# Just a Plain Sermon

Life, today, seems to be more and more complicated.   We seem sometimes to have made our lives miserable with our technology. We seem to want things with more and more buttons to push.

How many know all the features on our mobile phone, or all that our TV can do?  Let’s not even **talk about** our home computer.

With all that technology are we any happier with life?

I can remember some years ago, someone told me about **KISS** …

(Keep It Simple, Stupid).

Perhaps the gospel message today is not only about being happy with life, but how simple life can be.

Perhaps it comes this: If you are **not** happy, draw closer to **God**, who is the only source of genuine happiness.

* If you have a beautiful goldfish and take it out of the water so that you can sing a song to it, will it be happy? **NO.**
* If you put the fish on the couch and turn on the TV, will it be happy? **NO.**
* But if you put the fish back in the water it **will** be happy.

It’s the same with us.  We will be happy only in God.  You might say God is cruel making you in such a way that you will be happy only in God.  But God is not cruel. God is love, **total love**. God loves us even if we have not yet discovered **His** love for us.  He says, **“Come closer to Me and I will lift you up from despair to hope.”**

When we turn our hearts to Jesus, we don’t need all the buttons there are to push.  There is only one (*point to the cross*)—there he is ready for us.

Dr. Tostengaard was professor of homiletics.

One day, he said, “**Don’t get in the way of the gospel. Don’t try to get cute. Just tell the story and let the gospel speak for itself.”**

Sometimes, when Sunday’s scripture texts seem dry and the words won’t come, it is tempting to make the gospel say something that isn’t there.

I remembered his words this week as I considered the day Jesus came **down** from the mountain and addressed those who were gathered.

* **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, for your reward will be great in heaven.”**

In the Gospel of Matthew, these words are part of **“The Sermon on the Mount.”** But in Luke’s Gospel, Jesus doesn’t deliver this sermon up on the mountain top. He comes down among the people; the hurting, broken, and rejected people of the day, and tells them that there is hope for them. It’s called “The Sermon on the Plain” and it turns all the injustices of this world upside down. The poor will be rich, the hungry will be fed, the grieving will one day laugh again.

But then Jesus turns his attention to the powerful, the popular, the beautiful people of that day.

Just beyond the crowd of hurting people who had come to be healed by Jesus, there were the social and religious powerbrokers who had come to examine Jesus — and Jesus has a message for them, too.

* **“Woe to you who are rich now, because that’s as good as it’s going to get for you.**
* **Woe to you who are full now, you will be hungry.**
* **Woe to you who laugh now, for you are about to experience pain.**
* **Woe to you who are popular, for you are just like the false prophets.”**

There was only one sermon that day. There was only one crowd. But there were many responses.

The poor felt encouraged, but the wealthy felt judged.

The hungry went away hopeful, but the well-fed went away worried about the future.

And it occurs to me that, every time a preacher steps into a pulpit, there is never just one audience present, or just one sermon preached. We will leave this place today and every one of us will have heard a different sermon. Tostengaard said that we are responsible for what we say, but we are not responsible for what people hear.

Perhaps Jesus knew that, and that is why his teaching was always so provocative.

But I’m wondering what kind of a sermon we need today. Do we need a blessing, or do we need a woe?

Do I need a pat on the back, or do I need a kick in the butt?

What would Jesus want us to take from this **Plain Sermon** of so long ago?

Whether our lives are fractured or whole; whether we are filled with delight or filled with despair, I believe that Jesus would have us one message with four parts…for all of us.

The first message has to do with **wealth**. We live in one of the wealthiest **counties** in one of the wealthiest **countries** in the world. By the world’s standards, we are rich, yet many of us struggle to pay for our living. There is often a wide gap between our needs and our wants, and it fills us with all sorts of frustration, confusion and anxiety.

Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard once wrote:

I walked into a spectacular cathedral surrounded by stained glass windows. I watched as the preacher, dressed in silk robes opened a bible with gold edges and read these words:

**“If anyone wants to be my disciple, let them sell their possessions, give away their money, and come follow me.”**

And Kierkegaard said, **“I looked around, and no one else was laughing!”…..**

We seek financial security as if it can really make us secure. And Jesus says that **it** can’t, but **he can**.

The second message of this text has to do with hunger. We are supposed to eat to live, but we live to eat, and yet very few of us know what hunger feels like. Food can be a blessing or a woe, and there are lots of different ways to be hungry.

And then there is the issue of laughing and weeping. I went to a wedding last month, and the people in the wedding party were so happy, they cried.

I officiated at a funeral last month, and amid the family’s sadness and grief, there was **laughter**.

Sometimes, the most heartbroken people walk around with smiles on their faces because they don’t want people to know of their pain.

**“How are you today?” “Oh, I’m fine.”**

But they’re not fine. Others have wonderful lives, happy marriages, healthy children and beautiful homes, but they walk around with glum faces.

**“Are you sad?” “No. Just Norwegian.”**

Emotions can be a blessing or a woe, but we are seldom honest about how we are feeling.

Finally, there is this issue of being accepted or persecuted for what we believe. Some people in Third World countries are persecuted for their faith in Christ. Muslims in France will soon be forbidden to wear religious garments in public. Jews in Nazi Germany were marked with patches and systematically executed…because they were Jews.

But in this country, where we boast of our religious freedom, we mostly try to keep our religion to ourselves. Wouldn’t want to offend anyone. **“Religion is a private matter”**, we say, and so we shut up. Religious convictions can be a blessing or a woe.

I don’t know if **all of this** is what Jesus had in mind when he delivered that Sermon on the Plain 2000 years ago. What we do know is that he has come to this place, to enter the lives of the **humble** and the **proud**, to touch the lives of the **weeping** and the **laughing**…he has come to bring us a simple message, and it is this:

**WE ARE BLESSED BECAUSE THE SAVIOUR LOVES US.**

And if that’s all we hear today, it will be enough.

Amen.