

The crowd on the plain (Luke 6:20–31)

Jesus' sermon in Luke 6 is first and foremost about the people gathered.

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November 1, 2019

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I wonder if Christian churches in the U.S. are too claustrophobic for the message of Luke 6.

They are too likely to sift through the blessings and woes, to assume the instructions to love are meant for somebody else.

Most churches are not ready for this message.

After all, the moment the text describes would never work. The people are too close together. They are hearing the same message. This can't be so—why would people from different walks of life hear the same message? Why would they even be with each other?

They are sitting together. Why are they are sitting together?

The Sermon on the Plain espouses a message for a church that does not yet exist. It is for a church that quite possibly may never be.

It is certainly for a church that is not in the U.S.

Loyalties along race, gender, sex, class, ability, denominational lines, political bents, and a host of other factors ensure that this message cannot be for churches in the U.S. There is not much to learn from it; we are ill-prepared and unwilling students.

In fact that “we” is pejorative and preposterous; there is, in fact, no “we.” There is us and there is them. The only “we” that exists is in the truth that “we” all are all divided, that we would dare not sit near one another.

Jesus stands before a group that consists of people who need to hear his message: the blessed crowd, the woe crowd, both capable of loving, doing, praying, giving. Both understand good and bad things in their bodies, how they move about in society and the world. Both recognize ills and victories and how they take shape.

Even if they disagree with each other, they sit together.

U.S. churches today cannot sit together, let alone hear the same message. They would promptly think the message inapplicable to them. They would refuse to be with people on the ground. They would refuse to sit together waiting to hear what this man had to say.

He does not look like us, his message too radical or not radical enough, his associates untrustworthy. His talking to everyone would be a problem. So he is not heard, not known.

The words of this man who speaks like God would fall onto deaf ears, ears of people who pledge allegiance to their communities alone. How can they sit together if they stand apart?

Luke is emphasizing the rarity of this moment. What started as a message for 12 people soon fell into the hearts of many—but first the many had to decide to be many, to be together.

The Sermon on the Plain is first about the crowd and only second about the message—for the crowd has to hear the message together for it to be subversive, and for it to have staying power.