

Sixth Sunday after Epiphany
Year C

Jeremiah 17:5-10

Psalm 1

1 Corinthians 15:12-20

Luke 6:17-26

When was the last time you blessed one of your children? When was the last time they asked for a blessing? In many cultures, it is the norm for parents, especially the father, to bless the children as they move out into the world on their own. We read about these blessings throughout the book of Genesis as each patriarch blesses his sons. Blessings are not as important in our culture today - perhaps to our detriment. The one area we still see blessings on a regular basis is in church. We have birthday blessings, anniversary blessings and, of course, blessings at the end of each service.

In Luke's Gospel, along with Matthew's, we read what are called the Beatitudes - a series of blessings. In Matthew, these are part of the Sermon on the Mount. In Luke's Gospel we call this passage the Sermon on the Plain, because Jesus comes down to a level place. There are other major differences between the two passages. The more familiar Beatitudes come from Matthew's Gospel. In Matthew, we read nine Beatitudes, while there are only four in Luke. Luke also adds four "Woes".

To me, there are a couple of details that jump out in Luke's writing. The first three Blessings are aimed at the poor with the specific "now". Jesus is concerned about those on the lower rung of society. He contrasts their condition in this life with what they will experience in the age to come. There will be a great lifting up of those who are down-trodden. The woes take on the opposite end of the societal spectrum. Those who are rich, or full, or happy will suffer for they have achieved success. We might reflect on the story of the rich man and Lazarus, where the rich man denied Lazarus any help in this life while, in the age to come, Lazarus is found to be in the bosom of Abraham while the rich man suffers.

Why would Jesus address this sermon to the disciples and not to the crowds? Perhaps, it is to call attention to the attitude of the people regarding poverty. As in our time, the poor were dismissed, looked down upon, while wealth seemed to be a sign of God's favor. But Luke is focused on the treatment of the marginalized. Thus, by addressing this sermon to the disciples, Jesus is calling on those who would follow Him to change their attitude.

Like the disciples in this story, we are to look after those who need our help. That is the role of the church. Whether it is through providing food to the poor, water to the thirsty, or shelter from the cold, Jesus has given us the task of changing the plight of those in need. How we do that speaks loudly about our priorities. We are told to do our charity quietly, not letting our right hand know what our left hand is doing. We are not to seek accolades for our good deeds, for that is what the rich do. Instead, we are to go about our efforts behind the scene.

There are many people who look to the Church for their aid. By speaking directly to us, using the second person plural verbs, Jesus will not allow us to ignore this command. It is not up to

someone else to do this work; this is our calling. As we minister to others, let us remember that God is placing this responsibility on us - helping others laugh and be filled for the Kingdom of Heaven is their's.