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Luke 6:17-26; Jeremiah 17:5-10
"Jesus Power"

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Jesus was teaching and healing throughout Galilee. He gained a reputation as a healer. He was also known as a trouble-maker among the religious authorities. They questioned his character because he frequently ate and drank with people seen immoral and undesirable by polite society, especially religious people. He even healed a man's crippled hand on the Sabbath.

The religious authorities held to a strict policy that no work is to be done on the Sabbath. They regarded healing to be work, therefore it ought not be done. Jesus disagreed with them and did it anyway. He believed the Sabbath, above all days, is a time to do no harm and to do good. To Jesus' way of thinking, doing nothing to help the man's crippled hand when he had the power and proximity to help would be the same as doing harm. Jesus believed the Sabbath is a day for doing good. So, in front of the religious authorities, he healed the man's hand, thus restoring his ability to work and support himself and his family.

Jesus believed the way of love requires doing no harm and doing good. He embodied the kingdom of God. Everything thing he did was shaped by the mission statement he read in his hometown synagogue, from Isaiah 61:1-2

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Jesus was filled to overflowing with the power of God. That power equipped him to proclaim the good news of the coming kingdom of God everywhere he went. Because he is filled with the power of God, Jesus' teaching is always accompanied by healing. Word spread about the healing. And people flocked to him. They wanted to hear what he had to say. They wanted to learn about God, God's coming kingdom, and God's love for the world. And the people wanted to be healed. They wanted healing for physical, emotional, spiritual, and relational brokenness.

Luke tells us "a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon" came to hear Jesus and to be healed of their diseases. I think those place names Luke gives are important to understanding the meaning of what Jesus is up to. People from Judea and Jerusalem are Jews. They are Jesus' people. They shared the same culture, religion, and language. The people from Tyre and Sidon, however, are foreigners to Jesus. They are from a different tribe with a different religion, culture, and language. They are gentiles.

Luke tells us that Jesus healed all of them. He didn't ask for identification or if they were deserving. He didn't care if they were Jew or gentile. All Jesus saw was people who were hungry for God and needed healing. Jesus neither asked nor required anything from them. He healed them because he loved them. He loved them because they are persons made in God's image.

Luke tells us "power came out from Jesus." That power was the power of God. The power of God, Jesus power, is love. It's the love revealed by the cross. Jesus power is love that is self-

giving, self-emptying, justice-seeking, righteousness. Jesus power is love that reveals and points towards the coming reign of God. It is like a light that draws people to its source. That's why the gospels tell us over and over again multitudes of people were drawn to Jesus. People are hungry and thirsty for love. That is Jesus power.

In the blessings and woes Jesus describes the character of God's kingdom and how God's power works. He describes the world that is coming, the world as it shall be when God's kingdom comes. It is a world that is very different from the world as it is. The people Jesus says are blessed, the world as it is regards as cursed and disposable. The ones Jesus warns with "Woe to you..." are the ones the world as it is regards as blessed. The kingdom of God turns the world as it is upside-down.

Jesus said, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." and "Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation." The great Latin American theologian, Gustavo Gutierrez says about this,

"God has a preferential love for the poor not because they are necessarily better than others, morally or religiously, but simply because they are poor and living in an inhuman situation that is contrary to God's will. The ultimate basis for the privileged position of the poor is not in the poor themselves but in God, in the gratuitousness and universality of God's self-giving love."¹

Because he loves all people, the poor and the rich, Jesus warns of the danger of wealth that convinces people they don't need God. Wealth becomes an idol that replaces God and convinces us that we are better than people who are less fortunate. The danger of wealth is it tempts us to believe that people who are poor are being punished by God for moral failings. But Jesus reminds us that wealth is temporary, while God's love and justice are eternal.

Jesus does not condemn the rich.² He wants them to know that God loves all people. And that those of us who have the good fortune to have more than we need, have a responsibility to our sisters and brothers who have nothing. Jesus wants his followers to imitate him in his way of love. Jesus wants his followers to stay close to him and emulate his way of justice and righteousness.

Jesus calls his followers to stay close to him, to learn from him. He is the source of power we need to love like God loves. The Apostle Paul describes Jesus power in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7,

"Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrong doing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

And in 1 John 3:16-18

¹ Gustavo Gutierrez, "Song and Deliverance," in *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991) 131.

² John Wesley believed and taught the Scriptural definition of "the rich" is persons who, after they have provided food, clothing, shelter, education, and security for themselves, their spouse, children, and all who live in their household, have surplus funds to save and invest.

"We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action."

Jesus invites us to stay close to him and his power; to be a people known for love. I'll conclude with Jesus' words to his disciples in John 13:34-35

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Amen.