

Leveled out (Luke 6:17-26)

Jesus comes to a level place to bring the kingdom of God to all those who are gathered.

by [Lauren Dow Wegner](#)

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When I was a teenager, my grandfather died rather suddenly. It was the first major death in my life and remains one of my most emotional memories.

Thinking back to that time in my life, and to the emotional and spiritual development at constant work in a teenager's heart and mind, I realize that Grandpa's death forced me, for the first time, to reconcile my faith and my understanding of God with the very real experience of loss and grief. I was face to face with the death of someone real, someone I dearly loved, and I didn't quite know what to make of it all.

Riding in the hearse on the drive to the cemetery for Grandpa's burial, I remember looking out the window at the cars next to us. I remember the jarring thought that occurred to me: *Everyone else is going about their day. And yet my world has been completely changed and will never be the same again.* I couldn't quite fathom how all of us could exist at the same time in the same place when our experiences that day were so very different.

Of course, as a teenager, I was only really thinking about my own experience. Today, my awareness has expanded to recognize that each person around me was also carrying their own griefs and fears and worries. But the fact remains that I was sitting in a hearse with my family, about to bury my grandfather, and the rest of the world was going about its business. It felt like we, the people of God, were all

disconnected and separated from each other.

In Luke, before Jesus preaches the Beatitudes he comes down with the disciples and stands “on a level place.” This Sermon on the Plain is set in a different context than Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount, and place matters here. Jesus comes down and stands in the midst of those who have come to be healed and those who are troubled. He comes to a level place to bring the kingdom of God to those who are gathered. There is no space between those who suffer and those who rejoice; we all receive the gift of the one who brings God’s kingdom, and we are receiving it in the same place—a level place.

When Jesus comes to a level place, we find ourselves leveled out. No longer do we grieve alone, or stress alone, or worry alone. No longer do we celebrate alone or rejoice alone. When Jesus comes to a level place, he comes to level us with God’s kingdom and to level us with one another.

This is both a comfort and a challenge.

By overturning the world’s ideas and expressions of strength, by lifting up the lowly and bowed down, Jesus levels us out. In the words of Nadia Bolz-Weber, “[Jesus] was God’s Beatitude—God’s blessing to the weak in a world that admires only the strong.” Jesus physically and verbally levels with us in the Beatitudes, and in this leveling out, our lives are never the same. We are not alone in our experiences and needs, and we cannot leave others alone in theirs.

When we look out the windows of our suffering and feel that we are alone, Jesus promises that we are never forgotten by him, nor do we live this life apart from each other. As the kingdom of God comes to us directly through Jesus, we are bound to one another in his grace, leveled out and loved.