



The sermon on the Mount by artist Jesus Mafa 1973, Cameroon

Jeremiah 17:7-8

*Blessed are those who trust in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit. (NRSV)*

Luke 6:17-26

Beatitudes for Today

What do we mean when we say we are fortunate? What do we mean when we claim to be blessed and grateful?

Facebook, twitter, Instagram all have these hashtags. (That is, for those of who do not sojourn there, a number or pound sign that allows conversations to be tracked easily across accounts.) Folks share that they are:

- healed of disease #blessed,
- overcoming addictions #blessedandgrateful;
- found a suitable spouse and settling down, #thankfulblessedandgrateful.

The trouble is everyone can read these posts, people you know who love you and celebrate with you, and people you do not know and wonder about where this is going anyway? What about those who are not healed of their diseases, who have not overcome their addictions, who are unpartnered and unhappy about that. Where is their blessing?

Today I am preaching a sermon, on a sermon. For those of you keeping track. Jesus is giving a sermon, and I am preaching on his sermon 2000 years later. (Not to mention that other preachers have been preaching on this in the meantime.) There are two places in the Bible where we find Jesus preaching on what are called "beatitudes." Beatitudes are blessings which Jesus shares with his listeners. In latin they begin with the word "*beati*" meaning blessed. I'd like to reflect with you today on these blessings and how we hear them today.

In Matthew's version there are 8 blessings. In the Luke passage we are looking at today there are only 4 blessings, followed by a corresponding "woe." Matthew recounts a sermon Jesus gives on a mountain. The sermon on the mount begins in chapter 5 "

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Matthew's sermon on the mount is better known.

Luke's sermon on the plain is a little different, and it lands differently on the hearers. Luke reveals Jesus in a level place, and his sermon is one of leveling. Leveling the differences between people, leveling the blessing, and there is a divine gift in this sermon, something that we mere mortals cannot bestow on one another.

From the level place where he is standing, Jesus emphasizes disparities between people.

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, when they exclude you, revile you and defame you on account of your beliefs and values.

That does not sound so much like the social media #'s. That's not how those work at all. There's nothing to brag about here (#humblebrag), nothing worth feeling smug about – these are more like prayer concerns. The blessing is a gift from God, for the poor, the hungry, those who weep, those who are unjustly hated... it is the consolation that God provides. It is God's mercy that is revealed first to the most unlikely people, in the most unlikely of circumstances.

Woe to you who are rich

Woe to you who are full now

Woe to you who are laughing

Woe to you when people speak well of you

When he was seeking to describe the injustice of apartheid and the world's reluctance to stand against it Archbishop Desmond Tutu said: "if an elephant is standing on the tail of a mouse, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality about the situation..." I hear the logic of a beatitude in there:

*Woe to elephants who stand on the tail of a mouse, for the Lord is Lord of the mouse and the elephant, blessing the victims of injustice with entry into the kingdom of God ahead of their tormentors.* And it's true. The truth and reconciliation commission, the human rights gains in South Africa were brought about not by the wealthy and blessed, but by those who were oppressed and suffering. The oppressed could imagine it. The wealthy didn't need to.

You may have heard that the Bible needs to be read bottom up.

- The miracle of the wedding of Cana was revealed to those serving at the wedding.
- The paralytic was healed, took up his mat and walked away. All on his own. Those whom Jesus healed knew something in their bodies about having been touched by the divine.
- The feeding of the 5000 merely sustained most people who were there, only a few understood what kind of miraculous thing had just happened to them.

I'd like to encourage you as you enter your week to keep an open mind, an open heart, notice who is vulnerable, who is grieving, who is hungry, who is sick, whose voice is talked over in your presence. These are the people, the voices that God is blessing, to whom the kingdom is being revealed – today.

So hoping to encourage you, your imagination, your capacity for seeing blessing, I have made up my own beatitudes, and invite you to do the same:

Blessed are the recyclers, for they will be made new.

Blessed are the refugees, for they will arrive home.

Blessed are the veterans of war, for they will be the harbingers of peace.

Blessed are shy awkward teenagers, for they will lead the world.

Blessed are those who worship surrounded by empty pews, for they will be joined by the heavenly host.

Blessed are those who worship online, for they are numbered among the great cloud of witnesses.

Blessed are those living with cancer, for they will experience their resurrection of their cells.

Blessed are those whose illness is terminal, for they are already being healed in the infinite love of God.

Blessed are the black lives matter protestors, for they have tasted equality.

Blessed are you, living in this present tension between the failure of Christendom and the coming of the Kingdom of God. Rejoice and be glad, for Christ himself has invited us to stay alive to it all – the work of the Holy Spirit.

All of us are vulnerable before God, in different ways this changes as we go through our lives; it is God who is able to appear in our losses, to bless us, to fill us, to reorient us to our true home – God's love. God's deep blessing of our imperfect, difficult, messy lives.

It's a 2000 year old sermon, an echo of blessing. It is God who blesses the vulnerable, turning tears to laughter. May you locate yourself towards this deep blessing this week.

Questions for reflection and conversation:

- What blessing have you been made aware of this week?
- Who needs to be lifted up with blessing?

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