

What He Said
Sunday, April 6, 2008
Luke 6: 20-26

Reverend Patrick Day
First Presbyterian Church
Lake Forest, IL

Scripture Reading

Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

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

‘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, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

‘But 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.

It kind of feels like blanket statements Sunday - Blessed are these people, but woe onto these people. Lets divide up the room, shall we? We'll put the good people over on this side and the bad people on the other side.

It's a hard word to hear today. Who was hoping that there might be a little more? Maybe a 'but' at the end of verse 26 or something. But it isn't at the end. There is a part tucked right in there in the middle, at the end of verse 22, right in the center that says: "on account of the Son of man."

Each of these things taken on its own is neutral, for lack of a better term. There is nothing inherently noble about being poor, about being hungry, about weeping. The flip side is: there is nothing inherently evil about having money,

about having someone say something nice about you. It's that part in the center: "on account of the Son of man."

Christ came into this world to turn the world's values upside down. He did that 2,000 years ago and continues to do that today. When there is injustice in the world, when things are simply not fair, we are called to see who we will stand up for. Will we only pay attention to ourselves? Or, will we pay attention to the needs of others? When we lose that center, when we allow things such as wealth, popularity and a good reputation be the ends in and of themselves, then it's true. That is your reward. That is what you get.

David Duval is a professional golfer. He is a year younger than I am, and his current official world golf ranking is 815th. In April of 1999, his official world golf ranking was number 1. I'm sure that some who follow professional golf closely are probably not here today, and those who are, probably know the story better than I do. And for those who don't follow professional golf, let me add just a few words of explanation.

David Duval's father was a professional golfer, his grandfather was a professional golfer, and all he wanted to be was a professional golfer. In the 1990's he won 13 times on tour. There are many professional golfers who play their entire career without winning ever.

In the final round of the Bob Hope Classic in 1999, David Duval shot a 59; only two other men and one woman have ever shot a 59 in an official PGA golf event. For you Mickelson fans, he did it in 2004 but it was not an official event.....doesn't count. If still those numbers don't mean anything to you because you don't really care about golf, let me say this, at that time, in the late 90's, David Duval was the last person who might have been able to claim that he was better than Tiger Woods.

Like any other professional golfer, David Duval's dream was to win one of the four major professional tournaments, and he did that in 2001 when he won the British Open. The next year he was number 80 on tour, six years after that he's 815. Why? Because by his own admission, David Duval said that he thought it would feel better. He finally had everything that he had set out to

accomplish, he thought he would be fulfilled, he thought he would be changed, he thought he would become a different person by having achieved this. And that was it.

Sure, he won the Claret Jug, but he looked at it and realized it was a jug. Now, he's 815th on tour, he's married, he has three kids and he's happy. He has found his reward in other places.

It can happen so easily, that when we move Christ out of the center of our lives, we lose focus on what is important. We allow these things that we pursue to become the ends rather than the means to being God's people. It can happen with money, it can happen with influence, it can happen right here. I appreciate it when people say nice things about me, but if my motivation for standing here today is so that people will say kind things to me and about me, then I have lost my focus and I have moved Christ out of the center of my life and placed myself where he should be. It can happen so easily.

That is why we are here, isn't it? That is why we come back every Sunday and gather around this table so that we can feel God's presence in our lives and we can feel Christ moving back into the center, and hopefully stay there until we gather together again. So, I invite us to gather around this table this day. Each of us, in our own way, praying that Christ will be and will stay the center of our lives.

Amen.