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## ARE YOU AN INNIE OR AN OUTIE?

Let me begin by asking some questions:

- First, how do all good stories start? (*Once upon a time...*)
  - Once upon a time there was a good king or queen...
  - Once upon a time there was a fair maiden...
  - Once upon a time in a galaxy far, far away...

Now if I asked you where “Once upon a time...” happens in the Bible, where would you say? (*Genesis? The creation story?*)

- True, that’s the beginning, the “Once upon a time...” of the human story, but that, Christians, is really chapter three in the Big Book of the human story.
  - There are events that precede this chapter; events that we should know.

If you really want to go back to the beginning—to the “Once upon a time...” before all “Once upon a times...” you need to go to the Gospel of John, chapter 1, verse 1.

- “In the beginning was the WORD, and the WORD was with GOD, and the WORD was GOD. Through HIM all things were made; without HIM nothing was made that was made.”
  - *That* is chapter one of the Bible, the Big Book: “In the beginning...” is “Once upon a time...” or “Once upon eternity...”, if you will.
  - Something preceded us, something that had been going on long before we ever existed, a story already underway.

I’m not going to talk about chapter two of the Big Book, the stuff between “In the beginning was the WORD” and GOD saying “Let us make human beings...”

- That’s a discussion we can have on another day, if you wish.

But before I talk about our appearance in chapter three (and I will talk about chapter three), let me ask another question:

- Where does this Big Book story end? (*Revelation. The Return of CHRIST. Heaven.*)
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Okay, then, so we’ve named the beginning and the end of the story,

- and that we become a part of the story in chapter three.

Just one more question: Where are we right now in that story? (And don’t answer chapter three.) (*Somewhere in the middle.*)

- We are somewhere between “In the beginning” and “heaven.”
  - We are in the middle of a story—a love story, actually, with GOD who loves us, and chases after us desperately,
    - and yet we often go off on our own way.
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Today’s Gospel reading puts us in the middle of that story.

- Luke has already told how JESUS shows GOD’s love for us as HE heals the sick and eats with sinners.
- Now JESUS talks about what it is to respond to that love, or to follow our own priorities.

He starts by sharing the blessings of God’s love.

- “Blessed are you who are poor,” HE says.
- “Blessed are you who are hungry now.”
- “Blessed are you who weep now.”
- “Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject you especially because of Me.”
  - In doing so, JESUS invites us to have that same concern for others that GOD has.

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You may note however that Luke's version of the beatitudes differs from Matthew's in two significant ways.

- First, Luke's blessings are shorter.
  - Luke says "Poor," vs. Matthew who says, "Poor in spirit."
  - "Hungry" vs. "Hunger and thirst."
  - "Weep" vs. "Mourn."
- Second, Luke's version also sets that contrast of being concerned with the needs of others and only our own needs in the "woes" of that self-focus.
  - "Woe to you who are rich."
  - "Woe to you who are well fed now."
  - "Woe to you who laugh now."
  - "Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you."

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It would seem that JESUS in Luke's version is giving each of us a choice.

- Are you going to look inward at your own needs, or are you going to look outward at those who need your help?
- Are you going to be an innie or an outie?
  - Are you going to look inward only to yourself?
    - to your wealth?
    - to your desires?
    - to your comfort?
  - Or are you going to look outward,
    - to the needs of those who struggle in the world?
    - to the situation of those who are barely getting by?
    - to the helplessness of those who have no voice to change things?

Indeed, these are important questions which each of us must consider.

- And it is easy to find others who are better off than those in real need, so as to make the overall need seem less,
  - or those who are better off than us, so as to make these challenges seem like their responsibility and not ours.
- Yet we also know that we are surrounded by those poorer than us,
  - the ones toward whom JESUS calls our attention again and again throughout His Gospel.
    - Are you going to look inward or outward?
    - Are you an innie or an outie?

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I think when JESUS says that the poor are blessed, HE is stating a principle for the church and the Christian community gathered.

- You see, the gospel is not just to be heard individually, but also as community.
- When we speak the confession of sin, as we do when we are not receiving GOD's forgiveness in the Holy Communion, it should be a moment of humility for us both as individuals and as community.
  - It should not a time for us to just think about our individual sins—the things we've done during the past week that we regret and for which we are sorrowful.
  - It is also a time for us to think about and confess our sins corporately—as a community in the church, in our families, in our city, in our nation, and in the world.

For example, individually, we may fail to decrease our carbon footprint by not always recycling those things that can be repurposed.

- Corporately, we may fail to decrease our carbon footprint by not switching to renewable energy sources in our city or by not reducing carbon emissions in our nation.

In the same way, we can look the other direction as individuals when we see someone who is in need of food, or clothing, or shelter, or security, or employment.

- Communally, we can do the same thing through our city, state, and national policies.

JESUS' principle in His sermon in Luke certainly calls us as individuals to action.

- But HE also challenges to do this as a church, a city, a country:
  - to develop principles and policies that look toward the needs of the least,
  - to act in ways that will ensure that the poor and the needy are blessed.
- JESUS invites us to take up the task of reducing and eliminating poverty.
  - As of 2017, eight people in the world control 50% of the world's wealth.
  - Half of the world—over 3 billion people live on less than a \$2.50 a day. (Granted what a dollar will buy in certain places varies widely.)
  - 22,000 children die each day due to poverty.
  - 63,700 people in Los Angeles County in 2020 were homeless an increase of 19% over the previous year.

Figures like this can be overwhelming and we may wonder what we can do.

- The possibilities, however, are numerous, but there will be no response until people come together with the goal of making a difference.

As we consider our role in the midst of GOD's great story, we, the church, need to recognize that we have a role to play.

- How might we address the long-term issues of homelessness.
- What more that we might do?
- Are there agencies we can support, or is there something more that we ourselves can do?
- Or perhaps there is another need that we could address?
- Or in partnership with someone else?
  - Again, it's the question of whether you're going to be an innie or an outie?

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JESUS demonstrate His choice most clearly through a small detail in this reading that is easy to miss.

- Again, noting the differences between Luke's account of JESUS' most famous sermon and Matthew's, pay attention to the key element in the very first sentence: "HE, JESUS, went down *with* them and stood on a level place..."

JESUS, throughout Luke's Gospel, demonstrates a profound desire to meet the needs of the people *in their midst*.

- JESUS wants to be with them and for them, and with us in our need, and so comes down and around and out in order to meet with all on a level place.
  - In doing so, JESUS shows His unending concern for the people, for them and for us, wherever we are at.

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Today's gospel reading provides us the challenging example set by JESUS when it comes to where you choose to focus your eyes?

- Inward or outward?
- Are you an innie or an outie?