

## **Jesus is the Entry Point**

**February 11, 2007**

**Rev. Nathaniel R. Elliot, Jr**

In considering the Gospel just read to you one is struck with the question why have so many people come from so far to be with Jesus? How did he draw such a crowd? Luke, in his summary statement is brief. He says that the people have come to Jesus for two reasons: *They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases* (6:18). But if you want to poke a little deeper, Luke says that the people really came more for healing than to be taught: *And all the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came forth from him and healed them all* (v 19).

Unlike Matthew in his Sermon on the Mount, Luke presents negative pronouncements for the sake of those whose status is the opposite of that of the people who are to receive God's favor. The rich of this world have grasped immediate gratification, and they can hope for no consolation when God's kingdom is established. Those who have evaded every form of sacrifice and self-denial will have to learn what it means to be hungry or to be in sorrow (vv. 24-25).

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There is a theory of church dynamics, which is called the *theory of oscillation*. The theory, in effect, states that as humans we have a need to move back and forth between two modes of dependence: *extra-dependency* and *intra-dependency*.

Extra-dependency is the mode in which we rely on something, or someone beyond ourselves, or, outside of our ability to control, to get help. Intra-dependence, on the other hand, is to be able to rely upon our own abilities and authority to function in the world.

If I may, permit me to use our own granddaughters, when they were little, as an example of what I mean. If we went to the park so that they could play on the swings and other stuff they have in parks, occasionally they would run back to us just to “check-in” or, if they should fall off the swings they would come to get a hug and be reassured. In playing on the swings they are in their intra-dependent mode and doing just fine. But when they fall or need to check-in, they are in their extra-

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dependent mode, calling on the help of someone greater than themselves.

It is the assumption of the theory that we, all of us, naturally move back and forth between these two states. It seems clear throughout the Gospels, and especially in the reading here, that the people who come seeking Jesus have recognized the limits of their intra-dependence. The ones who gather “on the plain” are the ones who need a power greater themselves to heal them, and they believe Jesus is somehow the source of that power. They have long since given up on finding personal resources or privilege or clout, which would entitle them to anything. They have no “rights.” They are the forgotten fringe and they know it. As such they do not believe a human solution will be their answer. They need a power that is greater than their plight, and they believe this power is to be found in Jesus. It is as simple and as complicated as that. And they are ready to risk themselves, to **abandon** themselves to this Jesus dependability.

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Jesus describes these *extra dependents*, the poor, the hungry, those who weep, who are hated, excluded, reviled and defamed....he describes them as curiously blessed. These lost sheep are the ones who will find and be found. And because of their emptiness and incapacity to alleviate their own suffering, they hunger to receive the gift that Jesus has for them. These have-nots, Jesus says, are the blessed ones.

Ironically, those who are most successful at being intra-dependent, the ones who appear to have the world by the tail and under their control are the “woeful” ones, just the opposite of what our culture would think. Woe to you who win the lottery. Woe to you who are full, full of importance, full of praise, full of power???? That’s what he said, but the “woe” Jesus announces sounds something like the sigh of pain, the expression of a sad and lonely state of being. Someone once said, “The opposite of joy is not sorrow, but unbelief,” and that seems to be what Jesus is saying as he opens the Sermon on the Plain.

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Jesus touched people from a place of great presence and love. He was in contact with the essence of these sick people and they recognized that. And if they were open to him, they could receive that love. The people Jesus healed were ready to let go of something.

We are a people “on the Plain” with as many problems, although different ones, as the people who faced Jesus all those centuries ago, problems in our nation, problems in society, problems with our core values, problems in the Episcopal Church, problems with deciding what is important and what is not. The Litany of our problems and needs, not our wants, our *needs*, is endless. And here is the message for us, the ability to let go, the capacity to open oneself to Jesus is **the entry point** to the blessedness of the Kingdom of God. Surrender to grace becomes much more than a real possibility. Grace.....it’s the only train on the track that is going somewhere.

**AMEN.**