

*St. John Lutheran Church*

*The Sermon*

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Sermon, November 6, 2022

Luke 6:20-31

Howard Brockway was told at the age of seventeen that, because of his heart condition, he had six months to live. I knew him when he was eighty-seven. He said that everything after that first six months was icing on the cake.

Howard and his wife loved Frank Sinatra. And they loved each other. They were married for, like, fifty years or something.

Howard would go roller skating at the roller skating rink the first and third Fridays of the month, with a bunch of his friends who roller skated. The night before he died, he crashed his daughter's birthday party. Knocked on the front door and tumbled in with his roller skating buddies. Everybody said "Hi" and gave them a piece of cake, and we all sang "Happy Birthday." The next day he died.

Isn't it wonderful to have people who show us how to be old and strong and full of life.

Ashley was a friend of my friend Jan. I only met Ashley once. We were sitting in Jan's hospital room. Jan was sixteen. She was a swimmer but had started getting so tired she could not go to workout. So they brought her to the doctor and eventually found out that she had Leukemia.

Now we had been waiting in her room on the children's cancer ward in Danville, Pennsylvania for about an hour. The word from the tests came back. Jan had gone into remission.

While we waited the seven hours it took them to release Jan from the hospital, word got around the children's cancer ward that Jan had gone into remission. Before long, Ashely walked into the room. Ashely was seven or eight, but she looked like she was five, maybe. She padded into the room on her bar feet, hardly even touching the cold, smooth light gray hospital linoleum floor. She was pale, with whips of white hair clinging in two places on her otherwise bald head. Ashely had colored a drawing of rainbows and clouds to give to Jan, to say how happy she was that Jan had gone into remission. This, when Ashley had not. Ashely was dying, and she passed away a few months later.

Isn't it wonderful to have people who show us how to be young and frail and full of life.

My dad was a walking party. He looked like Friar Tuck, with a big tummy and hair like mine, bald on top with a fringe around the sides. He loved to get people together and for everyone to have a good time. One way he did that was to take people fishing. He would bring people out off the shore of the Gulf of Mexico and somebody would hook a Spanish Mackerel or a blue fish. They would pull it into the boat, the fish wiggling this way and that, flashing in the sun and my Dad would call out, "We caught a fish! We caught a fish!"

Sometimes my dad would take this fish and baste it for hours in butter back home. This was one way he said that he loved you. He also made buttermilk fudge. Very difficult to make. He would make buttermilk fudge and send it to us when we were far away. Like everything my dad made, buttermilk fudge takes a lot of butter, to the extent that, when my children watched Sesame Street, and the Count came on, (The Count is a Muppet that's a vampire. He's got the cape and the fangs and all. And he teaches children how to count. He says in this Transylvania vampire voice, "One apple in the basket, ha, ha, ha, Two apples in the basket, ha, ha, ha, Three apples. . .") When my children saw the Count on Sesame Street and then turned around and saw my dad making buttermilk fudge, they said, "One stick of butter in the buttermilk fudge, ha, ha, ha, two sticks of butter in the buttermilk fudge, ha, ha, ha. Three. . ."

Isn't it wonderful to have people who show us how to be alive in the middle of life.

In the Gospel lesson for today, Jesus says, "Blessed are you who weep." He says many things in the Gospel lesson for today, most of which we will get back to on another day. Just briefly, I do want to address his words, "Blessed are you poor, Woe

to you who are rich, Blessed are you who are hungry, Woe to you who are full now, Blessed are you who weep, woe to you who laugh.”

This is a common theme in Luke and in the New Testament. Scholars call it the theme of reversals. That is, God does not think the way people think. God loves everyone, but God pays particular attention to people who are poor, hungry, weeping.

This can feel uncomfortable. That’s good, to feel uncomfortable. If we’re never uncomfortable we will never grow. If we’re not uncomfortable, we will never learn.

This does not mean rich people are evil. There are several rich followers of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke and in the New Testament. They display three characteristics. They are humble. They don’t think they are any better than anyone else. They are generous. They share what they have. They are courageous. They are willing to give up some of their safety, to take risks for the sake of the Gospel, for the sake of God’s love that comes to us in Jesus.

But even if we are comparatively rich, in relation to the rest of the world. Even if we are full, I know some of us still weep. We still grieve.

Grieving is a good thing. It is one of the most beautiful and powerful things a human being can do, because when we grieve, we love.

And we don not grieve in vain. We have hope. “Blessed are you who weep, because you will laugh. God’s love reaches beyond all things. By the power of the cross and resurrection, Jesus reaches beyond death, and will raise us up again. We will meet Howard Brockway again, and maybe go roller skating. We will see little Ashley again. Maybe she’ll be grown up into a happy and vibrant woman, or maybe she’ll still be running around as an eight-year-old, flying kites around rainbows. I will see my dad again, and maybe we’ll go fishing. You will see your loved ones, the people you grieve, who have taught you how to live.

We may weep, yes. But we weep with hope. Thanks be to God.