

All Saints
Sunday, November 07, 2010

GOSPEL: Luke 6:20-31

20Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

“Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

21”Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.

“Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

22Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. 23Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

24”But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.

25”Woe to you who are full now,
for you will be hungry.

“Woe to you who are laughing now,
for you will mourn and weep.

26Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

27But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. 29If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. 30Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. 31Do to others as you would have them do to you.

20Καὶ αὐτὸς ἐπάρας τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ εἰς τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ ἔλεγεν, Μακάριοι οἱ πτωχοί, ὅτι ὑμετέρα ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ. 21μακάριοι οἱ πεινῶντες νῦν, ὅτι χορτασθήσεσθε. μακάριοι οἱ κλαίοντες νῦν, ὅτι γελάσετε. 22μακάριοί ἐστε ὅταν μισήσωσιν ὑμᾶς οἱ ἄνθρωποι, καὶ ὅταν ἀφορίσωσιν ὑμᾶς καὶ ὀνειδίσωσιν καὶ ἐκβάλωσιν τὸ ὄνομα ὑμῶν ὡς πονηρὸν ἕνεκα τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου: 23χάρητε ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ καὶ σκιρτήσατε, ἰδοὺ γὰρ ὁ μισθὸς ὑμῶν πολὺς ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ: κατὰ τὰ αὐτὰ γὰρ ἐποίουν τοῖς προφήταις οἱ πατέρες αὐτῶν. 24Πλὴν οὐαὶ ὑμῖν τοῖς πλουσίοις, ὅτι ἀπέχετε τὴν παράκλησιν ὑμῶν. 25οὐαὶ ὑμῖν, οἱ ἐμπεπλησμένοι νῦν, ὅτι πεινάσετε. οὐαὶ, οἱ γελῶντες νῦν, ὅτι πενθήσετε καὶ κλαύσετε. 26οὐαὶ ὅταν ὑμᾶς καλῶς εἴπωσιν πάντες οἱ ἄνθρωποι, κατὰ τὰ αὐτὰ γὰρ ἐποίουν τοῖς ψευδοπροφήταις οἱ πατέρες αὐτῶν. 27Ἀλλὰ ὑμῖν λέγω τοῖς ἀκούουσιν, ἀγαπᾶτε τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ὑμῶν, καλῶς ποιεῖτε τοῖς μισοῦσιν ὑμᾶς, 28εὐλογεῖτε τοὺς καταρωμένους ὑμᾶς, προσεύχεσθε περὶ τῶν ἐπηρεαζόντων ὑμᾶς. 29τῷ τύπτοντί σε ἐπὶ τὴν σιαγόνα παρέχε καὶ τὴν ἄλλην, καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ αἵροντός σου τὸ ἱμάτιον καὶ τὸν χιτῶνα μὴ κωλύσης. 30παντὶ αἰτοῦντί σε δίδου, καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ αἵροντος τὰ σὰ μὴ ἀπαίτει. 31καὶ καθὼς θέλετε ἵνα ποιῶσιν ὑμῖν οἱ ἄνθρωποι, ποιεῖτε αὐτοῖς ὁμοίως.

Blessed Are You

+ *In nomine Domini. Amen.*

The Sunday in November nearest November 1st is celebrated as All Saints Sunday.

It is the Sunday in the Church Year when we gather to remember *all* the saints, the holy ones, all those who have gone before us, and especially our loved ones, and the members of our congregation and our extended parish family who have died since last All Saints Sunday.

Each year in a three-year cycle, we read a different Gospel portion for All Saints. Last year we read the story where Jesus brought back to life Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha from the Gospel of John. Next year we will read Matthew's version of the Beatitudes, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, well known to nearly every follower of Jesus.

This year we have Luke's version of the same story ... a little different telling in a little different fashion ... with a little different twist.

It takes place, for Luke, not on a mountain, but on a level place ... we call this part of Luke's Gospel, "Jesus' Sermon on the Plain." And though Luke includes the blessings that Jesus pronounces, he includes also some of the opposites ... the "woes" ... the curses. And as if that were not enough, he answers the unspoken question, "What do I do with all this?"

So it goes something like this ...

Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

Woe to you who are rich for you have received your consolation.

Blessed are you who are hungry now for you will be filled.

Woe to you who are full now for you will be hungry.

Blessed are you who weep now for you will laugh.

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

Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

Confused? Yes, unless we can see this teaching within the whole teaching of Jesus that looks at humanity and turns things upside down and inside out ... as the ancient and tried advice to preachers "Comfort the afflicted, and afflict the Comfortable."

Confusing also unless we see this teaching inside the teaching of Jesus which takes what is personal and private and selfish and turns it into what is communal and shared and loving ... in other words, as the questioner asked of Jesus, "What is the Greatest Commandment, Teacher?" And he responds, "Love God ... and then Love Neighbor."

It is always the moving from the individual to the community among the followers of Jesus ... there is no thing as personal piety, personal salvation, personal religiosity. Always it is the concern for others, a concern that begins with the others right around us, but moves into the whole world.

There is no easy religion there or here ... when things are difficult, when things are tragic, when need arises ... the followers of Jesus are to look beyond themselves and see in the faces of those who are suffering, who are sad, who are in need, who are grieving ... see the face of a brother or a sister and move in compassion to bind up what is broken, embrace what is shattered, and heal what is hurting.

You see what happens in the human family when something goes wrong is that one of the family members is separated ... perhaps symbolically, often in reality. When a tragedy takes place, the circle is broken, and there outside the circle is one of the family members who is yearning for comfort maybe feeling so isolated, so alone, so cut off and inaccessible that he or she wonders if God is anywhere to be found?

Have you ever asked that question? Have you ever posed to the universe, "Where is God in all this?" "Where is God in my life when I need God now more than ever?"

Have you ever asked that question ... or am I the only one?

It is the cry of a member of the family, the human family, who is hurting, who is ill, lonely, wandering, grieving ...

The son of one of my clergy colleagues died this summer ... suddenly. I called my sister-in-Christ and we spoke at some length about it ... her husband had died two years ago and now her son was gone as well. She thanked me for calling, told me she appreciated my calling (I had a feeling that she was waiting for my call) that she knew I understood about losing a son, and then she asked, "When does it get better? Does it ever stop hurting?"

That's *the* question you see ... does it get better ... does the pain ever go away?

Yes, it gets better ... time does heal, there is nothing magical about time ... but it does *take* time to heal ... and while the loss and the pain is there as much today as when that pain first happened ... and does not go away ... it goes into the shared bearing of that pain ... one could say, it goes into the community where with one another we take it and carry it together ... and that is what makes it possible to live.

That's the teaching of the *Beatitudes* ... you who are poor are blessed because the kingdom of God means that the community shares your poverty and is willing to carry it with you ... and if you have an abundance and somehow cannot see the need ... woe are you!

You are hungry and you are blessed and you will be filled up because the kingdom of God is full of people who see that you are hungry and are willing to share their food ... and if your tummy is so full and your brain is so clogged with overabundance that you can't see the emptiness around you ... then ... woe are you?

And you who are weeping now, you who are sad for your loss of any kind of any one, you are blessed and you *will* laugh ... because the kingdom of God is made up of those who know loss and sadness and hurt and pain and sorry and understand that the way God makes it better is

through each member of the kingdom who are willing to reach out and move over and hold and embrace and listen and bear the burden of your grief ... and if you are so full of yourself and your own laughter at the plight of others and their loss and can't move beyond yourself ... well ... you know what will happen.

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I'd like to tell you about one of my saints. He was (is) The Rev. John W. Hauser. Pastor Hauser was the pastor who baptized me and when I was about 2 ½ or 3 years old accede to my persistent request of wanting to ring the Church Bell at St. Luke's in Dublin, PA.

The Bell was of course high above the church in a steeple, and the rope to pull the bell came down through a hole in the ceiling and into a closet. I have the fondest memory of Pastor Hauser holding me in his arms so I could reach the rope and letting me ring the bell ... after Services ... and much to the consternation of the very Pennsylvania German congregation.

When I was older two more of my saints, my Grandparents, took me with them to visit Pastor Hauser and his wife who had retired to a farmhouse. I was taken into the Pastor's Library and there he showed me several large wooden reading stands upon which were placed several open Bibles. "This one," he said, "is a Greek Bible ... and this one is in Hebrew ... and this one is in Latin."

He was convinced to his dying day that the reason I learned Greek and Hebrew and Latin was because of that day in his Library ... and he was convinced to his dying day that the reason I became a Pastor was because of that day he let me ring the Church Bell.

Most days I can think of no better answer.

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There are so many times here in this chancel that when we extend our hands in the *orans* (prayer) that one is keenly aware that there are others holding those extended hands ... the saints of God who have gone before us.

No one ever comes to the Table of Grace and Healing in solitude, but always in the company of at least a billion saints.

Today this room is filled with God's grace, God's presence, God's saints. It is the promise we share, it is the Gospel we proclaim.

Deo Gratias (+)
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