

Saints in Community

All Saints Sunday – Year C – November 10, 2010

Page |

1 Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18 ✕ Psalm 149 ✕ Ephesians 1:11-23 ✕ Luke 6:20-31

The time might come, when one of us might be called to step in front of our friend – or even step in front of a stranger - and take the slap – or the hate – in their place.

The Beatitudes that we hear from the Gospel of Luke this morning have a strikingly different tone than the perhaps more familiar set from the gospel of Matthew. Both gospel writers included a set of Beatitudes in their legacy to us.

Matthew's are a part of the Sermon on the Mount. He tells us that Jesus went up onto a mountain, sat down and began to teach. Luke tells us that Jesus came down from the mountain, stood upon a level plain, and began to teach.

Whether Jesus was standing or sitting, or whether he was on the mountain or on the

plain, are not significant differences for us today. The key difference is the issue of 'when'. When will we encounter the kingdom of God.

Matthew says: *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.* In Luke's version, Jesus says: *Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.*

Matthew speaks of hunger as a metaphor, *those who hunger for righteousness will be filled.* The Jesus that we encounter in Luke's gospel looks eye-to-eye at people who are hungry and says an altogether different thing: *Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.*

None of this is to say that the Beatitudes that were recorded by Matthew are of no value. I draw your attention to the contrast in order that we might better understand the story that Luke has given us. Because Luke is giving us a unique message, and that message has something to inform our hearts, our minds, and our souls on this All Saints Sunday.

The Beatitudes include not only the assurance of fulfillment and blessing, they also give us a new set of commandments – almost a 'short course in how to follow Jesus.'

If someone hits you, turn the other cheek. If someone takes your coat from you, give them your shirt also. If someone takes your things away from you, don't ask for anything back.

That is a pretty high bar. It would be a very difficult life to practice, all by yourself. The good news is – Jesus does not call us into this life, by ourselves.

Page |

2 This is one of those very strange and very rare times, when the Greek of the New Testament, and English as spoken in Oklahoma actually come together. It is almost a moment where the Holy Ghost descends in a gift of tongues.

In what most of you here on the East Coast would recognize as standard American English, it's difficult to tell the difference between the singular and the plural, of the second person pronoun. There is a big difference between: "Will you move your car from the parking lot out onto the street" when those words are spoken to one person, as opposed to saying those same words to a group of people. The correct pronoun is – in both cases – you. In one instance you is singular, and in the other, it is plural.

Believe it or not, this is where speaking a little bit of Oklahoman is helpful. As Luke recorded the Beatitudes from when Jesus was standing on the plain, this is what he said:

Blessed are y'all when people hate y'all.
Blessed are y'all when someone strikes y'all.
Blessed are y'all when someone steals from y'all.

Luke tells us that Jesus is speaking in the 'plural'. He was not saying: Blessed are you – an individual, someone who stranding alone – when someone strikes you, or steals from you, or hates you.

Jesus is saying: Blessed are you – all of you –

you who are standing together, with each other – when someone strikes you, or steals from you, or hates you.

This new life into which Jesus calls us is a different thing when we experience it in community. It's one thing to get slapped or to be hated because of something you believe in, or because of the color of your skin, or because of your sexual orientation, if you are all alone. But God doesn't call us to be alone. God calls us to be in community.

In the economy of the household of God, when one of us gets slapped or is hated, another of us is also called to be standing by to offer comfort. The time might come, when one of us might be called to step in front of our friend, and take the slap – or the hate – in their place. God doesn't call us to be alone. God calls us to be in community.

This is a radically different kind of life than the one that we observe in most of our society and culture today. You can pick almost any topic you like, and consider for a moment whether in America today we recognize the "y'all" of a common life together.

We saw one example last month in the statements by a member of a school board in Arkansas.

Following the reports of a half-dozen LGBT youth who had been so bullied or humiliated that



they took their own lives, a national 'wear purple' day was publicized. (I wore purple

shoes that day.) The idea was that one could show solidarity for LGBT youth who were in despair, by wearing a purple shirt on the 20th of October.

Page |

3 In response to the news coverage of that event, a member of the Midland Arkansas School Board had this to say on his FaceBook page:

Seriously they want me to wear purple because five queers committed suicide. The only way I'm wearin it for them is if they all commit suicide. I can't believe the people of this world have gotten this stupid. We are honoring the fact that they sinned and killed themselves because of their sin. Being a fag doesn't give you the right to ruin the rest of our lives. If you get easily offended by being called a fag then don't tell anyone you are a fag. I would disown my own kids if they were gay. They will not be welcome at my home or in my vicinity. I will absolutely run them off. Of course my kids will know better. My kids will have solid Christian beliefs. I like that fags can't procreate. I also enjoy the fact that they often give each other AIDS and die.

That isn't everything that he had to say. Some of it was even more offensive than that.

The time might come, when one of us might be called to step in front of our friend – or even step in front of a stranger - and take the slap – or the hate – in their place.

Blessed are all y'all when people hate you, and when they exclude y'all , revile y'all. Y'all should bless those who curse ya'll, pray for those who abuse y'all.

That's tough duty.

Almost impossible to do by yourself. But God doesn't call us to be alone, because God calls us to be in community.

It's when we – and by this I mean we here at Christ Episcopal Church in Poughkeepsie – when we are in community, we are at our best.

In community with the men and women who seek out the Dutchess Collaborative ReEntry Project to help them re-enter civil society after being jail or prison.

In community with the women at the Beacon Correctional Facility as we collect Christmas presents that they can give to their children next month.

In community with the guests and residents at the Dutchess County Coalition for the Homeless shelter as we take them a hot dinner one night each month. In community with the migrant farm workers with whom the Rural & Migrant Ministry works.

In community with our friends and even strangers who are in the hospital or nursing homes.

In community teaching, mentoring, and loving our children and youth – in Sunday School and Summer Camp; in community working in the kitchen to provide the gracious hospitality to which we aspire; in community for the countless hours that our musicians and singers dedicate each week so that we can worship with beautiful music.

In community in the sacristy, as an usher, or as an acolyte God doesn't call us to be alone.

God calls us to be in community. We are at our best, when we are in community.

Page | 4
It is at the altar rail, at the Holy Eucharist each week, that we stand in community with all the saints, who we remember in a special way this day.

All the saints – who from their labors rest. And all the saints who are standing beside us today. The new life to which God calls us, the life of the Beatitudes, comes together at its best for us, right here. Where we pray and sing with angels, archangels and with all the company of heaven.

God doesn't call us to be alone.

God calls us to be in community.

Let us pray: Loving God, the generations rise and pass away before you. You are the strength of those of us who still labor; you are the rest of those in your nearer presence.

We rejoice in the company of your saints. We remember all who have lived in faith, especially those most dear to us who rest in you. Give us, in time, our portion with those who have trusted in you and have striven to do your holy will.

To your name, with the Church on earth and the Church in heaven, we ascribe all honor and glory, now and forever. **Amen**¹

¹ Lutheran Book of Worship, page 285, adapted