

Luke's beatitudes, St. John's Linden Hills
All Saints' Day 2019
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Blessed are you poor, driving a twenty year-old gray Chevy, dented and scratched. The reign of God is yours. And woe to you who are rich, taking delivery of a fully-equipped Acura, for you have already received your comfort.

Blessed are you who hunger now, ashamed that your kid now qualifies for free lunch and comes home on Fridays with food-shelf groceries that someone quietly put in his locker. And woe to you who are satisfied, pushing back from the table and thinking about how nice it will be to have leftovers for breakfast.

Blessed are you who weep now, even though it's been months since he died and your friends are starting to wonder if you're depressed, because you ARE depressed, and you need to be able to tell your friends about it all without fearing their impatience. Blessed are you who weep now, because in an hour you will laugh so loud and hug that dear friend with such surprising fierceness.

Jesus' most famous sermon, usually called the Sermon on the Mount, starts with this bullet list of either/ors. Blessed versus woe. In the first column are all kinds of people who suffer, some of them victims of illness or bad luck or choosing the wrong parents. And some of them, just a few weeks into following Jesus, are already suffering because they have chosen this controversial rabbi.

In the second column are all kinds of people who are doing fine: they're rich, well-fed, in good health, and they're in a good mood. It's like Jesus' power point has the wrong labels. These folks are the blessed ones.

{salesman voice} It's obvious. They are living right. It's not luck, it's karma! God is blessing them for their faithfulness. Ask any televangelist, then send him money so he can keep praying for your prosperity. The first column should say "too bad that you are poor. We pity you hungry. We are so sorry you're sick. We dread having people hate us."

{own voice again} In other words, we intend to stay out of column one! Column one isn't so hard to understand: it's nice that God blesses all those unfortunate people. We'll definitely contribute to the food drive. Let us pray for the fire victims in California. We'll even go to a protest march every once in awhile and make donations to NGO's. And we will increase our church pledge. Column one is like a regular Sunday morning!

It's column two that makes us think, *hey, is this supposed to be Good News?*

It's the *woes* that mess with our heads. It's worth noting that St. Matthew does not include them in his version of the Sermon on the Mount, which by the way is much longer. But we've got St. Luke's version this morning, and Luke remembers the woes very well. They are, after all, the flip side of the blesseds. The opposite, right? Poor versus rich, hungry versus satisfied, people hate you versus people speak well of you?

I am not so sure they are meant to be, exactly, the opposite. At first, you imagine Jesus' power point with two columns labelled Blessed and Woe. Sad and Glad. Unlucky and Lucky. Maybe even saints and sinners?

No. Jesus doesn't say that. Sinners? The reviled folks in column 1 aren't any more sinners than the popular ones in column 2. And Saints? From the earliest days the church seemed to call each other--everybody--saints. Jesus is not praising the poor unfortunates and condemning the rich and fortunate.

Groucho Marx once commented wisely on this column one versus column two business. He said "there are two kinds of people in the world: those who divide people into two kinds and those who don't. I don't."

Groucho is the same guy who said he didn't want to join any club that would have him as a member.

In philosophy, the either/or folks are called dualists. It's a very popular idea, and our politics and religion are mightily dualistic. Us and Them. Now or Never. With us or

Against us. Cool or Stupid. Good or Evil. And our blessed rabbi Jesus is sounding mightily dualistic with his blessings and woes, and that bothers me.

I've been puzzling over this all week, because like Groucho, I don't want to be a dualist. I want to be a monist. A oneness-person. God is one. We are all one. Our planet is too tiny for all this! I want to look at every contradiction and say: hey, let's back up and look again. Both sides have plenty in common! **It's not either/or, it's both/and.**

Unfortunately, when Groucho and I divide people into monists and dualists, we fail to be monists. And I really think Jesus was a monist, a uniter-not-a-divider. Oops, there I go again, with the either/or talk! Aaaaargh.

I think I discovered my mistake on Thursday morning. The Power Point I saw in my head with two columns was not the one Jesus meant.

The opposite of blessed is not woe. It's *cursed*. Jesus doesn't curse the rich and popular. He just warns them: "look out. Things could change. Don't worship popularity. Don't think you are different than the weeper, the mourner, the sick person, the suddenly bankrupt. Beware. I'm not going to say you are also blessed for fear that it will go to your head (which is too big already) but *of course you are blessed, too.*

So here's another slide, with one big circle, and everyone in it. Some are smug about being blessed, and might seem unlovable, but we need to find a way. Others are anxious about losing their blessedness, and they need our love to help them see beyond their fears. Still others are convinced they cannot possibly be anything but cursed. They believe they have fallen out of the circle of blessedness. And those are the ones that need out love most.

So Jesus is reassuring some and warning others. One big circle of beloved people, some quite lovable and some not so much.

The dualists in the room will want to add the word "cursed" outside the circle, but I won't join them. Today. Jesus warns us not to judge, lest we be judged. Says so in this

same Sermon on the Mount. Says to love even our enemies, rivals, accusers, revilers. Maybe God curses some, maybe some curse themselves and refuse to stay in the circle, but Jesus tells us to leave that judgment up to God.

And meanwhile, beware those who see no shadows darkening our path. Woe is not a curse. It's a caution: do not think you are so different from the poor, the sick, the antagonist. Our wise Zen Episcopalian Bill Alexander would remind us: you ARE them. They ARE you. What seems like either/or is actually both/and.

There are not two kinds of people. Just one kind, and we are all blessed.

Woe unto us who act like we don't need to bless and be blessed.