

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

As we remember the Saints this day, we do so in order that they may strengthen our faith when we reflect and remember how they experienced grace and how they were helped by faith in the resurrection they share with Jesus Christ.¹ As we reflect and remember these Saints that were just lifted up among us, they join us now as the words of Jesus preaching at a level place are lifted up in this gathering. Just as that gathering with Jesus on that level place heard his words, we see in this Gospel that leads up to our reading today that he is surrounded by his Apostles, his disciples, and a mass of human reality that is symbolic of the culture of that time...the poor, the sick, the disenfranchised, the sad and lonely, and the hated and reviled. Here is how Luke says it:

¹² Now during those days [Jesus] went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God. ¹³ And when day came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles: ¹⁴ Simon, whom he named Peter, and his brother Andrew, and James, and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, ¹⁵ and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Simon, who was called the Zealot, ¹⁶ and Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. ¹⁷ [Jesus] came down with [the Apostles] and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. ¹⁸ They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. ¹⁹ And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them. ²⁰ Then he *looked up* at his disciples and said: “Blessed are you...” (Luke 6:17-20a)

We then hear the familiar Beatitudes according to the writers of Luke’s Gospel.

While we know these Beatitudes and are very familiar with them, we may not be so clear on whose version we are most familiar with and or fond of...is it Matthew’s version or is it Luke’s version that we like and take comfort in? However, when the two are placed side by side, we may find ourselves being threatened by Luke’s version and running quickly to Matthew for relief. In other words, Luke literally means the poor and not the ambiguous or metaphorical poor in spirit. When we juxtapose the two versions of this famous sermon from Jesus, we will hear that Luke’s Jesus is addressing real socioeconomical conditions, whereas Matthew’s Jesus is addressing spiritual stipulations and attitudes.

While studying these two passages side by side this past week, I was reminded of a grammatical technique or literary device called performative speech or performative utterances I became more familiar with in seminary. This is a type of utterance that does not merely describe an action, it actually performs it at the moment it is spoken. There is a very familiar performative utterance we experience every week at the close of our worship that comes from the Book of Numbers:

²² The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ²³ Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall *bless* the Israelites: *You shall say to them,* ²⁴ The LORD bless you and keep you; ²⁵ the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; ²⁶ the LORD lift up

¹ Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, and Charles P. Arand, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000. Article XXI of the Augsburg Confession, Concerning the Cult of the Saints, (German text) page 58.

his countenance upon you, and give you peace. ²⁷ So they shall put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them. (Numbers 6:22-27)

I mention this because as we listen to these words of Jesus from his sermon on a level place, Jesus is not just preaching, he is also blessing at the same time. And this is made more obvious by the way Luke presents it in this Gospel.

In this sermon, Jesus preaches amidst the brutal reality of humanity that surrounds him. So, when he says, blessed are you, he doesn't say blessed are *THOSE* as we hear in Matthew...which literally says according to the way Matthew presents it, blessed is someone other than the one speaking or the one listening. In Luke's version of this sermon, Jesus is saying blessed are you, second-person-plural, meaning the blessing happens to you all who are hearing these words and woe to all who are hearing the words. Likewise, the blessings and the woes are placed directly into our ears and into our hearts just as Jesus preached it back then and we hear it today. And in some reality, these words may just be rattling our safe understandings of who we assume ourselves to be as we listen to these Beatitudes...or at least I hope they are shaking us up as much as they shake me up each time I think of them.

As I listen to these words from Jesus, they hit me hard because I am certainly not poor. I am not, nor have I ever been hungry in that I never had to worry about what will I have to eat or when will I eat again. I weep...but I have not been to the depths of sadness that leaves me blind to hope. I have been disliked and may have even been hated but I have grown up and live in white privilege and never have I been hated by simply who I am or what I look like...nor have I ever been hated because of my faith. So, I guess it is, woe to me, and perhaps if you all are still listening and deeply considering what Jesus is saying to us right now, perhaps you're wondering like I am...now what?

What now? After Jesus seems to put us all in our place, we hear this, "But I say to you that listen!" And in this simple comment, Jesus doesn't leave us here in this place of woe. We are placed directly at the foot of the cross with these powerful words of Jesus that are before us right now, but we are not condemned to die at the foot of the cross...there is hope.

Today in this sermon, Jesus is teaching us to look at ourselves in a real way, or look at the reality of who we really are and how we are seen, and not look at ourselves in an idealized way...such as, oh my spirit is low so I can say that I am blessed because I am poor in spirit. *NO*, the reality of this sermon on a level place is that I am not poor nor is anyone sitting in here right now poor. Jesus is calling us to truly see those around us and to see ourselves for who we truly are...and to see that through our Baptism, the old-self has been drowned and we are raised up from those same waters a new person, a Baptized child of God...raised in the promise that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body.²

So instead of maneuvering ourselves into the blessed category by ignoring the reality of who we are and who the folks around us are...Jesus is calling us to, first consider the blessing of the very

² Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, and Charles P. Arand, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000. The Large Catechism, Fourth Part, Concerning Baptism, page 462.

Word that is Jesus Christ, the very Word along with Water that has washed us anew through our Baptism, and second to look honestly at ourselves through the blessing of Jesus Christ for all...to look honestly at the blessing that is this gathering, to look honestly around our community, our nation, and our world and see it as a blessing and not a stepping stone to elevate ourselves.

When we can honestly assess our place then ask, what does it mean for us as Baptized children of God to be “rich” when others are poor? What does it mean for us to be full while others are hungry, to laugh while others weep? What does it really mean to look at others with hateful divisiveness and prejudice while we so graciously and so very unrealistically judge ourselves? What does it mean for us as Baptized children of God to decry the divisiveness of our culture when in reality, we ourselves are the divisive factor that hides behind our human prejudices safe within our chosen information ghettos that we feel elevate ourselves from all that takes place out there.

The reality of the Beatitudes is that we see them saying more about ourselves than about the Words of Jesus. Because we are not poor, we are then mystified and even frightened by these words. We then bend the words to our satisfaction or to suite ourselves because we feel guilty rather than the comfort or joy we feel in some other words and teachings we hear from Christ. But our idealized fallback assumptions about ourselves is like the rich man who approaches Jesus and says, “I have obeyed all these commandments. What else do *I* need to do?” When Jesus tells the rich man what he needs to do, he doesn’t agree with Jesus and turns and goes away from Him, (Matt 19:16-30). And like that rich man, we today, upon hearing Jesus say, blessed are you who are poor...we too turn away, we turn in anger and hate from the words of Jesus and turn inward toward our own idealized version of what Jesus is saying about ourselves. We may even what to curse God. But instead, we disregard these words because we want to better ourselves, we want to divisively elevate ourselves because deep down we believe this to be what faith does for us.

Once again, I say listen. Listen again to what is being said, and how Luke is presenting the little details that get missed because we are busy jockeying ourselves and maneuvering our reality into this blessed category. Just before Jesus begins preaching these Beatitudes, we hear Luke reminding us that Jesus *comes down from the mountain* that he was up all-night praying on, and comes down to a level place and stands among the brutal honesty of humanity at that time. Luke is showing us with his words that Jesus and humanity stand on a level place...together and all are blessed in hearing the Word that is Jesus Christ. We hear this level notion again in the very opening line of our appointed Gospel lesson today:

²⁰ Then Jesus *looked up* at his disciples and said: Blessed are you (Luke 6:20).

Jesus looks up at his disciples, his followers...it does not say his Apostles as they are called in the verses just prior to our lesson today, he *looks up* at those gathered around him. Jesus doesn’t look down on them, nor does Jesus look down on us...reminding us through the very words of these Beatitudes that perhaps we ought not look down on others as well. But as I said, we are not left to die in our despair at the foot of the cross, there is Good News, there is the hope and promise of salvation for us all who have faith that Jesus will not leave us in despair.

Jesus is always teaching us and showing us, who God really is either with his actions or with his words. Jesus does this with his very life and death...a life and death that says *LISTEN*, here is what God does even when we do not...*LISTEN*...Love your enemies, do good to those who hate

you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹ If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you. (Luke 6:27-31)

This is how God is and what God does...God does for us as God would have us do to Him and others. Jesus is simply asking us to be as gracious and as caring to others as God is toward us. These Beatitudes call us to see the blessing and promise to the poor, yes...but at the same time to see the judgment and woe of *God's* sovereignty that is not ours nor can we earn it as our own, or assume or manipulate that sovereignty with our false sense of self-righteousness. Even if we are blessed or if we feel the woe...we can still be the very grace and compassion in the world that Christ is for us...to remember, to discern, and to consider what Paul has written to the church is Ephesus:

In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹² so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit;

¹⁴ this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

Today we have all been brought down to a level place with Jesus, and yes, through our Baptism and our faith in Jesus Christ we are blessed with the promise we shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body...

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.