

Sixth Sunday after Epiphany
February 17, 2019

Text: Luke 6:17-26

Theme: "Ill or Well?"

Can we agree that well is good? But wait, they are not the same, though good is often mistaken for well. For example: "For sale, 2005 F150 pickup, one owner, runs good." That's just wrong; however, the writer surely meant well. Good and well—one is an adjective, the other can function as both adverb and adjective. This is all well and good, but...what about the text?

Would you not rather be well than ill? Is not well good, blessed better, and happy the best of all? Our text today deal with ill, and well, and blessed, and even some ill will. "Well" or "blessed" is pronounced when and where you would not expect to find them. And it turns out that well, well, might not be so good after all. This may sound confusing, but take heart, our blessed Lord's words about "blessed" are good and produce a well that ill cannot touch.

Well is good. Do we not desire it? So did Jesus' audience in our text. Jesus had landed on a level spot after being up on a mountain (or hill). We read, "And He came down with them." (v. 17) He had been up on the mountain praying and afterward chose twelve He named apostles. The "them" would be the Twelve. But there are more there to hear, many more. There is a "great crowd" of His disciples. There is also a "great multitude" of people from Judea, Jerusalem and from the sea coast area of Tyre and Sidon. So they come, this great multitude. And they were not all well. There were many ill among them. They had surely heard or even seen that Jesus could touch and make well. These are the same type of sick folk we have seen already in Luke's Gospel (chapters 4, 5). Those

with various diseases were brought and those troubled with unclean spirits. As we saw a couple of weeks back all this sickness is a part of the handiwork of the devil. Jesus touches them to undo what the devil has done. He makes well the ill. Restoration to health, being well, is a great blessing. It must have resulted in a lot of happiness, rejoicing, maybe even laughing and leaping. Well is good.

It still is. Well is good here on this extended level area called the Delta, though we are actually on that wrinkle running through the northern part of it called Crowley's Ridge. Yes, well is good, certainly better than sick. We are serious about well and take steps to achieve, keep, and restore it. We know that following a good diet, adequate exercise, and sufficient rest are keys to well. We vaccinate against that which would steal it away. This includes childhood diseases, and ailments like the flu, certain pneumonias, or shingles. Disease are serious well suckers.

If well gives way to ill we certainly seek to be back among the well. This may require some expense and effort and there is no guarantee of success. One may even try what has not been tried or tested in desperation. To be able to breath freely, to have eyes that are not watering (or dried out), to have no aching muscles, no headache, and plenty of energy, it this not all good? Of course well is good. When there is an abundance of good to the point that almost all is well, we may here those so blessed pronounce, "God is good." They are certainly right. It is true God it is good and it is good to bless God for His goodness.

But all is not always well. There is plenty of ill. Such is the devil's delight. We see such firsthand ill in those in whom the demons have taken up residence. To be in a person would surely be much better than being in a pig, after all, man is the crown of God's creation. The devil delights to dwell in the crown to wreak havoc on bodies and lives.

Then there are ill bodies, still the devil's work, just not that direct touch. Some of this ill can be self-inflicted by neglecting those things that result in well and indulging in that which produces ill. At other time much is done to be well but ill still arrives uninvited, unwelcomed, and maybe unmerciful. One could also experience such ill conditions as lack of food, or shelter.

Those afflicted may turn to gods that are ill equipped to deliver, perhaps viewing the goods as the gods. So resort to evil to deliver the goods, and maybe more goods arrive, and maybe not, yet you are not delivered from the ill. The goods gods that can't deliver. They may provide pleasure and relieve now, but they can't touch eternity. We read in our epistle lesson for today, "If only in this life we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people to be pitied." (1 Corinthians 15:19) He is speaking of the Christ that would result if He had not been raised bodily, an empty and pretty much worthless one (as some in Corinth must have been proclaiming). But let's pick up on the "this life." If only we have hope in this life thinking there is this life and nothing more, really there is no hope. And the nothing more that comes whose hope is hopeless is the devil's delight.

Ill, so many of the ill were brought to Jesus. But He speaks of more ill, ill winds of ill will. The Gospel is certainly not always welcomed as good news. It can be judged and pronounced bad, even evil. Obviously this happens to Jesus. We see such winds beginning their stir already in chapter 6. It happens as Jesus' disciples pluck grain on the Sabbath day. It probably picks up a little more when Jesus heals a man of the Sabbath. As His fame and following increase so does the opposition.

Here in our text, Jesus speaks of ill will toward His followers. He speaks of those excluded, reviled, and spurned as evil on account of the Son of Man. Ears stopped to prevent the hearing of the truth want also to stop the mouths of those speaking and living

it. In a recent editorial it was suggested that Mike Pence should be removed as Vice President for His acceptance of our Lord's teaching on human sexuality—the teaching of one man for one woman for one lifetime. “Why not demand the resignation of Vice President Pence for his ugly views on homosexuality?” (Richard Cohen, Washington Post, February 4). This is a biggie in our age, but not the only subject for which Jesus' followers are spoken of in an ill manner. “God expects me to give happily to the needs of those around me and forego some of my wants? Why should I be made to feel guilty about that?” “So God wants all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth? Well and good, but to insist on Jesus as being that truth, the only way is narrow minded and maybe even evil.”

Ill words and winds would discourage. Jesus did not find such things inspiring or pleasant and yet He pushed on. The ill winds increase. He is accused of casting out demons by demons (11:15). The scribes and the Pharisees try to catch Him in something He might say (11:53). There is much grumbling as He eats with tax collectors and sinners (15:2). Yes, stirring of the winds, but not as much as the opposition would like,

Then Jerusalem, Jesus enters the city for the last time. The fury of the leadership intensifies at the reception Jesus is given. They can't do anything about it as the people hold him to be a prophet. But they hope they can sweep him away in controversy to discredit Him. They try to cause quite the stir, but it is they are getting twisted in the wind. But finally it happens. Then cooperation of one of His own, one of those twelve for which Jesus spent all night praying before naming steps forward to cut a deal. It leads to the perfect storm. Soon the winds of Roman authority will be blowing against him and he will be dying that horrible, but well deserved death on a cross.

Ill will and ill winds, but from that ill comes well. It was a well-deserved death, but it was we who deserved it. God in His love experiences it for us. “By His wounds we are healed, the chastisement that brought us peace was upon Him.” He is finally dead and in the tomb, but it’s not the final end envisioned by His enemies. He rises, He’s alive on the third day just as He said would happen! In Him we have the perfect well. We are righteous before God. This means there is well even in the ill.

So it is for followers of Christ who are not healed of diseases. Consider this. In Jesus’ ministry there must have been more not healed than healed. This is not from a lack of power on Jesus’ part. He did heal all brought to Him, but think of all those who did not have the opportunity to experience His touch. Jesus did not come to make earth heaven. If He would have, He would still be walking the earth. He came showing the power of heaven had broken into the death of this earth and now the days of brokenness are numbered. It is well even in the middle of ill for God is good, always, always, even though ill be all around. In our perfect righteousness we are always blessed.

We hear Jesus’ pronouncement of well for those who are poor, or hungry, or weeping. They will know true riches, food the fills, and laughing in God’s presence. Poor, hungry, and mourning do result when touched by the ills of this broken world. The poor, hungry, and weeping will include those so touched, but it will also include the rich, full, and happy according to this worlds standards. The poor, hungry and mourning that results in God’s well are the poor in spirit, those hungering for righteousness, and those mourning over their sin. These are the blessed. For these it is well no matter the ill.

Those who experience ill will from following Christ are in good company. It happens; it comes. It’s not because we are working to be obnoxious or repugnant. “For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those

who are perishing, ¹⁶ to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?” (2 Corinthians 5:15, 16) It’s sad. To those caught up in death the fragrance of life is accounted as death, the stench of death is received as life. When this happens we remember, as Jesus reminds us, so they did to the prophets. And so they were doing to Jesus. And so they would do to the apostles and all the faithful down through the ages.

Is this an encouragement? Faithfulness is affirmed by the outcry of those in the camp of the enemy. If such are speaking good things that may not bode well. It depends. If they are speaking well because of acts of mercy on our part, that is good. If they speak well because we are agreeing with their error, that’s not good at all. We are denying our Lord. How can that ever be good?

It is well. So Jesus spoke to those on that level place who were taking to heart His words. It is good to be here today to hear of God’s message of well. God’s well is good, too good to keep to ourselves. Yes, it may be perceived, spoken against as evil and bad and we may be, will be, on that receiving end. But it is well in Christ. We live in that well and we speak of it. God works all for our good in Christ keeping us in the well and using us for the good bringing that message of well to those who are entrapped by the ill of sin. For Jesus’ sake. Amen