . . . however he is doing a new thing. After his temptation in the desert, he begins his ministry in Luke and between scenes of healing and preaching, he calls his first disciples and is already challenged by the Pharisees. Jesus goes out to the mountain to pray . . . he spends all night in prayer to God and, coming down in the morning, he chooses 12 of his followers and names them apostles. Then, he comes down to the people, stands on a level place and speaks to them in terms they already understand. Framing his words in the form of Deuteronomy, he makes a verbal bridge for them between the old and the new.

Because we have Jesus’ words in English, translated from Greek, we forget that Jesus spoke to the people that day in Aramaic. The gift of the Aramaic language is that unlike Greek or English, it allows for a much greater range of meaning. Aramaic scholar and mystic, Neil Douglas-Klotz took the time to translate today’s Beatitudes from Luke from a Syriac Aramaic version of the Gospels. For each line of text, the translator offers several translations. I’ve asked some people in the congregation to read a few of them. In a moment I’ll read the verse in English, then we’ll have 3 translations from the Aramaic; as we listen, let us remember our ancestors in faith who were hearing these words of Jesus for the first time. May we hear something like what they heard that day.

Karen: Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God

Reader 1: Ripe are you who feel your personal strength drained away, your real power lies in the reign of Unity.

Reader 2: In tune with the cosmos are you who feel completely dissolved, your new form appears by the vision-power of the One.

Reader 3: Blessed are you who hold onto very little, yours is the wealth and rule of your original divine image.

Karen: But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.

Reader 1: Out of life's flow are you who have heaped up life's things, when their time is over, you will be left with emptiness.

Reader 2: Unfortunate are you who have enriched your false Self, what you have received from it is a bottomless pit.

Reader 3: Warning: you who are cut off from the energy of the natural cosmos, you can't substitute fuel that runs out for this divine life.

Karen: Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.

Reader 1: Aligned with unity are you who are raising your faces, hungry, you shall be returned to fullness in the One Being.

Reader 2: Tuned to the Source are you who feel stuck on the wheel of need, that wheel will turn, and you will be filled.

Reader 3: Ripe are you who feel an empty, gnawing space inside, you shall be surrounded by what's needed to fill it.

Karen: Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry.

Reader 1: You are out of tune with the One if you think yourself complete, with that way comes an insatiable emptiness.

Reader 2: Unfortunate are you surrounding yourself with everything you need, you will find a much larger space inside that needs furnishing.

Reader 3: Warning: if you hold onto the state of fullness now, feeling empty will become a continual process later.

Karen: Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

Reader 1: Tuned into the Source are you who are dissolving in tears, you will be carried with power toward hope itself.

Reader 2: Blessed are you who are flowing with mourning, you will dance over the waves of superficial appearance.

Reader 3: Lucky are you who feel empty with weeping now, in the next circle of life, you will be filled with cosmic laughter.

Karen: Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep.

Reader 1: Out of tune with the One are you if a forced, outer hilarity prevents you from feeling the weeping and mourning inside.

Reader 2: Warning: bringing all your life energy to the surface, eventually drives it all back inside.

Reader 3: Too bad for you if your laugh is hollow, your real Self has evacuated the premises.¹

As Luke's Jesus stands before the crowd of people, and as the words he spoke that day now wash over us, he wants to make one thing clear: God is for you and whether you are in need of comfort or affliction, God comes close to lift you from your misery and give you life. Like Mary sings in her Magnificat: "[My God] has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; [my God] has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. [My God] has helped his servant Israel . . . according to the promise he made to our ancestors.² And God continues to be faithful from the beginning to the end.

¹ *from Blessings of the COSMOS: Wisdom of the heart from the Aramaic words of Jesus by Neil Douglas-Klotz*

² Luke 1:52-55 NRSV