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Epiphany 6

Our Saviour Lutheran Church
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Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. AMEN.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, "he" has been hosting it since 1981. "She" has been alongside him since 1982.

As of May 31, 2019, there have been 7,000 episodes.

So, it is even more now. But that was the figure I found, 7,000 episodes since May 2019.

The overall number of contestants who have been on the show, I have no idea, but if there are 3 contestants per episode, well you do the math.

What am I talking about?

Well, the gameshow Wheel of Fortune, of course, which ranks as the longest-running syndicated television gameshow in the United States.

Now, if we didn't know, Wheel of Fortune was created by Merv Griffith and debuted in 1975

And just so you know, Pat and Vanna were not the original personalities for the game show.

Chuck Woolery and Susan Stafford preceded them.

PAUSE

Now the premise of the show, of course, is very simple. It is really just a more elaborate version of the game known as "Hangman."

Remember the game Hangman, where one person thinks up a word or phrase, and makes dashes to stand-in for the letters?

And then the other person has to pick letters to try to guess the word or phrase.

If that person guessing letters doesn't get the right letter, well then one of the body parts is drawn in at the gallows.

And the hope is to guess the word or phrase before the whole human is drawn.

The twist that is added for the gameshow Wheel of Fortune is the big wheel, where a person has to spin the wheel before picking a letter.

Now, the gameshow Wheel of Fortune has evolved over the years.

I remember watching the show way back, early on in the history of the show, when a contestant having won a round would then spend their winnings on the bonus round where they bought furniture and other prizes, all listed with prices.

And the TV camera panned around the room filled with prizes, and the contestant spent down their winnings.

That has since gone to the wayside.

But the one thing that hasn't changed is the big wheel.

And if we didn't know the idea of Wheel of Fortune originated with the ancient Romans.

You see, there was an ancient Roman goddess named Fortuna.

And we have heard this name Fortuna, or Fortune, recently in a commercial starring Matt Damon.

It is a commercial about investing in cryptocurrency, which I not advocating one way or the other.

But in the commercial Damon refers to the goddess Fortune, by saying, "Fortune favors the brave."

Now in Roman mythology Fortuna, it was believed, possess a wheel, which she would spin at random.

And the fate of those on the wheel could and would change at a moment's notice.

Those who had been experiencing a great bounty, those at the top of the wheel, might suddenly find themselves, with a turn of the wheel, at the bottom of the wheel, and with it, a great change in their circumstances.

While those who had been at the bottom of wheel, might, with a turn of the wheel, find themselves suddenly experiencing a great windfall.

It all depended on the turn of the wheel.

And the ancients then could never be certain of their future from day to day.

Who knew what fate would bring?

Who knew what the turn of the wheel would bring?

You might be sitting high at the top wheel, but look out, your fortune might change.

There was no telling what Fortune's wheel might do to you, so thought the ancient Romans.

And in our contemporary society, we still play to this idea of Fortune guiding our lives.

For instance, we bid people "good luck" as they start out on some endeavor.

We say "good luck" to a couple when they get married.

We say "good luck" to a person starting a new job.

We say "good luck" to a student before they take a test.

But that well-wish really plays on the idea that hopefully the turn of Fortune's wheel will be to the person's favor.

In our everyday lives we also speak of "fortune" and "misfortune."

"Fortunately, there was no traffic so I was not late."

"It was unfortunate that they lost the game."

So on and so forth.

So there is also this undercurrent in today's society that things happen on a whim sometimes, that it is all up to fate, that there is some unforeseen force or goddess spinning a wheel.

And we can't help but wonder if the belief in Fortune and her wheel didn't influence Jesus such that we have our gospel reading for today.

Because there certainly is the conviction in Jesus' words that the fortune of people can and will be reversed.

Jesus says, "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.

And so on.

“And woe to you,” says Jesus, “woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.”

“And woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry.”

“And woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep.”

And so on.

There is a definite reversal of fortune going on here in Jesus’ words.

And it is a theme that appears in other places in Luke.

In Mary’s song known as *The Magnificat*, Luke 1:46-55, Mary sings, “The Lord has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly.”

“He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.”

And in Jesus’ instructions on table fellowship, Luke 14:7-24, Jesus says, “Take the lowest place at table, so that the host may invite you to move up higher. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, but those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

And in the story of the rich man and Lazarus, Luke 16:19-31, Jesus describes a reversal of fortune.

In Jesus’ story here, Father Abraham speaks to the rich man saying, “Remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony.”

Those at the top of the wheel will soon be at the bottom, and those at the bottom will soon be at the top.

PAUSE

Now, there are also passages from the Old Testament, which also echo the idea of a reversal of fortune.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, for example, reads in part, “There is a time to weep, and a time to laugh. A time to mourn, and a time to dance. A time for war, and a time for peace. A time to be born and a time to die.”

There are up's and down's, high's and low's, all sorts of reversals throughout life.

PAUSE

So what are we to make of Jesus' words in our gospel passage today? Is Jesus resigned to some sort of fatalistic reality? Is Jesus also of the mindset that all of life is subject to the whim of Fortune?

Those who are blessed and those who are destitute will find their circumstances changed at some point.

In other words, does Jesus subscribe to the Wheel of Fortune mentality?

Or is there something more going on?

Personally, I keep coming back to that phrase from ancient Roman society, quoted by Matt Damon in that commercial: "Fortune favors the brave."

It seemed that the Romans believed that they had some influence on the whims of Fortune.

That if the Romans were brave, Fortune would look kindly upon them, that their circumstances in life may not be so up in the air, but only if they were brave.

PAUSE

Sisters and brothers in Christ, our Christian lives are not subject to the Wheel of Fortune, our lives are not dependent on luck and happy circumstance.

Our lives are not dependent on us being brave.

No, our lives are rooted in the good news of Jesus Christ.

Our lives are rooted not in bravery nor fortunate circumstance, but in faith.

Our lives are rooted in faith.

For Jesus is the one who has been brave, he is the one who has shown the paramount faith, when he went to the cross and died for us.

Jesus is the one who sets things as they ought to be, as opposed to some turn of a wheel.

The wheel turns and who knows what it will mean for everyone's life.

But God in Jesus Christ takes the reins of humanity's fate; by dying on the cross, Jesus sets things as they should be, through the power of God's people responding in faith to that grace in Christ Jesus.

The poor are to be cared for.

The hungry are to be fed.

Those who weep are to be consoled.

Those who are persecuted are to be comforted.

And those who are rich are to share.

Those who are satisfied with good things are to be generous with their abundance.

Those who are at peace are to extend peace to others.

Those who are loved are to be loving toward their neighbor.

This is the vision of the kingdom of God. It is not a vision of have's and have not's, so says Jesus.

It is a vision of the have's and have's. It is a vision, now get this...it is a vision of "enough."

So, really, the vision of heaven is about one beatitude:
Blessed are those who have "enough."

And the way we get to that vision is for those who have to offer grace to those who have not.

On the one hand, for people not to have enough is a problem.

But, on the other hand, for people who have an abundance, and for them think that they still don't have enough is an even greater problem.

In order for those who have an abundance to offer grace to those who have not, it must start with an understanding of what it means to have enough.

Those who bless others out of their abundance, will still have enough, of that we can be sure of.

But, if those who have an abundance do not share, then they still lack something of great worth, namely peace of mind, satisfaction with what they have.

In short, they lack the blessing of knowing what is “enough.”

Blessed are those who have enough.

Blessed are those who were in want but now enjoy enough for daily life because of others’ generosity.

And blessed are those who have had an abundance, but find that they have more than enough, and need not still seek exorbitant gain, but instead are gracious to share with others who have not.

Blessed are those who have enough.

However then the wheel of fortune may turn, those with enough, those whose faith rests in Jesus, understand fully what is grace.

And understanding God’s grace moves the Christian to give thanks for the bravery of Jesus, to give thanks for the faithfulness of Jesus, to give thanks for Jesus who has done all that was necessary, all that was enough, for new life and abundant life.

And in giving thanks for God’s grace in Jesus Christ, the Christian shares that all may have enough. Thanks be to God. Amen.