



“God Made Known ... In the Blessings”

Sixth Sunday of Epiphany
Saturday & Sunday, February 16–17, 2019

All Services

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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Isaiah 6:1-8 [9-13]; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11;
Luke 6:17-26

My best friend lives right inside Philadelphia so anytime I go visit her, it's easiest to take the train. I love the whole experience of taking the train. Maybe I have romanticized it a bit? I love the back and forth motion, watching the trees blur by, and of course, I love the train station. I love 30th Street Station: the sounds – I'm going to miss the click clack of the board that showed train departures. I love the sounds of people, of luggage scooting across the floor; the smells – there's nothing like an Auntie Anne's pretzels, am I right? I love the smells of food and coffee. This is a place of so much life and activity, and I drink it all in. What most of these people coming and going, and probably the people that work there don't know is a church was started at 30th Street Station. A church in a women's bathroom.

Pastor Violet Little traveled through 30th Street Station every day, and like most travelers had to stop and use the bathroom before she went to her destination. As she went about her business, she would encounter homeless women warming up inside in the winter and washing up. After several encounters, Pastor Little realized – and I quote her now - “God is always looking for a dwelling place, and this rundown women's bathroom turned out to be a place of God's holy dwelling.” God became known in a women's bathroom. So she started talking with these women, building relationships, and eventually, she started worshipping with these women. And to me, this is what Jesus is talking about in our story for today from Luke.

Now maybe you missed it so I'm going to read the first sentence of our story again: **“[Jesus] came down with them and stood on a level place.”** Jesus came down with them. Jesus was with them – the people who were ill and had unclean spirits. Jesus was with them. That little word *with* makes such a difference. Jesus was present with them. He walked with them, stood beside them, and sat down alongside people who ordinarily would have been ignored or thought to be odd or frightening, people to be avoided. But Jesus was with them. And our story tells us he was on a level place with them. He came down to their level.

Then, what Jesus says next is so simple, but was probably so shocking. He begins to proclaim *blessings* to the poor, the hungry, the grieving, the hated and the exiled. Nadia Bolz-Weber beautifully encapsulates this moment and writes this of Jesus' blessings: “Maybe Jesus was simply blessing the ones around him that day who didn't

otherwise receive blessing, who had come to believe that, for them, blessings would never be in the cards. I mean, come on, doesn't that sound like something Jesus would do? Extravagantly throwing around blessings as though they grow on trees." Jesus was blessing those that didn't know what it meant to be blessed. Jesus was blessing those who no one else would bless. Jesus always blesses the most unlikely people. Jesus blesses the people we – us here and now – would never imagine blessing. Jesus blesses the people we ignore, the people we are afraid of, even the people we hate.

Now who are those people Jesus blesses?

Jesus blesses the people who come here for Giant gift cards when they can't make ends meet. Jesus blesses the women in the bathroom at the train station. Jesus blesses all those furloughed federal workers who couldn't put food on the table during the government shutdown. Jesus blesses those who rely on food stamps and governmental aid. Jesus blesses those who have doubt, who are unsure of their faith. Jesus blesses those who come to worship here but sneak out without saying a word. Jesus blesses those that are lonely or shy.

Jesus blesses those who hunger for relationship and connection. Jesus blesses those with depression, those who want to be happy, but just can't. Jesus blesses those who mourn, whose hearts are broken. Jesus blesses refugees and immigrants, those running for their lives and the lives of their children. Jesus blesses those who are bullied and called names. Jesus blesses those who fear hate might get them killed. Jesus blesses the most unlikely people. Jesus blesses those we won't bless.

Now you're probably thinking, what about those woes? Why does Jesus say, "woe to you..."? Jesus says woe to us who miss out on the amazing work God is doing among those Jesus blesses. Jesus says woe to us who miss out on relationships with those Jesus blesses. Woe to us who let our money, our possessions, and our abundance blind us to God's work and to relationship.

Last Sunday night, Lady Gaga gave an amazing acceptance speech at the Grammy's. If you didn't see it, it's a short clip and you should see it because her words are so important. She spoke out for mental health awareness, but her words ring true for anyone who is suffering. She proclaimed: "We gotta take care of each other. If you see someone who is hurting, don't look away." Jesus didn't look away. Jesus went right to those who were hurting. Jesus was with those who were hurting, and Jesus calls us to be with those who are hurting: the poor, the hungry, the grieving, the hated and the exiled.

Jesus calls us to this hard, hard work. Especially, in response to the many **blessings** in our lives. Jesus is calling us to the hard work of being present with those who suffer, **blessing** those we can't imagine ever loving – let alone liking, being in relationship with those who are different from us. The love of Jesus goes beyond our little circle. The love of Jesus surrounds every person and envelopes every place.

And right here, right in front of our faces, God is doing amazing ministry and we are called to be a part of it. Have you served those who are hungry? Check the great work being done at the Ecumenical Food Pantry, the St. Patrick's breakfast in Harrisburg. Have you served the ill or grieving? Check out Pink Hands of Hope that serves women

affected by breast cancer or serve as someone visiting our homebound members. Have you served those in exile? Join us for worship at Dauphin County Prison and be changed by the faith of those incarcerated.

Friends, we have received the grace of God. We have been blessed abundantly. God has been made known in the many blessings in our lives, and now we have been called to make God known in the lives of others by abundantly blessing them. Amen.

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