

All Saints Sunday

A DARING DEFIANCE

Luke 6:20-31

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By Steven E. Albertin

20Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

“Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

21“Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.

“Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

22Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude
you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man.

23Rejoice 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.

24“But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.

25“Woe to you who are full now,
for you will be hungry.

“Woe to you who are laughing now,
for you will mourn and weep.

26Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their
ancestors did to the false prophets.

27But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to
those who hate you, 28bless those who curse you, pray for those
who abuse you. 29If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the
other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not
withhold even your shirt. 30Give to everyone who begs from you;

and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.
31Do to others as you would have them do to you.

All Saints Day commemorates all the saints of every time and place who have been “sainted” and “set apart” by the grace and mercy of God. Such being “set apart” is at the root of the holiness of God and God’s people in both Old and New Testaments. Jesus’ beatitudes from Luke’s Sermon on the Plain vividly describe how such holiness doesn’t just set the saints apart but also, puts them at odds with what the world values. Though such defiance is costly for Jesus, for God and for us, it is worth it!

Diagnosis: A Cursed Defiance

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Defying the World*
Jesus defies the world’s definition of success. Jesus reverses the socially acceptable and turns it upside down and inside out. What is typically considered blessed, Jesus curses. What is typically considered cursed, Jesus blesses. Jesus’ defiance leaves us scratching our heads. He sounds a little crazy defiantly declaring that the poor, the hungry, the grieving, the reviled and the excluded are blessed. He sounds like a spoilsport cursing the success of those who have “made it”: the rich, the satisfied, the happy and those voted the “best” in whatever is currently “hot.”

Jesus’ defiance goes even further. He recommends to his disciples a lifestyle that seems recklessly dangerous. He invites us to defy the world like he did loving our enemies and turning the other cheek. However, this hardly seems the way to live a rich and full life. Loving your enemies and letting yourself be abused and beaten by the bully down the block hardly seem appealing. It is a miserable way to live. If living in

defiance of the world is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, we are not so sure we want any part of it.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Defying God*

However, Jesus' defiance is not only aimed at the values and assumptions of the world. He is defying the God in whose name he claims to be sent. Does not God's law bless the obedient and righteous with abundance and plenty? Does not God reward the godly with life and punish the ungodly with suffering? Does not God demand justice, obedience, and that all God's people be given what they deserve? Jesus defies such a God, befriending sinners and outcast, giving losers what they do not deserve. Those who deserved to be cursed Jesus blesses in the name of the God they have dishonored. Jesus curses those who have earned their blessings. Everything is turned upside down and inside out.

Even more, Jesus asks us to believe that we are blessed when our world is falling apart. We believe that God helps those who help themselves. There is nothing blessed about not having enough to eat or the resources to keep a roof over our heads. Yet Jesus' defies the system and insists that we are blessed.

Jesus has a lot of nerve to act and speak as if he was acting on behalf of God. He dares to believe that he is ushering in the Kingdom of God. He thinks that God has authorized him to reverse the law that God himself had created. That is absurd! God against God?

We are unable to believe Jesus' claim. Our hunger for acceptance by the world matters more. Our longing for recognition by people who only value what can be measured and calculated is what's important. Our desire to be in control of our lives is what counts. We would rather trust what we can see than Jesus' outrageous declarations that must be believed in spite of

evidence to the contrary. We have a right, (a divine right?), to get what is ours. Yet Jesus dares to believe otherwise, and in the process defies the God on whom we have staked our lives.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Defying the Curse*

Jesus refuses to back down from his claims. We along with the rest of humanity refuse to back down from ours. It leads to an inevitable collision at the cross. There Jesus suffers the consequences for daring to oppose God's curse of sinners and law breakers. There Jesus suffers for daring to defy God's own plan for a world where people ought to get what they deserve. Jesus thought he could redefine God's description of blessing and curse. When he died, it looked like he was wrong. He had no right to make such a redefinition.

Of course, neither do we. Our fate is no different from Jesus' fate. Jesus died because we refused to believe he could undo God's system of blessing and curse. We die believing (wrongly) that we can win in God's system of blessing and curse. No one can beat the system. No one escapes the cemetery.

PROGNOSIS: A Blessed Defiance

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Reversing the Curse*

Jesus' defiance was not what it appeared to be. He was not the insolent blasphemer his enemies accused him to be. He indeed was whom he claimed to be, the divine Son of God, whose defiant belief in his right to redefine blessing and curse was not mistaken. When God's system of blessing and curse crushed him on the cross, that system collided with God's own desire to bless those who deserve curses and death. When Jesus died, it looked as though the system prevailed. Promises of the Sermon on the Plain were empty and worthless. But when Jesus rose from the dead, it was clear that Jesus was right. His defiance had been divinely authorized. He had the right to redefine and reverse

what had been God's system of blessing and curse. His declaration that the poor, the hungry, and all the defeated of this world are blessed, and that all the self-satisfied of this world who think they have made it are cursed, has been vindicated.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Defiant Believing*

The resurrection vindicated Jesus defiant faith and his refusal to give up on the mission his "father" had given him. It enabled him to redefine blessing and curse, starting with himself. Confident of who and whose he was, he did not need to have his identity and confidence based on what could be seen, measured or under his control. See his defiant refusal to give in to the temptations of the Devil which had been based on the old system of blessing and curse. Throughout his ministry and his journey to Jerusalem and the cross, Jesus faithfully defies that system and is not disappointed.

When Jesus uttered his beatitudes to his disciples in the Sermon on the Plain, he already offered to his disciples the possibility of such faithful defiance. That same possibility is offered to us today in the Word and Sacrament ministry of the church. In spite of evidence to the contrary, even though we may be "poor, hungry, grieving, hated, excluded, reviled and defamed, we can rejoice and leap for joy," we can defiantly believe that "(y)our reward is great in heaven" because Jesus says . . . that God says . . . we are blessed. We are set apart. We are the holy people of God, the saints. We no longer have to live fear of the curse because we know that our identity is no longer dependent upon our riches, our feelings or the opinions of others. We are certain of our blessedness because the once cursed Jesus is now alive, blessed and authorized to pass along the same blessedness to us.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Defiant Living*

Trusting Jesus' promise and his redefinition of blessing and curse, Jesus' crazy way of living becomes the shape of our lives. Because the source of our blessing depends solely on Jesus and his promise, we no longer need to live in fear that we will fail and not measure up to the old system of blessing and curse. Because Jesus has declared that we are "blessed," we are saints, set apart from the world's system of value and worth. We "get to" defiantly live as Jesus did, no longer concerned about ourselves. We can live selflessly for others redefining the meaning of blessing and curse for our neighbors. We get to defy the world's obsession with the bottom line and "what's in it for me?" by giving ourselves away as a blessing to those who are cursed. It does not matter whether they have deserved the curse. By experiencing Jesus' redefinition of blessing and cursing through us, others too can discover the joy of defiantly living in the promise of Jesus.