



1616 W. Mequon Road, Mequon WI 53092
(262)241-3121 www.stjohnsmequon.org
Email: office@stjohnsmequon.org
Pastor James Tiefel
(262) 853-9723 (cell#)
Email: pastortiefel@gmail.com

The Sixth Sunday after Epiphany

February 13, 2022

Definitions Uncovered

Blessings are cursed; curses are blessed.

On these Sundays after Epiphany, Jesus reveals to us what life in his kingdom is like. He uncovers the truth about himself and about those who follow him. This Sunday Jesus defines what it means to be blessed. Genuine spiritual happiness and contentment do not come from wealth or laughter or compliments. Instead, we find pleasure even when life is unpleasant because we have joy in Jesus. With faith in Jesus, the definitions of blessings and curses are defined and believed.

Luke 5:1-11

Here's to the Good Life

In order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

So you're sitting on the beach in Hawaii or leaning over the rail on a cruise ship and you smile at your spouse and you say: "Here's to the good life!" Or you land the job of your dreams and the salary that goes with it and you lean back with a grin on your face and you say, "Here's to the good life." Or the family's together; the grown-ups are happy and the grandkids are laughing and there's a smile in your heart and you say to yourself, "Here's to the good life." Nothing wrong with that, nothing at all.

In one way or another we all want a slice of the good life. Good health, money in the bank, a close family--whatever. The slice I want might be different from the slice you want, but whatever makes us happy is the good life we want. Nothing wrong with that, nothing at all. Nothing wrong from God's perspective, either. Truth is, God is who provides the good life in many ways. God loves to bless us and he loves to make us happy.

The trouble comes when the good life doesn't show up. And the trouble gets worse when the good life is the only life that makes us happy. That's the problem Jesus was talking about in the Gospel today. Jesus was becoming a sensation in Israel. What he said was powerful and convincing. What he did was amazing; he healed diseases and exorcized demons again and again. People from all over the Holy Land were following him. They all wanted a slice of the good life, just like we do.

Jesus saw the hopeful faces of his followers. He looked into the eager eyes of his new apostles. He knew they wouldn't find the good life they were hoping for, not if they stayed with him. The cross was coming for him and eventually for them. There would be no beaches, no cruises, and no job of their dreams. There would be suffering and persecution and death. The good life gone, vanished? No, not at all. Just different. And that's what Jesus taught in today's Gospel.

St. Paul wasn't there when Jesus spoke to his followers that day and he certainly wasn't one of Jesus' followers, not then. Decades passed before Paul wrote the words of the Second Reading for today. But what he wrote gives us a

concrete example of what Jesus was saying in the Gospel. Despite all his troubles, Paul was enjoying the good life to the max. And so can we. So we'll listen to Paul this morning and we'll be able to say:

Here's to the Good Life!

1. We can't review the life of St. Paul in one sermon. It'll take us ten classes in our Acts Bible study just to summarize it. But this is enough for today. Once Jesus called Paul to be the missionary to the Gentiles, Paul had it rough; no beaches and no cruises—just **insults, hardships, persecutions, and difficulties**. On top of that there was one really acute problem, a personal problem. He tells us about it here: **I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me**. That's all he says, and we have no clue what the thorn in the flesh was. Some people think it was an eye disease; he mentions he had to write in large letters. Some people think it was a sin that kept plaguing him—maybe pride or impatience. No clue. Was it chronic, an everyday thing, or did it flare up and get worse? No clue. But it was serious enough that it slowed down his work and so he knew Satan had sent it for exactly that reason. And it was serious enough—well, let him tell you: **Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me**. Paul certainly realized the good life was probably beyond him, but he was hoping at least for a better life, a life that would let him work and sleep and live without this pain or this distraction.

Jesus said no. Paul wrote, **But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."** So the thorn wasn't going away; no good life, not even a better life. But Jesus didn't really take the good life away; he just redefined it, he gave it a different meaning. The key to the good life, the key to completeness and contentment and happiness wasn't to pull out Paul's thorn but to fill Paul with Christ. The grace that covered Paul's sins and the power that moved Paul's ministry was better than being thornless. The Savior's grace and the Savior's power—that was the good life. And that's the good life that Jesus gave to Paul. And so Paul wrote: **Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me**.

So we all want a slice of the good life. Nothing wrong with that, nothing at all. But what if the good life doesn't happen? What if it rains on the beach or they cancel the cruise or the job falls through or the kids fight and the grandkids get sick? What if our health fails or our money is gone? Is life bad then? Does life disappoint and frustrate and sour us then? Is the joy of living gone? Life doesn't have to be like that. No way! **We still have the good life, but we have to redefine it**, we have to explain it as Jesus did in the Gospel. The good life is to live in the *kingdom of God* where Jesus' grace forgives our sins and where his power guides our lives. The good life is to be filled and overfilled with Jesus' love. When Jesus serves us, we're always *satisfied*. The good life is to anticipate the *laughter* of heaven where we'll grin from ear to ear and giggle in grace forever. With Jesus, we sit back and smile and we say, "Here's to the good life." Happy, content, at peace with God. In the Gospel today, Jesus says that people who have this good life are blessed. He said, **Blessed are you**.

2. We have no idea when Paul made his special pleas to God. The last plea may have been years before he wrote this second letter to the Christians in Corinth. But somewhere along the line Paul learned that the Savior's grace and power were more valuable than getting rid of his thorn. And so he wrote, **That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong**. Did you hear that? He delighted in his weaknesses. Just before that he said he boasted in his weaknesses. Paul would have loved to be done with his thorn, but if that thorn and all the other hardships in his life contributed to the good life with the grace and power of Christ, he was ready to say: Bring them on!

The road to the good life with Jesus isn't easy and Jesus wanted his new followers to know it. The joy that comes with the good life starts with being **poor**—not poverty-stricken or destitute, but poor in that we know we don't bring anything to the table with God. Our sins empty our spiritual pockets. We've never done anything for God that requires a rebate. We confess that God doesn't owe us anything. Contentment in the good life calls for **hunger**—not fasting or starving, but hunger, even craving for Jesus' forgiveness and for the thoughts, words, and actions that please him. The peace that comes with the good life means **weeping**—not with forced tears or fake tears, but with an honest sorrow that even now our lives are not what they ought to be. And this good life with Jesus also means that we will have to endure the same sort of troubles Paul endured: insults, hardships, persecutions. People who live in their own good life can't stand people who live in the good life of Christ.

This good life in Christ--this is the good life we want. If the Lord sees fit to remove our thorns or if he spares us the insults or the difficulties, great. We'll be happy. But the happiness we really want, that inner joy, that deeper contentment, that lasting peace is a happiness that comes only with the good life in Christ. Only there do we find grace and power. So **we seek the good life and we pursue it**, and we find it by boasting and delighting in our weaknesses. We confess our sins, we long for forgiveness, we sorrow over our failings, we endure the insults. Like Paul, we live with our thorn. But also like Paul, we believe that we are strong when we are weak and Christ's power rests on us. So here's to the good life, the good life in Christ. Amen.