

Luke 6:20-31

Today is a special Sunday for us as a parish because besides being All Saints Sunday, we are also baptising Iris and receive her into the family of God. I believe that as a parish we have every reason to echo the words of Psalm 149, **“Sing to the Lord a new song; sing the praises of God in the congregation of the faithful.”** But not only that, this morning, but God through Iris also gives an opportunity to renew our baptismal vows, an opportunity to renew our faith. What an opportunity! We have every reason to sing a new song to the Lord. The same spirit of renewal should allow to have a fresh and new understanding of the beatitudes.

In the beatitudes, Jesus seems to be reversing the norm because he is portraying suffering as a sign of being blessed while luxurious life as a sign of being cursed by God. In is contrary to what was known by the disciples and everyone else who lived during that time, but this can not be surprising because for Jesus the kingdom of God was a place for upside-down rules. The beatitudes are spoken in the context of the Sermon on the Plain in accordance with Luke and Sermon on the Mount in accordance with Matthew. Whether Plain/Mount it does not matter, that reflect the evangelists’ theological and cultural difference, but the thrust remains the same, the beatitudes are still the beatitudes, they seem to be a reversal of the norm. Due to this some New Testament scholars consider the beatitudes, to be precise the entire Sermon on the Plain/Mount to be an antithesis. However, Jesus in Matthew put a disclaimer, Matthew 5: 17, **“Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets, I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them.”** Because of this disclaimer. Progressive New Testament scholars then argue that the Sermon on the Plain/Mount is not an antithesis but in fact a super-thesis. In this sermon, Jesus was raising the standard from human’s standards to God’s standards. Our thoughts and deeds should not necessarily be motivated by human standards but Godly standards.

Jesus does not tell us that we should sell all that we have and give it to the poor so that we might attain the kingdom of God, although he will, in fact, require that of a wealthy person interested in gaining eternal life (18:22). However, in these beatitudes, he tells the poor that theirs *is* (present tense) the kingdom of God (v. 20). In the woes, he tells the rich that they *have already received* their consolation (v. 24). Nor does he tell us to measure our intake of food to

prevent hunger. Instead, he promises that those who are hungry now *will be* filled and those who are full now *will be* hungry. There is nothing wrong about being rich as long as the richness is as a result of being blessed by God and is being used to extend God's grace to others. On the other hand there is nothing good about being poor unless it is by choice for the sake of extending God's kingdom to others.

There is no mention of reward and punishment here. Instead, Jesus describes a reversal that is simply a fact of life. What you see is not what you get! He describes a mirror-image world where everything is backwards, where the rules are the opposite of what we expect. The kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God are very different, diametrically opposed. We know how things work in the kingdom of this world. Now Jesus tells us how they work in the kingdom of God.

Luke presents a strong emphasis throughout this Gospel on the great reversal that the kingdom of God brings, and some of the passages that reflect this reversal are: the parable of the dishonest manager (Luke 16:1-13), the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), the parable of the widow and the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8), the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14), to mention but just a few.

This emphasis on reversal encourages disciples, who might be suffering but who know that they belong, not to the kingdom of this world, but to the kingdom of God. However, Luke does not idealize poverty, but instead tells of disciples to share their resources, owning everything in common, selling possessions and distributing the proceeds to take care of everyone's needs (Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-35). The emphasis is on generosity rather than poverty. I guess that Jesus' blessing of the poor is good news for the first disciples, who had "left everything and followed him" (5:11). This beatitude is different in that it promises a reward to those who endure rejection or persecution because of their faithfulness to Christ. The corresponding woe, "Woe, when men speak well of you," promises punishment to those who are like the false prophets of old. It is natural to reciprocate, to help those who help you and hurt those who hurt you. "Do unto others as they do unto you" is simple justice and has been enshrined in law at least since the Code of Hammurabi (18th century B.C.), which specified an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

Reciprocity is a natural, common-sense way to order one's life, and is far more enlightened than the aggressive, selfish approach that many people favor today. **"Do unto others as they do unto you"** has changed into **"Do unto others before they do to you"** We live in a world where powerful and wealthy people use power and wealth to accumulate even more power and wealth, with little regard to the effects on other people. In many circles, such aggressive behavior is not only condoned but is celebrated. In some cases, truly evil people deliberately inflict injury on others for no apparent reason. In such a dog-eat-dog world, reciprocity seems positively enlightened. It does not seek to inflict injury except in cases where injury is deserved. Its goal is fairness. The bad person suffers, and the good person prospers. The examples which Jesus provides to illustrate the word "love" are not directed at feelings but at actions. Jesus calls us to love, but that does not mean that we must have warm feelings for those who mistreat us. Instead, we are to act in ways calculated to benefit the other person, to make that person's welfare our concern.

With the principle of love and the six examples, Jesus clearly establishes that we, as his disciples, are not to allow people of lesser principles to set the agenda. We are not to wait to see what the other person will do before we decide what we will do. Nor are we to be trapped in a vicious cycle that someone else starts. Instead, we are to take over the initiative by loving, doing good, blessing, and praying. These behaviors might seem weak in the face of hatred and violence, but Jesus transforms them. He demonstrates at the cross how powerful they can be. On the cross, he did not curse his enemies, but prayed for their forgiveness. Love wins! It overcomes the world! There are two important and common things in all the Saints: they loved their enemies, and they lived not according to human standards but according to God's standards. May God bless us all as we thrive to be in love with those who are different from us, as we thrive to live in accordance to God's standards and not human standards. Amen.