

Sermon on The Beatitudes

Luke 6: 20-26

By Deacon Robert Millott

Sunday November 7, 2021 24th Sunday after Pentecost

Please pray with me. Almighty God, look upon those who are in need but cannot work, or who lack employment and search for it in vain: on those who struggle to meet exacting claims with inadequate resources: on all who move in insecurity, attended by worry or despair. Stand by them, O God, in their deprivations, their dilemmas, and guide them as they try to solve their problems; let them come to open doors of opportunity or refuge; and so quicken and extend the world's concern for all it's people that every man may be ensured a livelihood and safety from the bitterness of want; through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN. *(from The Pastor's Prayerbook, Robert N. Rodenmayer, Oxford University Press, C1960, p89-90)*

This morning's Gospel reading is one of the more popular readings in the Gospels. It is the Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes. They are found in Matthew 5:3-12 and in Luke 6:20-23. If you were to put them side by side you would find some differences between the two readings. In Matthew the placement is shortly after Jesus' baptism and temptation by Satan and takes place on a mount. In Luke they show up later in Jesus' ministry and are preceded by His rejection in Nazareth, His home town where the sermon takes place on a plain.

Luke placed the Beatitudes later in Jesus' ministry because his concern was on emphasizing the great reversal that the kingdom of God would bring and not the chronology of Jesus' ministry as it happened. Many of the stories that occur before the Beatitudes are called conflict stories because in many of them the Scribes and Pharisees are upset or angry because Jesus violated the so-called religious taboos such as touching a leper, forgiving a man of his sins, calling a tax collector to be a Disciple, and eating with tax collectors and other undesirables, and many other instances. The Pharisees wanted to defend their understanding of God's people, that is, the godly Jews vs. ungodly Gentiles and traditional morality such as the sabbath observance.

In the Beatitudes Jesus turned the world upside down for the Scribes and Pharisees and gave the listeners a peek into the kingdom of God.

Matthew has nine beatitudes and no woes; Luke has four beatitudes and four woes.

The first beatitude is "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Jesus is not telling us that we need to sell everything we have and then give it to the poor as he told the rich man in Mark's gospel you all heard a few weeks ago when I preached.

Jesus told the people that **theirs is** the kingdom of God. When he said "Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied, He did not imply that the people are to cut back on

what they eat and go hungry. He is just telling the poor and hungry, and that included the disciples who sold or gave away all their earthly possessions, who were listening to Him, that they will be filled and those who had their fill would eventually be hungry. Jesus did not bless poverty in itself which could as easily been a curse as a blessing. When He told them “Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh” He was telling the people who were despondent because of their hard way of life from living under the Romans. The Romans made the Jewish peoples’ lives miserable and the Scribes and Pharisees did not help either. The rich in the world back then and as well as today were often self-reliant and therefore did not need to rely on others for assistance or help. That was not the case for the poor back then and as well as for today.

And finally in the last beatitude Jesus tells them “Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.” This final blessing was directed to those who were being persecuted because of their belief in Jesus. Sadly, this is still happening around the world and is becoming more pronounced in our own country today. Jesus was not giving pity to those people. He blessed them and told them to “Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in Heaven.” Jesus was letting the poor know that they were getting an eternal reward in Heaven. The prophets were likewise persecuted and received their reward in Heaven. That includes all God’s people and that includes you all and me too!

Now come the woes. “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 all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets.” These woes are only found in Luke’s gospel. The woes were a surprise pronouncement for the quality and state of life man universally regarded as desirable. Because of the world’s so-called blessings, men felt they were receiving because of their favored life styles, encouraged them to have an independent attitude of self-sufficiency which was fatal for them in their spiritual growth.

The first woe was not directed towards the disciples because they were not rich. There were possibly wealthy people in the large crowd who were rich. The rich and that would include the Pharisees, most often thought they had no need for anything. The same can often be said for some of the wealthy today. Not just in our country but in the world in general. They often relied on back then and even today on wealth and not on God. Their attitude is just the opposite of the first beatitude, “Blessed are you who are poor.” Jesus told the rich that they already received their comfort. What Jesus was implying to the rich is that even though they were enjoying prosperity they were really poor. They were spiritually poor.

Now when Jesus tells the listeners “Woe to you when **all** men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false

prophets” this could hardly have happened without experiencing some sacrifice of their principles. It is true that there can be a true sense of well being by being well thought of by others, as Paul writes in 1 Timothy 3:7 “He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap.”

The heart of the Beatitudes or Sermon on the Mount is the need to **LOVE** all people. That would be the poor person in rags standing on the corner begging and the wealthy man who in Luke 17:11 that reads “The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.” But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’” AMEN.

And now to God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit be ascribed as is most justly due, all might, majesty, dominion, power and glory, world without end. AMEN.