

Homily for Sept. 9, 2020

Scriptures: 1 COR 7:25-31, Ps 45, Luke 6, 20-26

Paula Cooney, IHM

Some of you may be acquainted with the program “Shades of America.” For those not familiar with it, the host, W. Kamau Bell travels to different parts of the United States to explore race-based subcultures. He spends time listening to the ordinary folk of the place. His aim seems to me to be to break open the reality and then leaves it to the viewers to listen deeply and search for how we are called to respond.

A recent episode chronicled his visit to Skid Row in Los Angeles, an area where 15,000 houseless individuals make their home. Houseless ... not homeless. He introduces the viewers to real people – people with faces and stories.

I was reminded of these women and men as I read this section of Luke’s Gospel. I’ll come back to them in a minute.

Today’s Gospel finds us at the beginning of Luke’s version of what some call, the “Great Discourse.”

Scripture scholars spend a great deal of time comparing, verse by verse, Luke’s compilation of these teachings of Jesus with Matthew’s version.

- Matthew’s Jesus is on a mountainside / Luke’s is on a plain / a level place.
- Matthew relates eight beatitudes / Luke four.
- It takes Matthew three chapters to relate the teachings he wants his community to hear and Luke wraps it up in less than one and then sprinkles them throughout the rest of his Gospel in a variety of ways.
- And unlike Matthew, Luke follows up the blessings with some pretty condemning woes!

Blessings and woes ... Luke keeps reminding us of both possibilities

In the Magnificat, Mary speaks of the rich blessings given to those who are God’s servants

- The lowly are raised to high places.
- The hungry are given every good thing.
- Israel is upheld in God’s promised mercy.

And then we are reminded that:

- The proud will be confused.
- The mighty will be deposed from their thrones.
- And the rich will be sent away empty.

And we hear it again today.

- The kingdom belongs to you who are poor.
- You who are hungry, you will be satisfied.
- You who now weep, yes, you will laugh.
- And if you are now excluded and insulted because you are my disciple, on that day you are to rejoice and leap for joy!

However:

- If you are rich – you already have your consolation.
- If you are filled now – the time will come when you will be hungry.
- And if laughing now, you will weep and mourn.

In Matthew, Jesus **is** teaching the Beatitudes to his disciples: (we know the pattern of the verses ...)

“Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom.”

But what strikes me in Luke’s telling, is that Jesus looks directly at his disciples and says – YOU – my disciples – YOU are filled with blessings, however, YOU **can be** filled with woe.

I wasn’t real happy about hearing that both were possibly a part of me.

Which brings me back to skid row and how I saw ... really saw ... the men and women Kamau Bell introduced me to.

I heard and saw their real poverty and hunger – for food – for housing – for respect.
I saw the caring protection that members of the Skid Row community offered one another and the gentle presence of others coming to wash hair and provide meals.

I saw police responding to the distress of a mentally ill person with power not compassion.

I saw the distress of a community of people waiting for those have the power to make a difference – watching as high-rises grow around them, empty, yet not open to them and needing to move their tent and belongings so the city could clean the streets.

And I saw that the vast majority of those living there were people of color.

And Jesus came down from the mountain to a level place and looked directly at his disciples ...

His disciples live on skid row too – and the kingdom **is** theirs – and their hunger **must be** satisfied – and their tears – well, they **must become our tears as well**.

We often and easily quote Luke 4 as our call – to bring good tidings – proclaim liberty to captives – recovery of sight – release to prisoners.

As I reflect on my one hour vicariously present to the community of Skid Row, Los Angeles, I think that they did the same for me. They invited me to release within myself that which is captive, to see without prejudice and to be free within myself from that which holds me from being a co-disciple with everyone called the beloved of God.

That seems to be the call of our times – to become – together – the Beloved Community. It’s going to take some time – a lot of work – more listening than we may be accustomed to – a lot of letting go – an openness to embrace and to be embraced – to forgive and to be forgiven.

It is a journey worth taking – no matter the discomfort – no matter the cost. Let’s be courageous in the walking.