

REFLECTION

September 13, 2023,

Colossians 3: 1-11

Luke 6:20-26

Psalm 145: 2-12

Today's Gospel begins Luke's sermon on the plain. His beatitudes are shorter than Matthew's and, unlike Matthew, he offers some "woes" for consideration. Matthew's beatitudes propose a set of attitudes which reflect the spirit of the kingdom, qualities that are to be found in followers of Jesus.

Luke, on the other hand, speaks of the material conditions in this life that will be overturned in the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are poor-materially poor—those sleeping under bridges and in our streets, those living pay check to pay check, if employed at all; Blessed you who are now hungry---those starving in our urban centers, rural areas, and in countries around the world, Blessed are you who weep- those who grieve the death of a loved one because of war or gun violence, or weep over children being taken from their families and exploited through war or via human trafficking. Blessed are you.

In this season of creation, we might add the hunger and weeping of our planet which cries out for healing and care.

Jesus is preaching good news: God's kingdom is for you. Through Jesus' words and actions, God embraced the untouchables, cured the sick, healed the broken-hearted, welcomed outcasts and sinners, included the excluded and those not chosen. Jesus said to these individuals and social groups, you are close to God's heart, you are loved and embraced. No one is an outsider or "other". This was and is good news! Jesus turned the social conventions of his day upside down. As his followers, we are to do the same. This is Jesus' vision of the kingdom of God where love, mercy, justice and peace prevail.

These are the values, attitudes and behaviors of beatitude living.

Luke also says that it won't be good news for those who are focused only on themselves and live selfishly. If you are oblivious to the needs of others and exclude and marginalize those who are poor, those unlike yourselves, Woe to you!

To be more like Jesus, Paul tells the Colossians don't get caught up in the small, unimportant stuff but keep your eyes fixed on Jesus and your call to follow him and build the kingdom of God on earth. That is to be your focus!

You have died and been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above and not earthly things. This is one of those paradoxes-- yes, it's true that in baptism we have died with Christ and have been raised with him, but on a practical, every day, level we don't always experience it in the present.

We must grow into that union by ridding ourselves of whatever behaviors, attitudes or values hinder living from our true identity as God's beloved sons and daughters, acknowledging and treating others as who they are, the beloved of God. Living the Paschal Mystery, dying to an old way of life and starting over, day after day, is a lifelong process.

As you and I look at our hearts, what would it take for us to be more like Christ individually and as a community? We all have something, at least one thing to surrender!

Paul says whatever those "vices" are they must go if we are to be followers of the servant Jesus who proclaimed good news to the poor by emptying himself and clinging to nothing.

"The Spiritual path, as Meister Eckhart observed, has more to do with subtraction than with addition. It is not so much a matter of adding all the active virtues to one's spiritual practice of living as of relinquishing everything that can possibly be abandoned. How much (and what) can you (and I individually and as a community) leave behind?"

Belden C. Lane in The Solace of Fierce Landscapes by Meister Eckhart.

