

## THE CHALLENGES OF LIBERATION

Luke 6: 17-31

In October 1946, a small Sunday School was started in the unincorporated area of Wilbur By-The-Sea, south of Daytona Beach. This was the humble beginning of Westminster By-The-Sea Presbyterian Church and was the dream of The Reverend Paul M. Edris, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Daytona Beach. Rev. Edris, with Miss Elizabeth McNeil, Director of Christian Education at First Church, conducted this outpost Sunday School for one year; then it was decided that more people could be reached through weekly prayer meetings.

In February 1955, forty-two people gathered for the first Sunday worship service. In May of that year, with sixty-two charter members present, a committee from the Presbytery of St. Johns installed The Reverend Richard W. SauerBrun as the first pastor of Westminster By-The-Sea Presbyterian Church.

Soon the congregation outgrew its temporary quarters in the Wilbur Clubhouse. Plans were made. Mrs. Laura Fair Ferran donated land at the corner of South Peninsula Drive and El Portal Ave (now called Westminster Drive,) and construction began on the first building of the church complex.

On Christmas Eve, 1956, the first Candlelight Service was held in the recently completed fellowship hall, which was to serve as a temporary sanctuary. Today our liturgists two children were baptized in that room where we will hold our anniversary reception today! An education wing was added in 1958, (that we know today as rooms 8,9,10, 11, and 12B) and by September, 1964, the beautiful colonial sanctuary was a reality.

How has the world changed since 1955? For one thing, I had not yet been born, but one year later, I would be, during what was called the “Baby Boom.” In those days, churches just had to open their doors and people came! Sunday Schools were burgeoning with children. Nearly every store except drug stores were closed on Sundays as America went to church on The Lord’s Day. In the little gathering at the Wilbur by-the-Sea Clubhouse, all the Sunday School classes could not meet at the Clubhouse, (now called Wilbur Boathouse) The boathouse was amazingly fortified a number of years ago, spearheaded by charter member James Hunt, and it is now a strong and welcoming structure. The Wilbur association graciously

allowed this congregation to return for a reception during our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. And we have been invited back again for a return visit! A double sized brick in the boathouse walkway says “Westminster By-The-Sea Presbyterian Church, founded here in 1955.” (Including \_By-The-Sea in our name is a tribute to our local roots!) Some classes in 1955 were held in the living room of Ernest and Mary Hunt’s home at the intersection of Toronita and A1A, one block from the Wilbur Clubhouse. Some of the adults met at Gaylord Restaurant between the Hunt house and the Clubhouse for their Sunday School. Distracted parishioners could look through the floorboards of the ramshackled main room of the original Clubhouse and watch fish swim by! In the winter, someone would have to arrive early to light the primitive heating. So from being a Sunday School extension for First Presbyterian Church, Westminster by-The-Sea got chartered by St. John’s Presbytery on May 22, 1955. The world was simpler then, but as the years went by, change would take place across our nation. Some changes rocked the boat of the status quo. In 1960 a Roman Catholic man was elected as President. Our country came close to a nuclear catastrophe with the Cuban Missile Crisis. That same president was assassinated, the first such horrific event in our lifetimes. Televisions were almost all black and white then. In rock and roll, Elvis, Little Richard, and Buddy Holly got to know other groups that came to our shores as the “British Invasion.” Civil rights became an issue, and the war in Vietnam became front line news. There was a space race then as today. The war produced protests in public squares and on college campuses. Sometimes police, trying to quell riots, pulled out not just protective gear, but clubs and guns, with once massacre at Kent State in Ohio. Young men were drafted into a war that had become, as some called it, a “quagmire.” A major figure, Martin Luther King Jr. proclaimed, “riots are the voices of the unheard.” He too was assassinated. In the 1960s those who were the unheard included students, included people of color, and included women. People

in Hollywood and elsewhere who were attracted to people of the same gender married others in traditional ceremonies out of fear of their love being discovered. By the late 60s and early 70s, women were clearly speaking out as being unheard. It stirred the soul of our nation, clearly delineating conservative stances and liberal ones. That has been amplified to this day. In the 1970s, North America became aware of the cries for liberation for those in Latin American countries under brutal regimes. That issue continues today too. The days when television could just tune in three or four channels, and one newscast a night gave American their information have changed at warp speed. A revolutionary idea was created: that people would watch news, and sports, 24 hours a day. CNN was born and other networks followed. More information, more issue that tore at the fabric of America came over our screens anytime, avoiding the national anthem that used to be played at the end of the broadcast hours followed by a test screen. Computers changed from the giant IBM machines to personal ones, some of which had more power than the ones used by NASA to land men on the moon. Once the technology age took hold, in the 90s something called the “Internet” revolutionized information; we could hear what was happening across the globe, not counting on the sonorous tones of Walter Cronkite or the back and forth of the Huntley-Brinkley report. The rest of the technological revolution took place since the 1990s. And progress on all fronts has been created largely by microchips. Recently when they have been unavailable, industries have suffered. In the last two years, the COVID pandemic has tested medicine, tested the skills of doctors, challenged political leaders, and taxed the patience of everyone. What else it did was to test the concept of “The Four Freedoms,” articulated by President Roosevelt in his 1941 State of the Union speech: *The Freedom of Speech, the Freedom of Worship, the Freedom from want, and the Freedom from fear*. Everyone of those freedoms were tested over the last decade, especially during the last two years. And it has

exposed some who have been on the margins of society; our awareness of them has been most challenging. How do we honor freedoms and still seek to honor civility?

Jesus had a liberation speech years ago that sounds tame by today's standards, but once we dive into it—especially the way it was recorded by Luke, it stands the test of time. Remember last week how Jesus had the discussion with the Canaanite woman whose daughter needed healing? That was in the region of Tyre and Sidon, originally outside of those Jesus believed he was sent to save. But that conversation with that Canaanite woman changed much. Listen this week to Luke 6:17-18: "Jesus came down with them and stood on a level place with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, *and the coast of Tyre and Sidon*. They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases, and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured."

Jesus's reach was expanding! People who he considered "others"—the marginalized or the forgotten ones—found hope in his presence and his healings. So in this account, he is not the old Jesus who was just speaking to the lost of Israel; now he is reaching others, even beyond any social, or geographical, or ethnic lines. He's not talking in general now; he's talking to his disciples, perhaps he is even speaking to you.

Blessed are you who are poor. What? How are the poor blessed? Perhaps in their impoverishment they lean more completely on God and notice heavenly blessings.

Blessed are you who are hungry. Many people come to the Port Orange Pantry every week. Is Jesus saying they are more blessed than others who watch food prices rise? Perhaps they are just more grateful when they sit for a meal.

And blessed are those who weep? Professor Alan Culpepper, who was Dean of the School of Theology at Mercer University, wrote: “When Jesus speaks, he speaks specifically to his disciples. What follows is the standard for which every disciple should strive. Nevertheless, the sermon does not begin with admonitions and exhortations, but the with pronouncement of God’s blessings on the disciples.” [NEW INTERPRETER’S BIBLE, VOLUME IX, Nashville; Abingdon Press, 1995, p. 143.] In other words, those who set aside their lucrative tax collecting job, or their fishing; those who are missing their families because they dropped what they were doing and followed Jesus, *they* will feel the blessings, he declared.. Others who are still working for good income are already receiving their reward. If you who feel hated by others, God loves you even more. As I said last week, how many groups of people feel hated or marginalized by others? Jesus says God loves them unconditionally. You will receive your daily bread; and you will receive blessings from heaven. Some commentators have called Jesus’ message “scandalous.” This month, almost everything Jesus does is called scandalous by someone. Perhaps we are called to do things that others might call scandalous too. Love kindness; show mercy; walk humbly with your God. Welcome the lost ones like a loving parent with arms open. The most powerful part of Jesus’ sermon is bestowing blessings on the listeners. *Today Jesus is seeking to bless; not bless selectively but to bless abundantly.* Our world may indeed improve if we embody the blessing and love of God toward others. And may this congregation be a lighthouse of Christ, shining not just from her spire, but from her people too. As we will sing at the end of today’s service: “The church’s one foundation is Jesus Christ *her* Lord; she is his new creation by water and the word.” We are that to others. Be his light!

Prayer of Consecration: Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on those in this sanctuary today. Send us forth embodying your light; cause us to be evangelists to our neighbors; and ground us in your Word as we worship and our work. We ask for your blessings, Lord Jesus, in carrying out your Great Commission. Send us forth today! Amen,

Jeffrey A. Sumner

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