

## Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

## *Changed for Good*

## Gospel Lesson

Luke 6:1-5, 6-11, 20-36, 43-45 (NRSVUE)

<sup>1</sup> One Sabbath while Jesus was going through some grain fields, his disciples plucked some heads of grain, rubbed them in their hands, and ate them. <sup>2</sup> But some of the Pharisees said, "Why are you doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" <sup>3</sup> Jesus answered, "Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? <sup>4</sup> How he entered the house of God and took and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and gave some to his companions?" <sup>5</sup> Then he said to them, "The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."

<sup>6</sup> On another Sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught, and there was a man there whose right hand was withered. <sup>7</sup> The scribes and the Pharisees were watching him to see whether he would cure on the Sabbath, so that they might find grounds to bring an accusation against him. <sup>8</sup> But he knew what they were thinking, and he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come and stand in the middle." He got up and stood there. <sup>9</sup> Then Jesus said to them, "I ask you, is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to destroy it?" <sup>10</sup> After looking around at all of them, he said to him, "Stretch out your hand." He did so, and his hand was restored. <sup>11</sup> But they were filled with fury and began discussing with one another what they might do to Jesus.

<sup>20</sup> Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

"Blessed are you who are poor,  
for yours is the kingdom of God.

<sup>21</sup> "Blessed are you who are hungry now,  
for you will be filled.

"Blessed are you who weep now,  
for you will laugh.

<sup>22</sup> "Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. <sup>23</sup> Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven, for that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.

<sup>24</sup> "But woe to you who are rich,  
for you have received your consolation.

<sup>25</sup> "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.

<sup>26</sup> "Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

<sup>27</sup> "But I say to you who are listening: Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you; pray for those who mistreat you. <sup>29</sup> If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. <sup>30</sup> Give to everyone who asks of you, and if anyone takes away what is yours, do not ask for it back again. <sup>31</sup> Do to others as you would have them do to you.

<sup>32</sup> "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup> If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. <sup>34</sup> If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive payment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. <sup>35</sup> Instead, love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. <sup>36</sup> Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

<sup>43</sup> "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; <sup>44</sup> for each tree is known by its own fruit. For people do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a bramble bush. <sup>45</sup> The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil, for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.

## Bible/Sermon Focus

There is a moment at the end of the first act of *Wicked* where both Glinda and Elphaba realize that they must take decisive action to live into their calling, to respond to an injustice, and stand against evil. And they come to a crossroads where they realize that they are called to act in very different ways.

Glinda finds that she is called to be a rule follower. To work within the system, within the rules, even though they are imperfect and even harming the creation and the creatures of Oz. She believes she can make the most change by being the change she wants to see in the world in this way.

And Elphaba, now having been used by these same systems of power, finds that she can no longer align herself or her actions within the system. Her good must be done in resistance to the power structure.

And both of them are able to see and understand each other's choice. They are each aware that the world is not "black and white," and that the room for grey is immense.

It takes a mature faith to recognize that God calls us each to different relationships either within or outside of the systems of the world and the institutions in which we collectively move, and to see that God works within it all. The world may define what is "good" and what is "wicked" but those definitions often lack the nuance required for ethical living.

Take our Bible story for today. Is it lawful to work on the Sabbath? No. But what if people need food? What if someone needs healed? What is the "good" action, and what is the "wicked"

action? What about a person's inaction? Does the inaction of those "following the law" indict them in the suffering of others?

After the questions about the sabbath, in the same chapter starting on verse 20, we hear Jesus' teaching that we call the *Beatitudes*. These sayings turn our assumption of who is "good" on their heads. "Blessed are the poor," Jesus says.

Maybe what Jesus is getting at is that just because the world may define someone as "less than," doesn't mean that God does. In fact, God loves even those who are cast aside, perhaps *especially* those who are cast aside. Maybe God's love for us doesn't have anything to do with what the world defines "good" and "wicked" based on status quo. Maybe God understands, better than us, that it's the people in power *at the moment* that get to define what is "good," and it's usually people who look just like them.

Maybe what makes us good is simply that God created us. *That* is a radical love that we may struggle to accept. Maybe it is God's grace that makes us "good."

And beloved community, that is a hard thing for us to accept sometimes. It's why we need each other. We are called to be the kind of people who remind each other of each other's goodness and value, no matter what the world says.

Like Elphaba, learning that she was "good" just as she was, green skin and all, we are called into relationships with one another that help us see that yes, we are "good" just because God made us. At our very best, that is what the church should be. "We are a grace-filled community helping one another see ourselves truly."

## Discussion Questions

1. Who has helped you learn to love yourself?
2. How has religion defined your worth to you in positive and/or negative way?
3. Reflect on the Beatitudes. What images and feelings do they conjure in you?
4. How is the community at Manchester UMC living into our call to be a grace-filled community in your life?
5. How can you witness to others *goodness* in the coming weeks?

## Prayer

Good and Holy God, Thank you for the people in our lives who see us as we are. Thank you for the people in our lives who help us see ourselves truly. And thank you, Good and Holy God, for creating us as we are, for celebrating us as we are, and for loving us just as we are. To You our God, in the name of Jesus, and in the presence of the Holy Spirit, **Amen.**

*"So much of me is made of what I learned from you.  
You'll be with me like a handprint on my heart."*