Ok. This is one of those lessons that doesn’t really fit well with the way that we think about being Christians. In fact it’s really the opposite of what we tend to believe. We would much more likely say woe to you who are poor and blessed are you if you are wealthy. Obviously. When I was a kid I was taught regularly in Sunday School that we were so blessed in America precisely because of our wealth and people were starving in Africa because they didn’t believe in Jesus. Exactly the polar opposite of this text. Matthew’s version of this says poor in spirit, which allows us out of the financial reality pointed to in Luke. It just doesn’t fit does it. At all. Blessed are those who believe would fit and woe to you who don’t believe would be OK. And our most popular preachers are those who promise favor and increase. But this text is economic and social and political, and our way is much more private. So this just doesn’t work. It’s not our way is it? Not at all. So what do we do with this?

Well, what I’m going to change the subject for a minute and then try to give us an interpretation that we can live with. Because we can’t live with a straight up interpretation of this. Won’t work. So let’s do a little bit of background on the Gospel of Luke, and them come back. The Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts were orginally one book. One scroll if you will, written by the same author. In the process of the New Testament coming together, some editors agreed to cut the book in half and call the second half Acts. But if you put it back together as it was originally intended, you have a story with two parts. In the first part you have the sotry of how Jesus came to the Isreal (or the Jews) to bring the Good News. And in the second part you have the story of the Apostle Paul, who under the guidance of the Holy Spirit came to the Gentiles to bring the Good News to Gentiles.

But this story of course created a tremendous problem. Because the Jews didn’t like the Gentiles. And even more than that, when the Gentile’s began to hear the Good News, the Jews thought the Gentiles should live like Jews. You need to do it our way. But this isn’t how the story turns out at all. In the end, the Jews had to follow the Mosaic Law, but the Gentiles did not. So God wanted two groups of people who lived out their faith differently. And some of the Jewish Christians didn’t want to hear that. And this is a perpetual problem in the church isn’t it? People who are Christians tend to believe that a real Christian should be like they are. If you’re Catholic you tend to believe that everyone really ought to be Catholic. If your Lutheran, it can be the same. Some people believe that in order to be a Christian you have to accept Christ as your Savior. Think these folks are going to allow a Christian perspective that is different? That can be a difficult situation. See, we often want to make carbon copies of ourselves, right? So Luke/Acts is pretty interesting story in that regard. It gets real dicey when you begin to get the message that the Gentiles didn’t have to be Christians like the Jews were. In the kingdom of God you can have two groups of Christians who do it differently.

This has some very down to earth applications. I heard someone the other day quoting Proverbs 22 verse 6, that says, “train up a child in the way they should should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it. There it is, the same issue, see it? The way THEY should go, not the way YOU think they should go. It’s going to be different for them isn’t it? Our children usually don’t see things quite like we do. That’s the Luke/Acts issue for parenting. It’s hard for us parents, I’ll just speak for myself. We all have something in mind for our kids, but they usually end up going a different way.

From the beginning there is conflict over this. We’ve seen it all through Luke up until this point. Jesus hometown a couple of weeks ago wanted to throw him off a cliff. Our text today says woe when all speak all of you. Well that happened at his hometown. Everyone was real impressed, they spoke real well of Jesus….until he told them that God’s blessing was for the Gentiles too. Then its off the cliff. We want people to be like we are. To see it like we see it. But every time Jesus does something here it’s for people that were written off or discounted in some way by that Jewish culture of the time. Shepherds, lepers, a Roman Centurian. They all didn’t have to be like the Jews to be God’s people.

Right before our lesson today Jesus heals a man with a withered hand on the Sabboth. Well, that’s not how the Jewish Pharisees did it, it was against their law and so they hated him. This the issue. That’s the inevitable conflict. We want people to be like we are. You’re welcome if you believe and do things our way. I always sort of cringe when people say, “there’s only one way”, “Only one way to heaven”. Because you can tell that what they usually mean is this . The only way to heaven, just happens to be their way. Their church’s way. That’s the issue. Luke/Acts challenges this. God is just going to show up in ways that just challenge our way as the only way.

Well, our lesson today then, should let us know that God is with us right? God is coming to us with His Word. Because this text is not our way is it? Not at all. This last week at our pastor’s meeting when we got started on the text, the general outlook was one of concern. How are we going to preach this to our congregations? To people who are essentially reasonably well off? Is it really bad to laugh? Bad to be wealthy? Is it good to be poor? Or hungry? We’re blessed when people hate us? That’s just not our way is it? That’s just not the way the Christian faith has been presented to people. It’s just not, and to pretend that it is, would be just silly. What does “I’m just so blessed mean?” when we say that? I have so many blessings? What are people communicating? Well, let’s just say that it doesn’t mean that they are poor, hungry, weeping, or hated and excluded. This way is simply not the way we see things. We don’t do blessing like this. Or woes either.

But being faithful to Luke/Acts, what do we need to say? Well, Jesus wanted this to be someones way. Jesus said this way to someone. Because evidently, there are a lot of people who really are poor and who need a blessing. Who are hungry and who need the promise that one day they will be filled. And there are people somewhere who are weeping right now, whose life is hard, and who need a promise that one day there will be laughter for them. And evidently there are a lot of people, who when they try to live out about what Jesus taught regarding wealth and poverty get ridiculed and laughed at. Social justice warriors, ha, ha, ha. And there are many wealthy people, filled with food and laughter, who are well spoken of who might need to be warned that difficult days may soon be coming. People whom God has called to share the Good News that the poor will be lifted up and the rich brought down. This is not our way, in southeast Nebraska, at least for the most part. But it is the way of many. Isn’t that interesting. The question is…..can we see God at work in people who do it differently. Who believe in a blessing for the poor and warning for the wealthy and powerful? Because they’re out there right? They’re not like you maybe. But living out a call that is different from yours. In God’s kingdom, not everyone has to be like we are. Or maybe someone might hear this today and say…. You know, maybe our way needs a little work.

I’ve shared with you a couple of times about a man that I had some great conversations with. Someone asked the other day if I ever met a famous person. I met this guy and spent several hours talking with him about God, and he considered me friend. He was a rear admiral in the navy. Hears some of his biography. Master of Science in Aeronautical Engineering, Mastor of Arts in international relations. He also graduated form the Naval War College and National War College. Executive officer of the USS Indepenence. Commander of the Top Gun Flight School at Mirimar (remember the movie?), Readiness Officer for commander Navel Air Force; U.S. Pacific Fleet. Distinguished Service Medal. You get the idea. This guy was national hero, and was qualified to fly over 120 different aircraft.

Well, I was a young seminary student with my own ideas about war and Viet nam and all the rest. But he did our text perfectly today when he said this. He said, “Mark, the minute we lose those young people who are protesting the military, waving signs and shaking chain link fences, this country is in big trouble. Do you see what he was saying? He wasn’t a protestor. I’m not a protestor. Not too many here are. It’s not my way. It wasn’t his way. I don’t feel called to that at all. But what he was saying was that we need that voice, holding the military accountable. All the time. Someone needs to hear the call for that. Someone needs to do it differently. And they’ll be hated and reviled and defamed for living out their call. But there wasn’t that ridicule from this guy, even though he was being protested against, all the time. Because he got the message of Luke/Acts. We need people who are not like we are. Who have a different kind of Christianity. Now the protestors can mess this up too right? Because they think everyone needs to be like they are. Then, we’re lost again. But God has room for more than one way in his kingdom. That’s seems to be the message.

And so our Gospel lesson today, may not be for us. But it was for the people Jesus was speaking to. He came down and stood on a level place. So that all people were on the same level. People from Judea and Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. Two groups of people who lived out their faith in very different ways. And there was room for both in God’s kingdom. It’s the backdrop for the entire New Testament witness to our Lord, who overcomes the hostility that exists between us. Our lesson today may not be our way. But it is the way of many who see their calling as Christians primarily to bless the poor and challenge the wealthy. God is working in people who are quite different than we are. It’s a surprising reflection of God’s surprising Grace. Amen.