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Grace Episcopal Church, Alexandria Virginia
Gospel of Luke 6:17-26

Four promises. Four warnings. Presented like the great codes of Deuteronomy where those who obeyed the law were blessed, and those who did not were cursed. But with God's new story emerging in Jesus, Jesus uses this moment to give his own version of the codes. It is a version that turns the world upside-down, or as we as Christians see it, right side up.

You remember the scene in the synagogue. Jesus announced that God is fulfilling his promises through him and that everyone is included. In his sermon today he continues to teach that good news is coming for people who have not had any good news for a long time: the poor, the hungry, those who weep, those who are hated. They will be blessed!

Both the Gospels of Matthew and Luke report this sermon of Jesus. While these Gospel accounts are a bit different, they are both like bombs! They are both revolutionary. They are both challenging. A scholar once wrote, "These statements are not quiet stars but flashes of lightning followed by a thunder of surprise and amazement. They take the accepted standards and turn them upside down. To talk like this is to put an end to the world's values."

Besides nodding our heads in agreement with Jesus, what can we do with this? How do we enter these Beatitudes ourselves? I think the key is in verse 24, "»But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation." I think Jesus is telling us that if we set our hearts on what the world values, we will get those things, but that is all we will ever get and they are temporary. If we set our hearts on Jesus, the journey may be difficult but the rewards are lasting. Jesus promised his followers that three things would happen in their lives: they would be completely fearless, absurdly happy, and always in trouble. A Christian author, who always caused trouble, once wrote, "I like getting into hot water. It keeps me clean!"

Jesus's sermon is challenging us to choose. The path of the world and warm water, or the path of Jesus and hot water. This choice first presents itself to us as children, and it continues our whole lives. It is like a split in the road that always hovers before us. By the standards of the world, will you take the easy way or the hard way? Will you grab the profit of the moment, or make a sacrifice that helps others? Will you concentrate on the world's rewards or the rewards of a life in Christ?

Jesus had no doubt which way brought happiness. Paul, in his second letter to the Corinthians, wrote, "For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure." Because Jesus loves us so much, the challenges and warnings of his sermon call us to always step on to his road. When it is difficult, even when the water is boiling hot, we know that Jesus will be at our side, supporting us, encouraging us, strengthening us, and showing us the way.