

Season of Epiphany
February 17, 2019
Luke 6:17-26
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Dislocated Exegesis & Jesus – 2/17/19

This past January I was in St. Paul, Minnesota to take two intensive courses on campus at Luther Seminary. One of those courses was “Foundations of Biblical Preaching” with Dr. Karoline Lewis.

Dr. Lewis suggested that we prepare for sermons with an exercise she calls “Dislocated Exegesis”. “Exegesis” means to examine a particular biblical text in order to more deeply understand and interpret it.

The “dislocated” part of this exercise refers to reading the biblical passage somewhere OTHER than where we usually read it. The intention is to get us out of our comfort zones in order to experience God’s Word in a new way.

Normally I would read a biblical passage in the comfort of my home, or here at church. I usually seek out quiet places to contemplate what I’m reading.

But to prepare for today’s sermon, I decided to “dislocate my exegesis” at a coffee shop where I could get breakfast!

This way I could experience God’s Word in a public place – out in the world, among God’s creation. Where God’s Word lives.

As I arrived at the coffee shop, I noticed that it was noisy very full. I found an empty table and put my stuff there to save my spot. Then I went to the counter to place my order: an artisan breakfast sandwich with egg, cheese, and sausage, and a mocha latte (hold the whipped cream and chocolate drizzle).

Then I spied a loaf of gluten-free dairy-free cinnamon spice bread, and decided to get a piece of that, too!

As I waited for my order, I engaged in people-watching, which is one of my favorite hobbies.

I noticed a number of college students on their computers working on papers, middle agers getting something to eat before going to work, and a father trying to negotiate with his young daughter to eat the breakfast he bought her. She wasn’t having it.

Finally, my food was ready! As I ate, I decided to dive into the biblical passage for today. I had in the back of my mind something that German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer would advise his students when reading scripture: we are to ask ourselves, “What Word is God speaking to me today?”

As I sat eating my fancy breakfast sandwich, drinking my mocha-latte-hold-the-whipped cream-and-chocolate-drizzle, and nibbling on my gluten-free-dairy-free-cinnamon-spice-bread, these are the words I read:

“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry NOW, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep NOW, for you will laugh.”

Hmmm... “Blessed are you who are HUNGRY NOW.”

Okay. This sounds like something Jesus would say. I took another bite of my sandwich and read on:

“But WOE to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. WOE to you who are full NOW, for you will be hungry. WOE to you who are laughing NOW, for you will mourn and weep.”

Oh...

“Woe... to... you... who are full... NOW...”

I looked down at my egg-sausage-and-cheese breakfast sandwich, and at my mocha latte-hold-the-whipped-cream-and-chocolate-drizzle, and at my gluten-free-dairy-free cinnamon spice bread and thought, “I’m pretty well fed...”

And then I thought...(hands up) wait a minute wait a minute wait a minute! What is Jesus really saying here?

This passage in Luke reminds me of the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew. In Matthew’s version, Jesus says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for RIGHTEOUSNESS, for they will be filled.” (Matthew 5:6). No “WOE’s”, just blessings!

So... we are to be hungry and thirsty for RIGHTEOUSNESS. It’s a spiritual hunger, right? Whew! THAT must be what Jesus really means!

Or does he?

I looked at Luke 6:21 again: “Blessed are you who are hungry NOW, for you will be filled.” And then I looked at Luke 6:25 again: “Woe to you who are full NOW, for you will be hungry.”

And then I felt...uncomfortable. Maybe even a little convicted. What does this mean? Is it really a bad thing for me to be well fed???

Luke paints a picture in this gospel of Jesus as teacher and healer. The Jesus that Luke knows is concerned about social conditions, people’s needs, and about relationships.

In Luke’s gospel, Jesus speaks about real, lived, hunger ...oppression... and violence. Jesus tells us that we are to respond... Jesus speaks of JUSTICE... Jesus speaks of God’s Kingdom.

There is a paradox about the Kingdom of God, and that paradox is this: it is both “already here” and “not here yet”.

Jesus illustrates paradox this throughout the gospels. And Jesus calls us to live a Kingdom-already-here life... and to live it NOW.

So...how are we to do this? How are we to embody this “already-but-not-yet here” Kingdom in our daily lives? In the NOW?

As I sat in the coffee shop contemplating all this, a few thoughts came to mind:

Am I filling myself... without concern for the other?

Do I ever allow myself to “go hungry” (both metaphorically AND literally) for the other?

Do I only give out of my abundance?

What would happen if I had only had just enough – would I give at all?

Our God is a God of life and a God of relationship. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that we see the face of Christ in each other, in the face of our neighbor, in the face of a stranger. God gifts us with chances every day to get glimpses of God’s Kingdom-already-here.

We don’t have to wait until we die to see God’s Kingdom!

We see God’s Kingdom in kind and loving acts... We see the Kingdom in people who look out for others, who truly listen to others... We see the Kingdom in those who speak out for the care of the earth... We see the Kingdom in those who speak for the voiceless... We see the Kingdom when people of different faiths work together for justice.

We also see the Kingdom when we check on our elderly neighbor and stay to visit...when we share our gifts and talents to benefit others...when we bring food to the food shelter during times of need and abundance...when we call our representatives about unjust and harmful laws... and when we speak out against racist or violent acts and language.

But it can seem overwhelming at times, can’t it - this idea of needing to make sure that EVERYONE experiences the Kingdom. After all, the Kingdom is meant for EVERYONE, right? And we all want to see it...we all want to live in it. But the idea of us helping to usher in God’s already-here Kingdom seems a lot to ask of us mere mortals!

Well, I have news for us. WE CAN’T DO IT ALONE. Nor are we supposed to. God sends the Holy Spirit to help us, to show us how we can live out God’s intentions for our world every day.

If we ask God to open our eyes so that we can see how to help others get a glimpse of God’s Kingdom, God WILL open our eyes. God WILL send the Holy Spirit.

What is the Holy Spirit inspiring YOU to do? How is the Holy Spirit breathing God’s Kingdom into YOU?

Please pray with me:

God of Inspiration and Justice,

As we prepare to come to Your table and to go out into Your world, give us new eyes to see Your already-here-Kingdom. Give us hearts and hands to serve your children and all of creation. Give us glimpses of Your Kingdom...and help us be those glimpses for others. Help us to live justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with you. We ask the Holy Spirit to inspire us and help us each and every day. Thank you, generous and loving God. In Jesus' name, Amen.