

## Luke 6:17-26 “Getting Our Goodies.”

Rita Nakashima-Brock, one of our movement’s most talented scholars, theologians, and speakers convinced me a few years ago to try out the TV show *Mad Men*. *Mad Men* is about the rise of the advertising industry in New York during the 1960s. Before this era, advertising was all about presenting a product so that folks knew it was available. Most of the time, advertisers would sell the product by bragging about how much better it was than the competitors. But during the 1960s, there was a big paradigm shift in how products were advertised. Instead of just saying, “You should buy our product because it’s the best one out there,” advertisers started saying, “If you don’t have this product, you’re missing out. You have more to gain by buying this product than just quality. By investing into this product, you can have *status*.” And that’s how advertisement has been done since. Why? Because we fell for it. “They,” the advertisers, captured us hook, line, and sinker.

I bought a really expensive toy for my kids once because “they” told me that it would make my kids happy. They told me I would be the envy among other dads because I invested in this toy that they said would make my kids happy. Were my kids happy? Well ... sort of. They ignored the toy and spent the day playing with the box it came in.

Alright. So much for making my *kids* happy. Next, I bought a boat. I bought this boat because they told me it would make *me* happy. To heck with my kids. This boat was going to make *me* happy. And it did. I had two days of happiness. The day I bought it and the day I sold it.

So then I bought some special cream because they told me it would make my wrinkles disappear and I’d have the skin of a teenager again. They were right, because the allergic rash I developed definitely made me look like a teenager who was having a major acne breakout.

Finally I bought a really fast sports car because they told me it would help me attract beautiful young women. And it did. Her name was

Officer Roslin. She worked for the California Highway Patrol. She was gorgeous, and she gave me a \$500 speeding ticket.

So many promises of happiness! Advertisers don't tell you that you should consider this car because it will reliably transport you from point A to point B. They tell you that owning it will change your life and make you a better and more desirable person. This drink will lead you into life in all its fullness. This handbag will be a touch of the divine on earth. This dining option will reconcile your family one to another and bring true happiness. The meaning of life, the fulfilment of our deepest yearnings, is always just a purchase away, and then another, and if you're not sure what purchase will take you there, just look around you and learn from other consumers. Salvation is at hand. And if you doubt me, think back to what we were asked to do by our country's leaders after the terrorists attacks of 9/11. We were told to shop. Several leaders, including the mayor of New York City told people that it was their moral duty to get out and shop, to ensure that the economy kept powering on and the values that America stood for were protected from this attack. Pray if you must, but for God's sake, shop! There are so many unhappy people who believe that happiness comes from having something that will set them apart from everyone else.

Our scripture this morning comes from Luke's gospel. It's a part of the "Sermon on the Mount" which contains some of Jesus' best teaching moments. This section is called the "Beatitudes." Jesus talks about what it means to be "blessed." But the Greek word that we often see translated "blessed" is interchangeable with the word "happy." So it is entirely appropriate to say, "Happy are you that are hungry now for you will be satisfied" or "Happy are you that weep, for you shall laugh." Sounds a little bit like the kind of promises that advertisers make thought doesn't it? That's a big promise to keep. Especially the one about how people that weep will laugh. This is hard to believe. Think about how we respond to other people's news. If someone tells you that they've just lost everything they own to the most destructive wildfire in California's history, we don't say, "O wow! You're so lucky! What a

blessing!” Unless, of course, you really feel like getting punched in the face. On the other side of that, if someone tells us that they’ve just inherited a million dollars, or won the lottery we don’t say, “O you poor thing! I am *so* sorry! I’ll see if I can get some folks together to make some soup and cookies to help you through these tough times.”

But here’s Jesus turning everything upside down again. Here’s Jesus making it sound like the key to happiness is to suffer. That doesn’t sound like a very good foundation to build my faith on that’s for sure! Shoot, I’d rather hear Joel Osteen tell me that the key to happiness ... the key to receiving blessings is to pray harder, have more faith, and send money his way. Yeah, that sort of faith system sounds like it requires an investment on my part, and I may not get the goodies because I’m not praying hard enough or whatever, but it sure sounds a lot better than suffering!

In this passage, Jesus presents two different ways. Our problem is that we want to look at these two ways as, “the religious way” and the “non-religious way.” Honestly though, he presents it more like two separate and competing religions. It’s not that those who pursue wealth and comfort and celebrity have no religious faith. It’s just that they’ve put their faith in something *other* than what Jesus calls us to put our faith in. It’s still a religion. It’s still about the pursuit of meaning and putting our trust in a higher power to save us from ruin and delivering us into the promised land where all will be well. It still involves believing various doctrines and putting ultimate faith in something we can’t see or prove. It still has its priests and temples and ritual practices. But Jesus says that way is cursed, and calls us to abandon it and follow him. He seems pretty clear that the two are not compatible faiths. It’s one or the other. “You cannot serve two masters.”

Which faith system’s understanding of blessings and curses do we really believe in? We are far too entangled in the values of consumerism to allow God the sort of transforming claim on our lives that we hunger to reach. And if one thing is for sure, the almighty power of the market is

often way too strong for any of us to resist on our own. Thank God we have each other though. We *don't* have to resist on our own.

We are caught in the middle of a massive clash of cultures. On one side, we've got the culture that we've inherited just by being in this time and place in history. We've inherited this without even having to *think* about it. But on the other side is the culture of Christ ... the reign of God ... the one that we have been *called to cross over to*. That culture begins in the person of Jesus ... Emmanuel ... God in our midst ... the one who has come to lead us in this new way. In Jesus we've seen what this new way looks like, and though it might take a death before there is resurrection for us too, we do know that the way of life will prevail and that even death cannot destroy the life that God is giving us *right now*.

It's funny how these beatitudes have been used by the church though. Sometimes they're used as a way to suggest that Christianity is a deferred benefit plan: "Do the hard stuff now so you can enjoy the goodies later." We've added something else to this too. We've added something that would make the Mad Men of 1960s advertising industry proud! "Do the hard stuff now so that you can get your goodies later ... *and* you'll have the added benefit of enjoying all your rewards while all the bad guys have to sit back and suffer!" Sounds great doesn't it? Not only do I get mine, but they get theirs. I get my rewards, and they get left out. They don't get the miraculous wrinkle cream. They don't get the red sports car. They just get the rash and the speeding ticket.

This is certainly not the good news of Jesus. Jesus says that no matter how well off we are in this life that it's not necessarily a sign of God's blessing or favor. We don't need to do anything to receive the "goodies" or the benefits of God's kingdom. The reign of God is at hand. Right here. There are blessings ... there is happiness to be had no matter what our circumstances might be. This is life in the reign of God. This is life in the culture of Christ.