

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY

(In Unison) Lor God, mercifully receive the prayers of your people. Help us to see and understand the things we ought to do, and give us grace and power to do them: through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE GOSPEL LESSON Luke 6:17-26

(Jesus preaches both blessings and woes in His Sermon on the Plain.)

¹⁷ He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coast of Tyre and Sidon,

¹⁸ who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by evil spirits were cured,

¹⁹ and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all.

²⁰ **Looking at his disciples, he said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.**

²¹ **Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.**

²² **Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.**

²³ **"Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.**

²⁴ **"But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort.**

²⁵ **Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.**

²⁶ **Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets. (NIV)**

INTRO - I was in the work room at church this week and someone asked me if I had heard the news. Anna Nicole Smith had died. Now, if there was someone in the public eye she seemed to be it. She was famous, for many reasons. She was rich, for interesting reasons. She was pretty young, and attractive, and seemingly healthy. And now she was dead.

I. Before I say any more, did you listen to today's Gospel lesson? Jesus made some interesting claims about blessing and woe's.

A. The last couple of verses in our lesson are pronouncement of Jesus of woes', or reason to be sorry. Interestingly, the reasons for woe are what normally might be a reason for joy, at least the way this world thinks.

1. ²⁴ **"But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. ²⁵ Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. ²⁶ Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets.**

2. Somehow, as a I read this lesson I could not help but think about Anna Nicole Smith.

3. She seemed to have what people clamor over in today's world, and it does not seem to have led to life, or happiness.

B. Jesus is issuing a warning.

1. In this world riches, and personal satisfying pleasure, and happiness, and the approval of others is a sign of danger.

2. What gives joy and approval in this world can ruin our relationship with God.

C. In a very real way all these attributes or possessions are indulgent, and selfish.

1. While they feel good for a minute, they can lead us away from God.

2. Focusing on ourselves and our desires is dangerous, in this life, and eternally.

II. Before we look further at Jesus' words, I want to tell you a story. About 18 months ago I went to the doctor. It was a doctor toward whom my wife had directed me. The doctor told me to stop doing some things that . . . well I liked doing. He told me to do some things I'm not sure I wanted to do. He wasn't trying to be mean, he was responsibly, and even caringly trying to make me healthy.

A. Now look at the situation we have in our lesson.

1. Jesus goes into the wilderness After 2 incidents of conflict over the Sabbath.

2. People follow Jesus, we are told, in order to be healed and taught.

A. Jesus heals some, well, *many* according to this passage.

B. Others *touch* Jesus and are healed.

C. People want the health Jesus has to offer.

D. And truthfully, in love, in the middle of a mixed up world, Jesus is seeking to give health, and love, and life . . . eternal life.

3. In the middle of this scene of some chaos Jesus does not just take care of the physical needs of these people, he cares for them spiritually as well, by teaching.

4. By filling their minds with truth, Jesus hopes to change their hearts with the health of faith.

B. As Jesus is caring for the whole person, he tells them not only what not to do, the woes, but what to do, the blessings,

1. ²⁰ Looking at his disciples, he said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. ²¹ Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. ²² Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. ²³ "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.

2. Isn't it interesting that the source of blessing, according to Jesus, is treatment we want to stay away from.

3. Jesus says that poverty, and hunger, and weeping, and rejection . . . BECAUSE OF THE SON OF MAN. . . that these things are healthy.

C. God's way is different than the world's way. But, God's way brings blessings in this world, and eternal life.

III. Back to Anna Nicole Smith. If she is an example of someone who followed the world's way of woe, who would be one who follows the Lord's way?

A. I've known people here at St. John, people who give their lives for others, and for the Lord.

1. They do it because they know that God served them by sending His Son, who did not choose to live for himself, but for us.

2. They do it because they believe and trust that God has eternal life waiting, so they can suffer the desprivation and pain of serving another rather than themselves.

3. Ultimately, in serving God, and in serving others, they receive even in this life, not woe, but blessing.

B. You see, Jesus himself wisely and thankfully for us followed the way of God's Blessing, and the world's woe.

1. He chose poverty, and ridicule, and serving others.

2. He knew He faced death, but did not run from it.

3. Because He became a servant, and suffered, Jesus in THE source of blessing by sharing God's love.

CONCLUSION - In addition to Anna Nicole Smith I can think of some others who passed away recently. At St. John in the last year that would include Barb Kunkel, Chuck Logsdon, Rich Kelpo, and Eleanor Brooks. I don't know that they could be called rich, unless you want to talk about the riches of God's kingdom. I don't know that they could be called famous, though they all stood out as servants of God and so come might have called them odd for serving Him. They may have struggled at times, but trusting the Lord, they followed His way of blessing, which the world calls the way of woe, and found blessings from God. I pray that you may find the same.