

## **6<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Cycle C , 2.13.22

Jeremiah 17,5-8; 1 Corinthians 15,12.16-20;  
Luke 6:17.20-26

### **HIDDEN DANGERS: Beware! HIDDEN GRACES: Be Aware!**

Things are not always as they seem. You've probably driven many times past the big oak tree in the grove of trees near the corner of St. Mary's Road and Moraga Road. During one of the heavy rains we had a couple months ago the ground must have softened causing the massive tree to fall over. It's hard to believe that something that looked so solid and impenetrable could be toppled by winds and rain. We had something similar happen a few years ago on the parish grounds with a redwood behind what was then the Religious Resource Center. In the middle of the night it was uprooted by strong winds, fell across the space between two buildings, breaking a gas line on top of the school building so school had to be cancelled the next day.



I thought of those fallen oaks as I read the scriptures for today's liturgy and the several references to trees. *Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose hope is the Lord. He is like a tree planted beside the waters that stretches out its roots to the stream.* I spoke to the arborist whose company did the removal of the tree on our property and he explained to me that the root ball of the oak tree doesn't go down very deep. If the roots aren't healthy or don't get enough water, they can weaken on one side or another. Enough wind and down comes the mighty oak. Just from looking at the tree, I doubt if any of us, unless we were trained, could have known if that tree was healthy or not. It looked pretty strong and healthy to me, but, beware... looks can be deceiving.



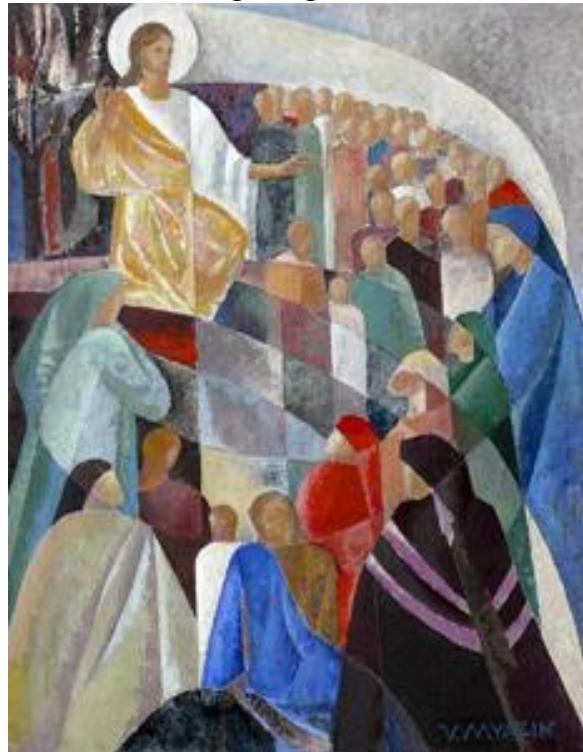
Things are not always what they seem to be. In the past, a few parishioners received an email supposedly from me. One of them said: *I need to get iTunes gift cards today for some women going through cancer at the hospital, but I can't do that right now because of my busy schedule. Can you possibly get it from any store around you now? and I'll pay you back later in cash or check. Let me know if you can get the cards for these patients.* The return address on that email wasn't mine; the email was a scam, but obviously the scammer had gotten some of my addresses. This has happened to a number of priests I know.

One dear parishioner actually dropped off gift cards at the office, thinking the request was real. She was just too kind and trusting. Beware... things are not always what they seem.

The Word of God today offers us a note of caution, a word of warning that things are not always as they seem. We can easily be deluded into thinking that material prosperity and personal success, good health and the praise of others will satisfy our deepest needs. In the upside-down world of the Gospel we're told that the opposite is true. *Blessed are you who are poor, hungry, sad, and expendable. Woe to you who are rich, full, happy, and popular.* That's the weird Good News of the Kingdom of God. A world turned upside down. An economy of blessing that sounds ludicrous. A reordering of priority and privilege that believers have found awkward and even offensive since the gospel was written.

When Our Lord said: "Blessed" are you poor, hungry and so forth, he's not saying to those who are burdened by life that their life is ideal -- far from it. The Lord is teaching that there is a truth within their circumstances, a strength they don't realize. Within the tragedy of their lives is a **hidden grace**. And when the Lord says: *Woe to you who are rich, popular, healthy,* He's saying that there is a **hidden danger** in their lives. It's our faith that helps us to discern the hidden graces and hidden dangers. The reason the Lord speaks of "woe" to the rich, the contented, the popular is that we can deceive ourselves and not go any deeper than these things. The wealth of this world and its pleasures are not the blessings we may think they are. They can blind us to the real values of life and prevent us from dying to the world and living resurrected lives in Christ. On the other hand, when we face

poverty, need, grief and troubles, illusions tend to evaporate quickly. We are liberated to seek the lasting things of God.



Unlike the Gospel of Matthew and his version of Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount," the Gospel of Luke offers us Jesus' "Sermon on the Plain." Jesus is with his disciples on level ground and he's leveling with them and with all of us. His words aren't prescriptive. He's not giving advice at all. It isn't even judgment. Jesus is simply telling the truth about the way things work. Notice that Jesus doesn't offer four blessings to one audience, and four woes to another. His sermon isn't a sorting exercise between the good folks and the bad folks; he addresses *every* blessing and *every* woe to *every* person. As if to say: this is the human pattern. This is where all of us live. We move from blessing to woe over and over again in the course of our lives... in the course of a week. We invite blessing every time we find ourselves empty and yearning for God, and we invite woe every time we

retreat into smug and thoughtless self-satisfaction. When I'm "full" of anything but God, God "empties" me. Not as punishment, but as grace. Not as condemnation, but as loving reorientation. When I'm bereft, vulnerable, and empty in the world's eyes, God blesses me with the fullness of divine mercy and kindness. In other words, our God is a God of both comfort and challenge, and in this divine economy, we are, all of us, on one level. Blessed and woeful. Saint and sinner. We occupy "the plain" of this beautiful and broken world together.

As we celebrate the Sacrament of Baptism today with David, Angelina, Caroline and Mathias, may the waters of Baptism continue to flow for us and strengthen the roots of our faith so that our lives may be like that biblical tree... *planted beside the water that stretches out its roots to the stream: it fears not the heat when it comes; its leaves stay green; in the year of drought it shows no distress, but still bears fruit.*



*John Kasper, OSFS*