

In the middle of the night a lone figure crept around a house in the shadows, then quietly opened a window. As the intruder broke in a voice called out "Jesus is watching you..." The thief shined a flashlight round the room, and his light fell on a parrot who again called "Jesus is watching you." Dismissing the bird, the robber's light continued to shine in the darkness for what to steal, when the light illumined a Doberman Pincher growling, and the parrot called out "Sick'em Jesus!" Somehow, Christian Faith has been obscured to make our Lord and Savior into a Guard dog that protects and blesses us, while Cursing others.

I am uncertain the value of any sermon trying to interpret a sermon? I also doubt my ability to improve on a Sermon from Jesus, who is the Word of God incarnate! In all 4 Gospels, we have numerous stories of Jesus' healings, his teaching parables, his death and resurrection for our sake, but there is only 1 piece recorded in each of 2 Gospels that identify Jesus ever giving a sermon: on the Mountainside, and on the Plain. Perhaps, Jesus gathered people together and delivered the sermon he intended to preach at Nazareth when the religious folk attempted to throw Jesus off a cliff. Scholastically, we understand, the Evangelists compiled each from the common sayings of Jesus. What I hear in "Jesus' Beatitudes" is material like the Old Testament Proverbs, where there is meaning in every saying. The Proverbs are different from the Gospels and Teachings and Torah. The purpose of the Proverbs, is to read one and think upon that, before being ready to take in another. This morning I would like to do something different. When Chefs at a restaurant seemingly reach their limit of interpreting existing recipes, on occasion they "DECONSTRUCT" their traditional methods. Therefore this morning instead of a sermon based on a sermon, I propose we deconstruct the Sermon on the Plain. Although there be 4 Blessings and 4 Woes in this Sermon, and 32 Beatitudes in Matthew's Sermon on the Mount, there seem to me to be 10 points, something like 10 pearls on a string, or different 10 ratchets of a Kaleidoscope, in no definite order.

FIRST, after hundreds of years of our belief in a "Melting Pot" that All people are equal as children of God, Each Blessing names a different circumstance. Some of us here are renting for the Winter. Some have been here 20 years, a few even for 40 years and more. Who are the folk from Michigan? Where are those from South Dakota? Who are the ones from Colorado? Texas? Iowa? Which are from New York? Who are rooting this afternoon for the Los Angeles Rams, who are cheering for the Cincinnati Bengals? And Where are the diehard Packers Fans? Part of the nature of a democracy is belief all people are equal, but what Jesus names is that because of the life circumstance we identify, we do have differing Faith Priorities.

SECOND, if we follow Jesus' ministry according to Luke: after teaching on the shore at Galilee and the great catch of fish, Jesus took his new disciples up the mountain to pray. NOW, if this were Matthew's Sermon on the Mount, Jesus would have sat the crowds down on the mountain like Moses with the Israelites receiving the 10 Commandments on their way to the Promised Land, but this is Luke's Gospel... Instead of a sermon on the Mount, Jesus comes down to a Plain, with his Disciples, and Apostles, and Crowds from the rural country of Judea, from the City of Jerusalem, the Gentile places of Tyre and Sidon. This is a Sermon on the Plain, not only because of the Geography, but Jesus here is also talking "plain" to his disciples, and on a different level to his Apostles, also to the Crowds, and to the early Gentile Church.

THIRD, To women and men, Jesus is calling each to be a child of God, as dependent on God as flowers and trees are upon rain. To followers of Jesus, he is calling for us to take up the cross and follow his example. To the Early Church, he is calling to practice the responsibility of BLESSING. Nothing more, nothing less.

FOURTH, My father used to say that no soul was WON/LOST in Sermons being More/Less than 20 Minutes. Sermons in the North have 3 Points: a Thesis, an Antithesis and a new Conclusion. Where sermons in the South, tell you what the Bible is going to say, Tell it to you, then summarize it again. Someone recently

told me, they determined my sermons have all these many threads to follow, like turns of a Kaleidoscope, and they need to hang on, certain that we will get to the finish together but it could be a wild ride.

Luke always has three simultaneous audiences: 1. He began this gospel addressed to Theophilus, so Luke is writing to a Gentile (non-Jewish), like us. 2. Luke is writing this Gospel about 50 - 60 years after Jesus' Crucifixion, so writing to the Early Church. 3. From the birth stories about Mary and Joseph, Shepherds, Fishermen, Luke has a concern for the Poor.

Luke does not believe those with wealth are beyond salvation, there is Zaccheus the Tax Collector, Barnabas, Cornelius, and Lydia. Rather than "WOE" meaning "CURSED," what Jesus does here is to name the specific issues for "why it will be hard for the wealthy to follow Jesus to the Kingdom". These persons have already had their needs met by their own Satisfaction, so why would they look to rely upon God?

SIXTH, I believe that one of the bases for Jesus' sermon on the Mount or Plain is the Old Testament Book of Ecclesiastes, a title that means "The Preacher". You remember the passage that says:

*"For everything there is a season, a purpose for every matter under Heaven. A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant and time to pluck up what is planted. A time to kill and a time to heal. A time to break down and a time to build up. A time to weep and a time to laugh. A time to mourn and time to dance..."*

As human creatures when we feel plucked out of familiar surroundings, when we need to heal, when we feel broken down, what do we do? We search for things which will satisfy, stuff that will entertain, calories that make us feel full. HOWEVER, for every human condition, Jesus names what we truly need and desire:

1. When hated because of what you believe, to know you are not alone.
2. When you are weeping, to know there will be laughter.
3. When you hunger, to know you will be satisfied.

4. When you are poor, there is shame, desertion, feeling lost, and needing to know God.

You see, I think there is a great deal more behind poverty for Luke, because in our world being poor is not only an economic situation, poverty is a matter of access, a circumstance of shame, and with it feeling isolated, lost. Which is why Luke contains so many parables from Jesus about The Lost Coin, The Lost Son.

SEVENTH, In the Bible, always pay attention to the VERBS. Jesus came down with them and stood on a level plain with those who came to be healed and cured of unclean spirits. All sought to touch him... And what did Jesus do? He LIFTED HIS EYES on them. JESUS SAW THEM FOR WHO THEY ARE as precious to God. He did not ignore anyone or their needs.

EIGHTH, all of the nouns here are SECOND PERSON PLURAL, "Blessed are Y'ALL". Jesus is not speaking accusatively calling You out, but when considering moral responsibility, the needs of the church regularly fall upon us BOTH as individuals and as a Community. We need a Choir, so we combine all these many voices in harmony. No one person could do the work of the Patio Sale, but all the many persons working together over the course of the year and great things are accomplished.

NINTH, Will Willimon who was Dean of the Chapel at Duke University, Dr. Willimon once described that "A sermon is only a sermon when it is about God." We learn implications for human behavior and responsibility but only after we hear who God is and discern what God is up to. What do we mean by a God who is defined by the values of blessings and woes? What does it mean to worship a God who is both All knowing, All powerful, and yet powerless over our Free Will? Our God is the God of those who possess nothing but God. And our Messiah is The GOD who cares.

AND FINALLY TENTH, to paraphrase Johnny Cash:

We must not be so Heavenly minded, that we are of no earthly good to anyone.

Conversely, we must not be so earthly-focused, that we stop looking for the Divine.

In this PLAIN Sermon, Jesus gave 4 Blessings. What Blessings would you name for the Church today?

Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you who are hungry, for you will be filled.

Blessed are you who weep, knowing loss and mourning, for you have known love and will know laughter.

Blessed are you, when people hate you, when they exclude you, revile you and defame you, on account of your faith in the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.