

APPALACHIAN JESUS

Appalachian Liberation Theology

Here in Appalachia we have some of the most startling statistics in the United States. Entire counties within Appalachia have the lowest life expectancy rates in the nation. We have some of the lowest education rates in the nation; counties where less than half of the population finishes high school and only 5% of the adult population go on to finish some level of college. In a nation that touts being the wealthiest country in history we cannot ignore that over 43 million live in poverty. In Appalachia, we are home to counties where over half the county lives below the poverty line. This is a region of the country where unemployment reaches record highs, drug addiction is an epidemic, and our schools continue to struggle from not receiving adequate funding. For one out of every four children in my state, the only meals these children receive are the meals they eat at school.

Luke 6.20-26—Looking at his disciples, he said:

Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.
Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.
Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.

But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort.

Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry.

Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.

Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

Lukes Shared Table

Gustavo Gutierrez, author of *A Theology of Liberation*, wrote, "But the poor person does not exist as an inescapable fact of destiny. His or her existence is not politically neutral, and it is not ethically innocent. The poor are a by-product of the system in which we live and for which we are responsible. They are marginalized by our social and cultural world. They are the oppressed, exploited proletariat, robbed of the fruit of their labor and despoiled of their humanity. Hence the poverty of the poor is not a call to generous relief action, but a demand that we go and build a different social order."

"To set the oppressed free." Luke 4:18

All Texts Quoted from the NIV Unless Otherwise Noted

Matthew 5.39— If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also

Walter Wink, *Jesus and Nonviolence A Third Way*

Barbara Deming, *Revolution and Equilibrium*: “With one hand we say to one who is angry, or to an oppressor, or to an unjust system, ‘Stop what you are doing. I refuse to honor the role you are choosing to play. I refuse to obey you. I refuse to cooperate with your demands. I refuse to build the walls and the bombs. I refuse to pay for the guns. With this hand I will even interfere with the wrong you are doing. I want to disrupt the easy pattern of your life.’ But then the advocate of nonviolence raises the other hand. It is raised out-stretched—maybe with love and sympathy, maybe not—but always outstretched. With this hand we say, ‘I won’t let go of you or cast you out of the human race. I have faith that you can make a better choice than you are making now, and I’ll be here when you are ready. Like it or not, we are part of one another.’ Active nonviolence is a process that holds these two realities—of noncooperation with violence but open to the humanity of the violator—in tension. It is like saying to our opponent: On the one hand (symbolized by a hand firmly stretched out and signaling, ‘Stop!’) ‘I will not cooperate with your violence or injustice; I will resist it with every fiber of my being’. And, on the other hand (symbolized by the hand with its palm turned open and stretched toward the other) ‘I am open to you as a human being.’” (p.16)

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: “In order for this struggle to have meaning, the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity (which is a way to create it), become oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers of the humanity of both.” (p. 44)

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When the gospel says, “The last will be first, and the first will be last,” despite the fact it is counterintuitive to our cultural presuppositions, it is invariably good news to those who are last, and at least problematic news to those who see themselves as first.”— Peter Gomes, *The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus: What’s So Good about the Good News?*

“Good news to some will almost inevitably be bad news to others. In order that the gospel in the New Testament might be made as palatable as possible to as many people as possible, its rough edges have been shorn off and the radical edge of Jesus’ preaching as been replaced by a respectable middle, of which “niceness” is now God. When Jesus came preaching, it was to proclaim the ends of things as they are and the breaking in of things that are to be: the status quo is not to be criticized; it is to be destroyed.” - Ibid.

Survival, Resistance, Liberation, Restoration, and Transformation

Luke 18.22-24—When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy. Jesus looked at him and said, “How **hard** it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”

Matthew 11.28-30—Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is **easy**, and my burden is light.”

Luke 6.27-31—But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them.

Other Liberation Applications

