

“Sermon in the Plain”

Sermon – November 2, 2025 Stone Presbyterian Church

In today’s gospel pericope, the Lucan Jesus inaugurates a radical ethical paradigm that subverts prevailing socio-economic hierarchies through a dialectic of blessing and woe wherein eschatological beatitude is conferred upon the marginalized and juxtaposed to those whose present felicity portends eschatological reversal.

Culminating in a heuristic maxim, the passage delineates a teleological reconfiguration of human relationality under the aegis of divine mercy and eschatological reversal.

Inspiring message, right? My exegetical synopsis was not too esoteric, was it?

In all disciplines, experts develop and use vocabulary and language to convey specific concepts and ideas precisely, which is necessary because of the intricacies and complexities of their work. For sciences mathematics is often the language of choice because words are inadequate. While specialized language aids in the communication and collaboration with their peers, it can be a barrier to the lay person.

Our daughters, research professors, will send us their latest peer-reviewed academic research journal articles and I can proudly say that I can almost understand them—if I read just the abstract and conclusion and look up every other word.

It’s unfortunate that today instead of people admiring those who have spent their adult lives doing such in-depth, technical research they defile and defame them for being elitist.

This tends to happen when findings are counter to a person’s core beliefs or values, which are shaped by culture, politics, and religion—each of which we have great disagreements on.

“Sermon in the Plain”

Sermon – November 2, 2025 Stone Presbyterian Church

Christianity, with its hundreds of denominations, is no different. Churches and Christians have disagreement on a *few* things, like, y’know, polity (how we govern ourselves), liturgy (how we worship), and theology (how we think about the divine).

That’s why a passage like today’s gospel lesson from Luke 16 is a relief because there’s no academic jargon, no complex concepts, no arcane context. It’s pretty plain what it’s saying. The passage is also unsettling because it’s pretty plain what it’s saying.

The verses are very similar to ones you are more familiar with in Matthew chapter 5 with the Beatitudes and some of the ethical commands.

Matthew’s version is called the “Sermon on the Mount” because Jesus delivers his message on a mountain. Luke’s version is often called the “Sermon on the Plain” because Jesus has come down from the mountain is speaking from, quote, “a level place.”

Matthew’s version is also more spiritually layered and rhetorically extended—it goes on for two full chapters.

Luke’s version is more concise and socially direct. Whereas Matthew says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”

Luke’s says,

“Blessed are you who are poor (period), for yours is the kingdom of God.

“Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.”

Thus, while Matthew’s beatitudes are in the third-person, the entire set of blessings and woes in Luke is cast in the second-person plural “you.”

“Sermon in the Plain”

Sermon – November 2, 2025 Stone Presbyterian Church

In Luke, Jesus focuses on the conditions in which people find themselves: poverty, sorrow, hunger and marginalization.

This distinguishes the Sermon on the Plain from the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew focuses on issues of piety such as mourning, meekness, mercy and peacemaking.

In Luke, Jesus’ mission is a prophetic one that changes the lived experiences of the people who believe in and follow him, in addition to attending to matters of the Spirit.

Also, unlike Matthew, Luke’s “blessings” have corresponding “woes” where “woe” functions as a sharp contrast to “blessed.”

Now we typically translate the Greek word *makários* [mah-KAH-rios] as “blessed” but that has become such a churchy word it has little meaning for most people. “Happy” is another common translation, but that word has become too simplistic and shallow in contemporary usage.

Perhaps a better way to phrase it is “What a fortunate and privileged position you are in...” This helps convey the sense of a deep and secure spiritual state rooted in a relationship with God, regardless of outward circumstances. Because the beatitudes are not about a fleeting emotion but about the deep and unshakable joy of receiving God's approval and being part of his coming kingdom, even in the midst of hardship.

Similarly, we translate the Greek word *ouai* [oo-AH-ee] as “woe” but it does not mean “cursed” or “unhappy.” It’s more like “alas” or, more colloquially, “yikes”. It is more of an attention-getter and emotion-setter than a clear characterization or pronouncement.

As such, the “woes” that Jesus proclaimed are not a complete rejection of wealth, adequate or abundant food resources, happiness or having a

“Sermon in the Plain”

Sermon – November 2, 2025 Stone Presbyterian Church

good reputation. Rather, Jesus was warning those who were fortunate enough to live under these conditions that they would be expected to live differently. The rich would be expected to share their wealth with the poor.

Those who had adequate or abundant food resources would be expected to share their food with the hungry. Those who were happy would be expected to attend to the emotional needs of those in sorrow. Those who had good reputations would be expected to leverage those reputations on behalf of those who found themselves in challenging circumstances. That is, Jesus is not delivering an abstract definition of discipleship or sainthood. He is not listing the qualifications to “get into heaven.” He is calling all to become faithful and effective agents of God’s reign here and now.

The problem for us is not that Jesus’ words are hard to understand but that their clear meaning is so challenging: “Love your enemies”, “If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also”, “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” And yet, this is the way for followers of Christ.

More than ever as the church, we need to strive to live as agents of reconciliation in a world filled with hate and division.

All Saints Day is a witness to God’s way of blessing the world, not simply reinforcing the entitlement of the privileged to the way things are, but revealing God’s justice fulfilled in mercy, when ordinary sinners conveyed God’s holy love to you and to the world, probably in unexpected times and places.

“Sermon in the Plain”

Sermon – November 2, 2025 Stone Presbyterian Church

The first miracle of All Saints Day is about God whose holy reign is still at work in the lives of the likes of us.

And the second miracle of All Saints Day is about us and how our lives are transformed. We forgiven sinners are called and sent to be ordinary saints in God’s world, enacting God’s love and justice!” It’s that plain, if not that simple.

Still, as St. Augustine said, “Pray as though everything depended on God.

Work as though everything depended on you.”

In the name of God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer.

Amen.