**Crossings Text Study Group – All Are Welcome!**

**Wednesday Mornings at 9:30 A.M.**

**Martin Luther Lutheran Church, Milwaukee**

Dear Friends: The Gospel reading for Epiphany 6 (Luke 6:17-26) consists of the lead in and opening lines of what scholars call “the sermon on the plain” (Lk 6:20-49). It is the second “sermon” that Jesus preaches in Luke and is in many ways an extension of the first which we heard him give on Epiphany 4 in his hometown (Nazareth) synagogue (Lk 4:18-21). There, you will remember, Jesus read the Isaiah scroll about “bringing good news to the poor, etc.” and declared that it was now being “fulfilled in their hearing,” meaning, he has been anointed/authorized by the “Spirit of the Lord” to fulfill that longstanding promise of God.

The sermon comes on the heels of three significant developments: 1) Jesus’ “infuriation” of the religious establishment because of his breaking of Sabbath law (Lk 6:1-11); 2) followed by his ascent up a mountain to pray; 3) followed still by his calling out the “twelve apostles” (literally, “sent ones” or missionaries) from amongst a large number of disciples (aka, the crowd) who were following him. With the twelve Jesus descends the mountain to the plain where we find a large “crowd” (ochlos) of disciples and a large multitude of “people” (laos) from the surrounding regions, all eager to hear Jesus. The scene has the aura of Jesus setting forth his program of what his coming reign of God is all about.

The three publics, I think, are important. They represent to Luke’s contemporaries – and us today – the churches “leadership” (the apostles, always in training), the “church” (the large crowd, *ochlos*, of disciples), and the “world” (the people, *laos*, from the surrounding regions). Also important is the audience to whom Jesus’ sermon is addressed, namely, his disciples, which include the apostles and the crowd. But also note this. His message is not “private” but “public.” It is as accessible to the people of the world as it is to his disciples. The difference is in the reception. Even so, the hope is that the people would join the crowd of disciples in receiving the benefits of following Jesus.

Now to the message. I like David Tiede’s description of it as a “major policy statement of the Kingdom.” (*Luke: Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 137.) The policies of Jesus’ kingdom are 180 degrees from that of the world, which is fixated on power, but also from that of the religious establishment, who are fixated on the law of God (see, Lk 6:1-11). And neither group understands Jesus. The evidence of his reversal of policies is clearly stated in who receives his “blessing” and who receives his “woe.”

Of those blessed, we not only have the poor, the hungry, and the weeping (the ones whom in Old Testament prophesy always were of major concern to God) but now also those who are hated, excluded, reviled and defamed on account of following Jesus. This is the unique plight of “the crowd of disciples” in this world. Therefore, they are a new category of “blessed” because they are those who are obviously condemned by the law of God (as the religious establishment will never cease to point out), but whom Jesus nevertheless forgives and declares righteous on his account.

Of those who receive “woe” from Jesus, we have not only the rich and the well feed (those who mistakenly take these comforts as signs that they are OK with God), but also those who “laugh now” at the plight of Jesus’ disciples (whether those disciples numbered among the “apostles” who pronounce forgiveness in Jesus’ name or among the “crowd” who receive it in faith) and who are “spoken well of” by the religious establishment (“the false prophets”) for supporting it in its opposition to Jesus and his kingdom. Of course, that is not new. For as Jesus notes, even their ancestors did that. And although they can’t see it now, the day will come when the blessings of Jesus will pass them by and they will be left only with mourning and weeping that comes from following false prophets.

Of course, the very ministry of Jesus reflects this policy reversal that is at the center of the kingdom of God. For he the crucified one will become by the decree of God the exalted one. In light of that fact, Jesus’ “sermon on the plain” continues to bless us, who live in the reality of the plain, with the promise that our day of exaltation is coming too. Indeed, it is by that blessing that the crowd of Jesus’ disciples persist in faith toward God and love for the poor, the hungry, the weeping and the persecuted.

**Martin Luther Lutheran Church --**  9235 W. Bluemound Rd, Milwaukee, WI 53226

**Wednesdays -- 9:30-11 a.m.**

Crossings has developed a visual model for organizing the message of a particular biblical text based on the simple idea of distinguishing law and gospel, God’s own diagnosis of what ails us and God’s own prescription of what heals us.  The model is useful for everyone, both those who listen to and those who proclaim the text, because it helps to remind us what to focus on and listen for in the process of reading and understanding a biblical text and relating or crossing it into our daily life.

Who: Anyone interested in studying the Bible – clergy and lay, preachers and listeners

What: We will learn the Crossing Method by using it on the texts that everyone will hear on Sunday Morning

Questions? Email me or call me at 262-642-6303

For more Info on Crossings go to [www.crossings.org](http://www.crossings.org)

I look forward to exploring the Scriptures with you together,

Peace,

Steve Kuhl

The Crossings Community, Inc.