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> "Jesus…stood with a great multitude… [who'd] come to hear him and be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them."[1]

There's a scene in the series THE CHOSEN, which powerfully illustrates this opening scene from Luke's gospel.

The camera follows the disciples setting up camp, while Jesus himself—off camera—is responding to the needs of the growing crowd of people who've come to be healed.

As the day progresses, and the line to meet Jesus continues to grow, we eavesdrop on conversations within his inner circle as they reflect on this movement they find themselves being caught up in.

As day turns to dusk Mary joins them and they gather around the fire sharing stories—as all the while Jesus tends to the needs of the crowd—determined to take time with every last person who has sought him out.

The conversation among the 12 heats up when the topic turns of suffering—specifically, what they have suffered under Roman occupation.

And that's when Peter first, and then others, turn their focus to Matthew, the former tax collector, who in choosing to serve Rome made himself materially rich at the expense of his fellow Jews.

Voices rise, accusations fly, and just when it looks like they might come to blows, THE CAMERA FINDS JESUS, STUMBLING INTO CAMP IN THE DARKNESS, COMPLETELY and UTTERLY SPENT.

Silent now, the quarrelers watch, stunned, as their depleted Lord bids them goodnight and goes to his tent.

Mary, rising to help, goes to him, washes his feet, wipes his bloodied hands, his face, and helps him lie down…

And the gaze of the disciples turns inward, as it dawns on them what making himself so available to others has cost Jesus.

And they realize without saying a word…

- how far THEY are from that kind of generosity.
- how far THEY are from giving each other grace.
- how far THEY are from choosing Jesus' Way rather than the way of the world.

One of my mentors when I served in Indian Country was a Karuk tribal elder named Jeanerette.

I learned so much from Jeanerette—among them, that when a woman is apprenticed to become an AINE – a medicine person – she acquires a PHYSICAL "PAIN" within her body.

And a key component of her training for this role involves learning to locate this PAIN, to feel it, to know its limits and its power, and finally to control it.

[1] Luke 6:17-19

Only when she has successfully achieved this ability to deal with her own pain is she able to identify, diagnose, and free the pain and sickness of others.

Coming to terms with her personal pain is a key ingredient in her ability to bring healing to others.

That kind of learning, that kind of tutelage, is, I think, part of Jesus' story. He is—in the words of Henri Nouwen—a WOUNDED HEALER.

Instead of giving the crowds who surround him tips for how to AVOID suffering at all costs, Jesus affirms the REALITY of their suffering and calls them BLESSED.

Instead of BLAMING the poor, the hungry, the reviled and excluded, for the circumstances in which they find themselves, Jesus flips the script: In the economy of God, he tells them, you matter— GOD SEES YOU; I SEE YOU!

When Jesus delivers his sermon today—NOT from a mountaintop but on the level plain—he's surrounded by people searching for something that will touch their need and bring them wholeness; something that will endure.

The words he speaks, BLESSING and WOE, are spoken NOT in the 3rd person: BLESSED ARE THOSE…but directly: BLESSED ARE YOU. . . WOE TO YOU.

These beatitudes of Jesus are paradoxes, and go against our common experience of comfort and blessing.

And his point? God sees the world differently than we do.

The prevailing conditions of haves and have-nots in our world, and the systemic forces that keep them that way, are INTOLERABLE to God…and God is acting in Jesus to reverse those conditions.

Christ's mission is not to support the status quo or to dismantle efforts for EQUITY in the name of a feigned EQUALITY, but to usher in… *♪ a world turned upside down.*

This isn't the first time we've heard this kind of reversal language in Luke's gospel. Remember Mary's song?

She was the first to forecast this great topsy-turvy—when the child she carried was a mere speck of light in her womb.

She sang of the God who scatters the proud, and tears tyrants from their thrones; who fills the hungry with good things and sends the rich away empty.

Jesus learned these lyrics at Mary's knee—and now HE'S proclaiming it.

But these are difficult words for affluent American Christians—like most of us—to hear.

We wonder where our place is among these blessings and woes?

We may feel hunger pangs in our bellies now and then; we may find ourselves struggling with deep longings for a more just world; but more often—too often—we are FULL.

And so we experience these verses as an indictment, living as we do in a society where tax breaks for the RICH outstrip programs for the POOR many times over.

How do we find our way through these difficult verses?

William McElvaney writes: [2]

> It took me a long time to come to one of the major discoveries of my life: namely, that God loves me enough to disturb me...
>
> For me the gospel has been like a Roto-Rooter, churning through my resistances and turning my presuppositions and priorities upside down.

McElvaney calls this a "bless-ed disturbance." [SING:] ♪ *"Blessed disturbance, Jesus is mine."*

Brother Martin taught us that a religion that costs nothing and suffers nothing is worth nothing.
I, for one, need to be reminded of that. I suspect I'm not alone.

Before people sign on to his mission, follow him up country and down, hinter and yon; before he sets his face toward Jerusalem, Jesus wants them—wants us—to know that following him won't be easy; that it comes with a price.

That there is, as Bonhoeffer said, a COST to discipleship.

That cost was born first and foremost by Jesus on the cross. And it seemed, for all who saw him hanging there—both enemy and friend—to be the end of his story.

A righteous man, yes, but a righteous loser. And all this talk about a great reversal proven, to the world's great relief, to be sham.

And if that had been the end of his story; if for this life only we have hoped in Christ, then we are, as Paul says, "of all people most to be pitied."

But the story doesn't end there. Christ has been raised from the dead.

And we are a people who worship not a righteous loser, or a dead hero, but a living Savior.

And since HE lives, the question then becomes how will WE live—
we who are bound to him in baptism, we who are people of the empty tomb?

My friends, we live with the blessed assurance that we have been called to be a blessed disturbance.

- To say out loud that the existing architecture of social division and inequity is contrary to God's vision.

[2] *Good news is bad news is good news*

- To say out loud that throwing refugees, asylees, and immigrants under the bus—along with those ministries which support them—is a criminal act, beneath the dignity of this nation, and contrary to the will of God.

- To follow our Lord into a way of living and being where the last are first, the lost are found, and the least are the greatest emblems of God's reign.

This is our calling. A calling for which our lives in faith have prepared us.

We are not helpless bystanders. We are powerful agents.

Amen.