

All Saints Sunday
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
Rev. Jason S. Glombicki
November 3, 2019

Today's appointed gospel reading does us no favors. Upon reading it, I immediately regretted not having Vicar Paisley preach. You see, today's reading is a part of what scholars call "the Sermon on the Plain" and part of the reading includes Luke's version of the beatitudes. Unlike the gospel of Matthew, Luke doesn't spiritualize the beatitudes. What is "blessed are you who are poor" here in Luke, is read as "blessed are the poor in spirit" in Matthew. Luke is blunt, and Matthew makes it a bit more palatable. So, to find a way out from Luke's words, I read scholar-after-scholar's take, I opened up bible commentaries, and I went deep into some dusty books from seminary to find a way out—any way out. As I munched on some food, I searched for a loophole in the phrase "blessed are you who are hungry." As I rejoiced at a wedding last night, I looked for a secret interpretation that took the edge off the statement "blessed are you who weep now." I thought: "It has to be a metaphor," and I believed that there must be something deeper. And, lucky for me I had a whole extra hour to search for vindication that living in one of the world's richest countries is okay. But, I got tired of searching, because maybe, just maybe, Jesus said exactly what he meant.

So, what exactly did Jesus mean? Sometimes the binary of this text paired with Dante's 13th century writings and two thousand years of questionable theology can get us stuck among the "blesseds" and the "woes." We can accidentally believe that the blessed will be granted an afterlife of heavenly proportions, while those hearing the woe will have a fire-filled afterlife. Yet, Dr. Matt Skinner suggests that we look at the

Greek of the term translated here as “blessed” and better translate it as “unburdened” or “satisfied.” While, “woe” is more like “yikes!” or “look out!”¹

In today’s passage, we find Jesus proclaiming relief for the burdened, and to those with ease, he’s telling them to be careful. Jesus does *not* say that God’s reign is a zero-sum game where every winner corresponds to a loser. Jesus does *not* say that every one of today’s pleasures will get repaid with punishment tomorrow. Jesus does *not* even say that every single person will receive plenty and security in the future. Rather, as Dr. Skinner notes, Jesus urges his hearers to reassess their lives in light of God’s unfolding reign. The blessed are going to have a much easier time understanding God’s way of acting in the world. Those who are told to “look out!” are reminded that Jesus sees the world through glasses that distort our conventional values. So those who have the advantage by our conventional understanding—namely, those with money, food, comfort, self-won security, respectability, and the like—those are the ones that are most likely to misunderstand God’s manner of engaging with the world.

And, we see how God has engaged with the world throughout all of Luke’s gospel. We have a God who was testified to by Mary who was oh-so pregnant with Jesus. We have a God who specifically comes to the poor, the prisoner, and the short-sighted. A God who consistently upends our western value system and brings a worldview where radical generosity is supreme, where servant leadership is C-suite management, where non-violent peacemaking is a military-grade weapon, where forgiveness is the only tweet, and where truth is fashionable in ever season.

And, those values are God’s reality, is the reality that we all share in as the communion of saints. For all who are baptized – those living and those dead – share

¹ https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4256

in a confident hopefulness that God's new reality will come. It's a new social reality that those who have gone before us, in all their imperfection and their grace, have helped to make a reality. It is in our baptisms that we inherit a gift of God's abundant grace. A gift that is sometimes forgotten and other times is cherished. It's a gift that God abundantly bestows on all people without exception.

Then, in moments that are beyond our understanding, we see glimpses of God's love in dear ones like Jose and Rosie. In tender places, we see God's justice and truth growing in loved ones like Gordon and Stan. And, God's grace continues in this place. For each time we gather at this table, we are joined by saints who have died, like Frank, Paul, and Kyle, and we are also joined by the living saints – the ones that drive us mad and those that calm our spirits. So, as we eat God's bread of life with saint Silas, saint Kane, and saint Nathan, we experience a God whose gifts know no barrier in age or background. As we come forward with Jackson, Cora, Pearl, and Everett, we experience the welcome of our God at every age. And, as we grow together with Maeve and Vaughn, Sloane and Charleston, we grow together as one mystical body of God's people seeking to embody God's love for all people.

So, friends, today is a day where we give thanks for all the saints. We give thanks for the ways we've seen God through those living and those dead. We also acknowledge the ways that God comes to bring an entirely new way of being together. It's a way that our unburned siblings can be our primary teachers. It's a way that follows a different path that is filled with love, peace, justice, and truth. It's a way that brings eternal life for all. Amen.