4th Sunday of Epiphany- Blessed Are You Pastor Leanne Darlington

Matthew 5:1-12

 At my ordination service last week, Bishop Michael Pryse mentioned in his sermon the words of Numbers 6:22 which states “the Lord spoke to Moses saying, speak to Aaron and his sons, saying thus you shall bless the Israelites. The Bishop stated that God spoke to Moses in that moment saying you shall bless the people. Bishop Michael’s words really stuck with me, and I spent much of this past Monday reflecting on what that means to me as a newly ordained minister and what it means to us, the congregation of Zion Philipsburg. What does it mean to bless the people?

 Jesus speaks of blessing the people in our gospel reading this morning. Jesus is near the Sea of Galilee and the town of Capernaum where he has been spending much of his time teaching both the disciples and the crowds who have gathered to hear him. There is a mountain nearby; a place where the heavens meet the earth. He climbs the mountain and the disciples follow, then Jesus sits down and proceeds to teach the Beatitudes, much like Moses who climbed Mount Sinai to receive the 10 Commandments from God. The Beatitudes that Jesus spoke were a series of blessings, but not for whom one would think. Jesus taught the disciples to bless the poor in spirit, the meek, to bless those who mourn and those who hunger and thirst. Wait a minute. Don’t blessings usually fall upon the rich and famous, the successful and those with authority? When good things happen in our lives, don’t we say to our friends and family that “we are blessed?” Just what is Jesus teaching here? Because it is the exact opposite of what the first century Galileans would have learned and the exact opposite of how the world expects us to live and get ahead. Jesus was and is turning the world upside down, he was reinterpreting the old law and offering a radical new way of living, a new way of loving, and a new way of thinking. Jesus was living out the word of God, the radical grace and mercy of a loving God in a way that folks back then did not understand and sadly in a way that many in modern society do not understand. More often than not it seems like we live in a world consumed by fear and materialism and where if you come in second place you are the first loser.

 So, what if we wrote our own Beatitudes for today? What would they look like? What if Jesus was sitting in the pew beside you, and he suddenly began to speak and teach using examples from folks lives today? Have any of you heard of Nadia Bolz Weber? She is an ELCA minster and the founding pastor of The House for All Sinners and Saints in Denver, Colorado. She is not your traditional pastor so to speak, look her up if you would like to get to know her better. She has written four books and in all that she does she speaks with honesty, authenticity and truth about her past, her faith, her passion for justice and inclusion, and her relationship with God. In 2014, she wrote an updated version of the Beatitudes for a sermon for All Saints Day. I think it is some of the best writing she has ever done, and I’d like to share it with you now.

 Nadia writes, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the agnostics. Blessed are they who doubt. Those who aren’t sure, who can still be surprised. Blessed are they who are spiritually impoverished and therefore not so certain about everything that they no longer take in new information. Blessed are those who have nothing to offer. Blessed are they for whom nothing seems to be working. Blessed are the pre-schoolers who cut in line at communion. Blessed are the poor in spirit. You are of heaven and Jesus blesses you.”

 “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are they for whom death is not an abstraction. Blessed are they who have buried their loved ones, for whom tears are as real as an ocean. Blessed are they who have loved enough to know what loss feels like. Blessed are the mothers of the miscarried. Blessed are they who don’t have the luxury of taking things for granted any more. Blessed are they who can’t fall apart because they have to keep it together for everyone else. Blessed are the motherless, the alone, the ones from whom so much has been taken. Blessed are those who “still aren’t over it yet” Blessed are they who laughed again when for so long they thought they never would. Blessed are the Seyler family and the Doering family. Blessed are those who mourn. You are of heaven and Jesus blesses you.”

 “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who no one else notices. The kids who sit alone in high-school cafeterias. The laundry guys at the hospital. The sex-workers and the night shift street sweepers. Blessed are the losers and the babies and the parts of ourselves that are so small. The parts of ourselves that don’t want to make eye contact with a world that only loves the winners. Blessed are the forgotten. Blessed are the closeted. Blessed are the unemployed, the unimpressive, the underrepresented. Blessed are the teens who have to figure out ways to hide the new cuts on their arms. Blessed are the meek. You are of heaven and Jesus blesses you.”

 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the wrongly accused, the ones who never catch a break, the ones for whom life is hard – for they are those with whom Jesus chose to surround himself. Blessed are those without documentation. Blessed are the ones without lobbyists. Blessed are foster kids and trophy kids and special ed kids and every other kid who just wants to feel safe and loved and never does. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Blessed are they who know there has to be more than this. Because they are right.”

 “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are those who make terrible business decisions for the sake of people. Blessed are the burnt-out social workers, the overworked nurses and the pro-bono case takers. Blessed are the kids who step between the bullies and the weak. Blessed are they who delete hateful, homophobic comments off their friend’s Facebook page. Blessed are the ones who have received such real grace that they are no longer in the position of ever deciding who the “deserving poor” are.[[1]](#footnote-1) Blessed is everyone who has ever forgiven me when I didn’t deserve it. Blessed are the merciful for they totally get it.”

 In a world that is constantly asking us to do more, to be more, to pick a side, the Beatitudes invite us to simply bless the people and love the people. And that is what is so desperately needed both in our lives and in our communities today. God shows up in the least expected places; in the brokenness and imperfectness of our lives, in the sadness and in the hurt. God is there.

 Today we will celebrate communion and break bread together for the first time. We commune together to proclaim the presence of Jesus Christ in our lives and by the power and grace of the Holy Spirit, we are fed and sustained. We are then invited to boldly take our mission into the world as disciples of Jesus Christ to proclaim the unconditional love of God, to proclaim that all are worthy, to proclaim that all are blessed knowing that the kingdom of God is found wherever we honour God’s children no matter what their brokenness or imperfection may be.

May God bless each of you, now and forever. Amen

1. Sarcastic Lutheran, The Cranky Beautiful Faith of a Sinner and a Saint, “Some Modern Beatitudes – A Sermon For All Saints Sunday,” November 6, 2014, accessed January 31, 2020, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/nadiabolzweber/2014/11/some-modern-beatitudes-a-sermon-for-all-saints-sunday/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)