

Luke 6:27-38

The Sermon

1 Corinthians 15:42-50

February 23, 2025

Years ago and for about a year I lived in Iowa.

Because it was farther to the north than anywhere I had ever lived, the winter was harsher and there were fewer hours of daylight. They didn't have more snow than we have here, but higher winds and colder temperatures.

People did not go outside much in the daytime, for much of the season. Garages were attached to the houses. People could leave before the sun came up without having to go outside, and drive to where they parked in garages connected to their work places, and then after dark at the end of the day return home to the garage attached to the house. One could go weeks without being in the daylight except to attend church or shovel snow or run an errand, or for recreation like snowboarding or cross country skiing.

Then right about the third week of January there was a warm spell. The temperatures were in the sixties and seventies for a few days. The snow melted. Neighbors who hadn't seen each other since before Christmas would go outside to get re-acquainted. There were long walks and trips to the park. Then it got cold again and everyone went back into their self-imposed yet weather-induced hibernation for the rest of the winter.

It was called January Thaw. I did some checking and found one article that said the phenomenon occurred

mostly on the east coast, and another that associated it with Minnesota. Some thought it was a part of a seasonal climatological pattern and others said it was coincidental. I am not sure how things are there now.

For some reason I was reminded of that experience the last few weeks as I read through the readings for the day, and found the epistle text from 1 Corinthians 15 about the resurrection. Right in the middle of winter, near the end of the Time After Epiphany, on the precipice of Lent, we are allowed to pause . . . and think of Easter; to skip ahead in our thoughts to springtime.

I am also reminded of the first book in the the Narnia series by C.S. Lewis, The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe. In Narnia, it is always winter but never Christmas. When the children arrive, the magical spell is broken and Christmas comes, and then the ice and snow begin to melt.

The actual reading has a different tone than all that. Paul is not addressing the liturgical year which in his time had not developed. Rather, Paul is reckoning with church members who do not believe in the Resurrection of the Dead, thus by implication, the raising of Jesus.

The, "Resurrection of the Dead," refers to the general idea that everyone will be raised to one end or another. One might associate it with a belief in life after death; the belief in two realms; the spiritual, eternal realm, that there *is not* a natural explanation for

*everything*, in addition the material, temporal, earthly realm, where there does seem to be helpful natural explanations.

It is no surprise in the scientific era, that some do not adopt the mindset of the two orders. Those who do not, are not typically found as active members of Christian churches. For Christians to say they don't believe in the resurrection, *is odd*.

Among other issues in Corinth, Paul addresses this one with a certain degree of astonishment. How can believers in Jesus fail to believe . . . in Jesus? Paul speaks of the two realms in terms of two bodies, the physical and the spiritual. He relates the idea by the use of a farming metaphor, that of sowing and harvesting. In the Resurrection, the physical body is;

“sown perishable and raised imperishable; sown in dishonor and raised in glory, sown in weakness and raised in power. It is sown a natural and raised a spiritual body.”

It is the spirit of the age to believe *only* in that which can be seen. A sentiment that can sneak up on us. I have spoken before about a de facto quality to faith and unbelief. It is possible to pay lip service to belief in the realm of the spirit, and then live and act as if one only believes in what can be seen. It is also possible to pay lip service to unbelief, and in some ways live as a believer.

To be clear, the problem in Corinth involved a logical contradiction. Apparently some claimed to believe in the raising of Jesus, but not in the more general idea of the Resurrection of the Dead. Paul argues that one must be taken with the other.

There are implications for the understanding of life. If one, and Paul mentions this directly, concludes that the Christian gospel has meaning only for this life, then it is being misunderstood. If belief *in* the resurrection causes one to *doubt* the important of *this* life, then it is also being misunderstood.

It is good for us to strike a balance between the way in which the implications of the gospel for *this life* are understood, and the way the implications of the gospel for the *next life* are understood.

Thus the gospel reading is encountered. This understanding of the world is apparent in Luke's version of the sermon on the mount, part of which was read this morning. Let me share the part that would have been last week's text and includes the Lukan Beatitudes: Luke 6:17-38

We are told, “He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of disciples was there . . . Looking at his disciples, he said:  
‘Blessed are you who are poor,  
for yours is the kingdom of God.  
Blessed are you who hunger now,  
for you will be satisfied.  
Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.

Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.

But woe to you who are rich,  
for you have already received your comfort.

Woe to you who are well fed now,  
for you will go hungry.

Woe to you who laugh now,  
for you will mourn and weep.

Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you . . . But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to

you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

The resurrection of Jesus means for us that we can be assured of our destiny, even if we are not able to see clearly its details. It also means that how we live out our time on earth matters, not only that we lead lives of love and grace, of concern for others, of high moral character, integrity, and the like, but also that in our approach to community life, that *part* of our witness is to be concerned about making the world better, about justice and mercy.

But this is a February version of a January Thaw sermon. It is an opportunity to think about Easter just before the beginning of Lent. The central problem of our humanity is sin, death, and meaninglessness, which is very closely associated with the problems of the modern era, as it was in the days of the prophets, and of Jesus, as it is in every era. This may sound like three problems, but let me suggest that it can be understood as different aspects of one.

This problem has been met and resolved by God in Christ, whose death on the cross turns our upside-down world right-side-up, and whose resurrection gives the confidence that the foundational contradiction of human existence has been solved; life and grace are victorious over death and judgment. It is like the melting of the ice and snow in the middle of winter. In Christ, we live in the promise of that victory, now and forevermore.

## Romans

11 I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. 2 God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what Scripture says in the passage about Elijah—how he appealed to God against Israel: 3 "Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"? 4 And what was God's answer to him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal." 5 So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. 6 And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

7 What then? What the people of Israel sought so earnestly they did not obtain. The elect among them did, but the others were hardened, 8 as it is written: "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that could not see and ears that could not hear, to this very day."

9 And David says:

"May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them.

10 May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever."

11 Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. 12 But if their transgression

means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring!

13 I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry 14 in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. 15 For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? 16 If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.

17 If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, 18 do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. 19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." 20 Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.

22 Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. 23 And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. 24 After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much

more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!

25 I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, 26 and in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written:

“The deliverer will come from Zion;  
he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.

27 And this is my covenant with them  
when I take away their sins.”

28 As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies for your sake; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, 29 for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable. 30 Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, 31 so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God’s mercy to you. 32 For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

33 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgments,  
and his paths beyond tracing out!

34 “Who has known the mind of the Lord?  
Or who has been his counselor?”

35 “Who has ever given to God,  
that God should repay them?”

36 For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

[Back](#)

[Home](#)