

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

HOW THE UNLUCKY LUCK OUT

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

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Analysis by Ron Starenko

30The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. 31He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. 32And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. 33Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. 34As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things...

53When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. 54When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, 55and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. 56And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

DIAGNOSIS: On the One Hand, As the Luckless Masses

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Looking for Our Luck to Change*

The truth be known, we are all gamblers and we loathe losing. The crowds who followed Jesus were losers, and they knew it, as they waited for their luck to change. They were “like sheep without a shepherd” (v. 34), people whom no one cared about, people who had gotten the short end of the stick in life. Having a loser mentality, feeling deprived, we, too, have hopes of striking it rich, winning the lottery, whatever, desperately hoping that our luck will change.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *We Take Our Chances*

Without knowing it, we set ourselves up for further loss. When luck seems to be the answer for what we need in life, we become victims of our ups and downs. Our winnings don't last, and luck always seems to hold promise for new gains. “Lady Luck,” our idol, woos us into believing that when we get what we want in life we will be a winner. So, we test our luck, consuming food, looking for love, “keeping up with the Joneses,” even mistaking Jesus to be our good luck charm, as we eat the bread that comes from his hand (6:35-44), and receive the healing that comes from his touch (6:56), never knowing that none of it will be enough. Still looking for luck to come our way, never sure of the outcome, we discover more often than not that we are holding a losing hand.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Ending Up Luckless Altogether*

Finally, we all run out of luck. Lacking a shepherd we can count on, lucky or not, we end up losers, death finally confirming all our losses, revealing the futility of our vain striving, exposing our false sense of security by which we imagine that we will find our pot of gold just around the corner. Backing the wrong lord, there is nothing or no one to save us from our deserved fate, unless there remains for us a mercy we hadn't bargained for, or even bet on.

PROGNOSIS: On the Other Hand, As the Luckiest People in the World

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *We Truly Luck Out*

The good news, the truth be known, is that Jesus will not leave us luckless and helpless, “like sheep without a shepherd” (v. 34). Seeing “a great crowd” (v. 34), then and now, he will not fail in his “compassion” (v. 34) for us all. Luck or no luck, nothing will prevent him from being the kind of Lord (Psalm 23), who “makes us lie down in green pastures,” and “leads us beside still waters,” and walks with us “through the darkest valley,” and “prepares a table before (us) in the presence of (our) enemies,” so that “goodness and mercy shall follow (us) all the days of (our) life.” This is the Lord who goes to the cross, to the place where all faithless empty striving gets overthrown, where Satan’s claim to our souls gets overruled, and where God’s visitation of judgment gets overturned by a suffering and death big enough to gather all losers into “the house of the Lord,” the community of the Good Shepherd. Who else could take our restless, luckless existence and exchange it with his eternal peace and providential care? How lucky is that!

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Lucky in Faith*

What other word, what other gracious invitation, delivered by the Holy Spirit, could free us from our compulsive will to fail and inspire faith in our hearts by drawing us into the company and community of Jesus? There is now a place where the Spirit “restores (our) soul” (Ps. 23:3). Touched by such “goodness and mercy” (Ps. 23:6), clinging to Jesus “cloak” (v. 56), his compassion that covers our sin and death and all the contingencies of life, we find ourselves drawn into the very life of God, where there is security in God’s everlasting arms. By the Spirit’s word and promise, present in our baptism and in our communion at the table of the Lord, we have a Shepherd who mercifully “restores (our) soul” (Ps. 23:3). Then, not by chance

but by the faith of the church, we get to know the One who is with us (our) “whole life long” (Ps. 23:6), energized for our living today and tomorrow and forever. How lucky is that?

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Lucky in Love*

No longer the misguided, luckless crowds, anxiously “chasing after wind” (Eccl. 1:17), we become focused, like our Lord, turning in compassion away from ourselves and our obsessions about winning or losing to our neighbor in need. Losers ourselves at one time, we now walk with the winning hand of our Lord, not ashamed to reach out to our crowded world, to those who are hungry, alone, and afraid, to those betrayed by good and bad luck, where our love becomes a sign of God’s shalom. How lucky is that!