
Do You Have Your Ancestors' Heart?

A sermon by CanonCarolynne Williams
Epiphany 6 – Year C

These words were recorded by Jeremiah from God: “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. And before you were born, I consecrated you.” These are the words from God to King Zedekiah. King Zedekiah reigned during the life of Jeremiah. Prior to Zedekiah there were other kings... Usually the “son of.” And as each generation was born, they inherited what their father before them had left for them.

Like those generations, we are descendants of those who have gone before us. We are the descendants of our ancestors. We have inherited. Some of you can trace the long view family lineage to five, six, or even seven generations before you. Others can trace perhaps just to three generations ago, which is fine, and still others may not know their biological family of origin.

Just as Jeremiah tells us that God knew us “before we were formed in our mother’s womb,” Jeremiah informs us today of this. God is very much aware of the condition of our heart. Jeremiah today reminds us that God has a keen awareness of where we mere mortals place our trust.

Our epistle reads: “By your own act you shall lose the heritage that I gave you ... cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the Lord” (Jeremiah 17:4).

In other words, if we trust in any creation that is not the creator, then our hearts are subject to being centered in a place that is not of God.

In the Old Testament, “the heart is at the center of a person’s motivation and action. It is the deepest fiber and sinew of human willpower” (Year C, New Proclamation, 115).

As Paul the Apostle says, when our minds are set on mere flesh, it is like death. We become like the people of Judah. We turn to idols. “We begin to trust in mere mortals, and we make mere flesh our strength.”

In the Gospel of Luke we are given four beatitudes and four woes. The beatitudes in Luke are different from the beatitudes in Matthew because in Luke they, are looked upon as one focus.

It is the same with the woes. They are looked upon with one focus.

In Matthew they are looked at individually. The description is also given in the gospel. Another difference is that the beatitudes in Matthew were given from the mountaintop, whereas in Luke they are given “on the plain” – *so the perspective was different.*

The disciples were from different walks of life. We don’t know if any of the disciples were wealthy by man’s standards or not. What we do know theologically, they were wealthy. Wealth was not an issue for the disciples, according to the text.

The issue according to the text with the pronouncement of blessings and woes was their perspective. The disciples and others who had come to hear the sermon on the plain, had come to be healed and they had come to discuss what they had

learned.

“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.
Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.
Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you, revile you for my sake.

Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.
Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry.
Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep.
Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.”

The contrast between the beatitudes and the woes is the contrast as God sees it. Not as humankind sees it. Who are these poor and rich?

“The poor are those who are also hungry, who weep and are hated, insulted and excluded. The rich are those who are well fed who laugh and are flattered. Thus both types reflect their economic conditions and social status.

The poor are the powerless, the rich are the powerful. The poor find it difficult to fend for themselves, whereas the rich have no trouble in making their way in the world.

At the center of our motivation and actions is the heart.

The condition of the heart determines whether we are rich or poor. The heart is where we carry our burdens and our joys. The heart is the only place that God continues to monitor us.

Joan Chittister, in her book, *Scarred By Struggles, Transformed By Hope*, discusses the conversion of the heart. She says this: “Conversion is the opening of the heart to the grace of new possibilities. It does not blame God for plotting nefarious plans to test us and try and torment us. It recognizes in the glory of new life that God simply accompanies us, simply stands by ready to receive our tattered, restless selves, as we are tested, tried and tormented by the machinations of life itself. God guides us to new life by allowing us to open our eyes to possibilities and find it for ourselves” (page 25).

Conversion is not immediate. It is simply that the spiritual person is open to the possibility.

With the heart being at the center of our motivations and actions, our level of wealth is usually determined by these two factors. Our wealth as mere mortals is not determined by the amount of cash on hand, some say, nor is wealth determined by the accumulation of material wealth, others say.

Wealth, according to Jeremiah and Luke, and as far as God is concerned, is not determined by the thousands of acres one holds, in his or her name nor is it determined by the number of withholdings that we can claim.

The condition of wealth and the condition of being poor are determined by a factor that is predicated upon the **place** of our hearts.

Only God can determine who is really wealthy and who is poor.

The disciples learned that the beatitudes and the woes were based upon the condition of the heart and nothing else.

If there is a change in the heart, the change is reflected in how one sees their relationship to God. It is reflected in how one sees oneself in relationship to another.

When you and I have the capacity to look out into the world and not see it as one dimensional; then we have subjected ourselves to the same teaching moment that the disciples subjected themselves to “*on the plain*.”

The wealthy are those who love and care about others who may be difficult to love OR care about or even see.

The wealthy are those who are reaching out to those who are in high places and **some** are in high places themselves and they, either collectively or individually, are also including the unnamed and the obscure within their reach.

The wealthy are those who attempt to, through their individual venues and sometimes corporate venues manage resources for the good of the order. Those watching have to be conscious of “what exactly is the order being managed.” This happens simply so that there will be a part of creation still in existence for generations to come.

We are reminded that the wealthy, according to Psalm 1, are those who are planted by the streams of water, bearing fruit in due season. Those planted will have leaves that do not wither. The leaves will not wither at the time of anxiety, or with the threat of loss, or with the approach of a serious illness.

The shrub, on the other hand, in the desert will wither and dry up like brittle bones which are not connected in any manner other than to themselves.

When did you have a conversion in your heart? When did we realize how wealthy we truly are?

It was being able to sense the very pulse of our country and where we fit into it. It is understanding that all women and men are not equal in this society today. The reasons are entrenched in the long view of one’s consciousness and long view of history.

Remembering the condition of the heart really dictates true wealth. Are you trusting in mere mortals or are you planting yourselves with deep roots by streams of living water which will quench one’s thirst and will allow seeds to be planted for future generations?

With God having known us before we were formed in our mother’s womb... we should look to God with a trust like a child. Allowing ourselves in all of our wisdom to be carried and gazed upon with the love that God has for us.

Our wealth as given to us in the beatitudes is not for those who believe as the disciples did as they listened to his sermon given “on the plain.”

The rich and the poor are the same in the eyes of God. For we all at one time are experiencing the four beatitudes and we all experience the four woes in this generation.

It is the condition of the heart that God monitors and changes. God alone, through God’s grace keeps our hearts distinguishing between the two, blessings and woes.

“Thus, both the beatitudes and the woes are intended to shape the lives of disciples who live in this world as citizens of God’s kingdom. While the promise of a future in which there is no hunger, thirst or weeping is a hope that is necessary to strengthen obedience and patient endurance in this life, the presence the kingdom demands a manifestation of that future already in the present.” **The Lectionary Commentary**, pg.335.

Remember... The heart determines our motivations and actions.

So, is your heart and is my heart set on righteousness, steadfast love, faithfulness, forgiveness, seeking joy and peace?

Regardless of what we may say to one another in answering that question... God knows for sure.

Amen.