

All Saints Sunday

WE ARE RIGHTEOUS, AREN'T WE?

Matthew 5:1-12

All Saints Sunday

Analysis by Eric W. Evers

1 When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. 2 Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: 3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

5 “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. 6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. 7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. 8 “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. 9 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. 10 “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 “Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

DIAGNOSIS: Self-Righteous

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Something’s Not Right...*

There seems to be a disconnect here. Oh, at first things might look all right. We can pick up a few words from these Beatitudes

and wrap them around ourselves. Pure in heart, maybe. We can tell ourselves that applies to us, as long as we don't look too closely in the mirror. But unease ought to set in when we read this statement of who is blessed. The poor in spirit? The persecuted? Those who mourn? The meek? That's not us. Not in North America. Not in the Church. But aren't we God's people? Aren't we blessed? According to Jesus, the answer is no.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *We Are Righteous, After All*

You see, the problem is, we are a righteous people. A self-righteous people. Whether it is the arrogant right-ness of the Right or the arrogant right-ness of the Left, we don't hunger and thirst for righteousness, we have it. And so there is no need for meekness. We are right, after all. And "they" (whoever "they" are) are wrong. So we aren't merciful towards those who disagree with us, we are vindictive. We are not peacemakers; we are winners.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Rejected In Our Righteousness*

But all of this self-righteousness places us outside of God's blessing. We may be fine in our own estimation, but Jesus' words reveal God's perspective: we are not blessed. All our vanity is at cross-purposes with God's desires. We have set ourselves up, in our self-righteousness, in opposition to God. "Righteousness," in our fashion, isn't what God blesses. He rejects it. And, therefore, us.

PROGNOSIS: Unrighteous, but Blessed

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal solution) : *What Was Bad News...*

These beatitudes, these words that we expected to confirm our blessing, have taken away our righteousness. They have unmasked us. They have brought us low, humbled us, and led us into

mourning for our spiritual poverty. And, now, we can claim righteousness from only one source: The cross and Christ. That is exactly where Jesus blesses us. There on the cross, the ungodly are justified; there the poor in spirit receive the kingdom; and those who lack righteousness (who “hunger and thirst” for it instead) are filled. Stripped of our own righteousness, we are given the undeserved, free gift of God’s blessing.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : ... Is Now Good News

And now that blessing does something. When our goodness is not our own, we can no longer be arrogant about it. Meekness comes. We are no longer satisfied; we start to hunger and thirst for Christ’s righteousness to be more and more evident in us. We recognize our own spiritual poverty, and attribute all goodness to the work of God.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : ... That Can Change the World!

And such spiritually-impoverished-but-rich-with-Christ’s-blessing people now look differently at others. Mercy is extended to those whom we once wished to simply prove wrong. Peace is sought more than victory. None of this comes from us; it comes from God’s work of bringing us low and raising us up. And since these righteous acts of mercy, peacemaking, and meekness are not our own, they carry God’s blessing to us, and more importantly, through us, to the world.