

All Saints Sunday

WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

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Luke 6:20-31

Analysis 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.*

DIAGNOSIS: A Cursed Delusion

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Who Do You Think You Are? Someone Special?*

Jesus must have sounded like some kind of nut . . . naively declaring that the poor, the hungry, the weeping, the hated and the despised are somehow blessed. Anyone with any kind of common sense knows that those situations are anything but blessed. Likewise, Jesus' criticism of the good things of life must have sent people away scratching and wondering, "What is wrong with this guy? Who in their right mind doesn't want to be rich, happy and popular?" On top of it all, Jesus seems to think it is a good idea to go through life playing the victim. Anyone with any kind of self-esteem should not be abused and bullied by their enemies. Who does Jesus think he is to go around pretending that blessings are curses and curses are blessings?

Attacked by the same kind of criticism and ridicule, we wonder how we can think we are so special. Why are we entitled to think that we are immune from "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune?" Real life is that "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" along with fame and fortune are blessings. Real life is that hunger, poverty, grief, loss and having to sit in the back of the bus because no one likes us are curses. "Getting back and getting" seems like a very effective way to live. Turning the cheek, blessing those who curse you and giving your stuff away without expecting anything in return is crazy. Who are we to think that things can be or ought to be any different?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Who Do You Think*

You Are? Do You Think God Gives a Rip?

Jesus somehow thinks he is authorized to reverse what everyone assumes to be the nature of things. He dares to think that what is “really real” is not based on what everyone can see with their eyes. Instead he thinks it is “really real” simply because he says so. Doesn’t he get it? Who does he think he is . . . God or something? At his baptism by the Baptist at the Jordan Jesus was assured, “You are my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.” His temptation in the wilderness immediately followed. This assurance was under attack. Throughout Jesus’ ministry as he makes his way to the inevitable confrontation in Jerusalem his identity is continually called into question. Only God could turn blessings into curses. Only God could reverse the inevitable consequences of retribution and life under the Law.

Jesus, who do you think you are? God or something?

That is exactly what Jesus announces in Luke’s beatitudes from the Sermon on the Plain. That is exactly what Jesus lives out in his ministry. That is exactly what makes him so dangerous and exactly why he must die.

Who are we to think that we are blessed when everything going on in our lives signals that we are cursed? How foolish can we be to live our lives so recklessly, loving our enemies, doing good to those who curse us and turning the other cheek when anyone in their right mind ought to pop the other guy in the nose? Who are we to think that God gives a rip about us?

So, unlike Jesus we take a pass on our Baptism. Yes, it was a nice thought. It would be good if it were true, but the truth is that we are on our own. Or at least, “God helps those who help themselves.” There is nothing blessed about having an empty stomach and not being able to pay our mortgage. Standing in the unemployment line or sitting alone in the school lunchroom

because we are not “cool” is not good. We are not going to be fools and let ourselves be walked on. So, we carefully calculate “What’s in it for me? What is the bottom line? To heck with these sanctimonious sentiments! I have got a real life to live in a real world where sitting at the top of heap is what really matters. I have my rights! Get back and get even! I want what I have coming to me!

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Who Do You Think You Are? No One Gets Out Alive!*

Jesus suffered the consequences for daring to think that life could be different. “Jesus, who do you think you are, God or something? Only God could remake and recreate the world like this, turning curses into blessings and blessings into curses. And since you obviously can’t be God because God couldn’t possibly reverse himself and change the very nature of reality, you are a blasphemer. You are desecrating the sanctity of God’s own Law. Therefore, in the name of God you must die!” And he did. As Jesus died God did not dispute the opinion of Jesus’ enemies. Jesus appears to be no better and no more privileged than the rest of us. As now infamously dead rocker Jim Morrison (of the Doors) once defiantly screamed, “No one gets out alive!”

Jesus got what he deserved for daring to defy God. So do we. Who do we think we are to think that somehow we are blessed when we are cursed with a life and world bleeding, broken and begging for mercy? We foolishly believe that, if God or Fate and Life would somehow give us what we deserved, all would be well. The fact of the matter is that in the Final Analysis, when the curtain finally comes down and all is said and done, we do get what we deserve. God hands us over to our foolishness. No one gets out alive.

Who do you think you are, Jesus? God or something. We do we think we are? Saints or something? A broken world where no one

escapes the obituary page declares, "Fiddlesticks!"

PROGNOSIS: "A Blessed Conviction"

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Who Do You Think You Are? God?. . . Yes!*

Jesus' bold and audacious conviction was not mistaken. His daring reversal announced to His disciples that day in the Sermon on the Plain was not naïve, foolish or absurd. He did indeed have divine authorization to turn blessings into curses and curses into blessings. He did finally have the right to reverse God's own Law and righteous judgment of sinners. The very Creator of the Cosmos had sent Him to seek and save the lost. He had every right in the world to reverse the very nature of things and declare that curses were blessings and blessings were curses. Why? Because on the "third day" God raised him from the dead and thereby reversing the ironclad law of inevitable retribution.

Jesus' offer of that new life was proleptically offered to His disciples that day in the Sermon on the Plain . . . and to all those disciples who have heard these startling beatitudes ever since, including us. The skeptical realists may have scoffed, "Who do you think you are, Jesus, God or something?" Jesus believed that he was . . . all the way to His death on the cross. Even there he continued to naively "turn the other cheek" and offer himself to his enemies praying, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." It all seemed foolish and naïve until he was raised from the dead. Then the shocking good news began to spread. It is true. Jesus was right. Because of Him, the blessed are cursed and the cursed are blessed.

Step 5: Advance Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Who Do You Think You Are? Someone Special? Saints? . . . Yes!*

Jesus in spite of evidence to the contrary throughout his ministry all the way to Jerusalem trusted the promise He

received that day in the Jordan River. Such trust enabled Him to have the blessed conviction expressed so boldly in the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Plain. Years later, even as He hung on the cross cursed, despised and hated, He still believed that He was blessed. His enemies shouted, "Who do you think you are, God or something? Then save yourself!" Jesus sure looked cursed. Yet He still believed that He was the blessed Son of God as he prayed, "Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit."

That same kind of faith can be ours. In the waters of Baptism God declared once and for all that we are His blessed Sons and Daughters in spite of evidence to the contrary. Our enemies may howl, "Who do you think you are? Someone special in God's eyes? Saints or something?" We can gently answer with the blessed conviction, "Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you and defame you on account of the Son of Man." We rest in the peace that the world cannot give. We are saints, the blessed people of God, even though the world and our lives along with it are going to "hell in a hand basket."

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Who Do You Think You Are? Do You Really Think You Can Change The World? . . . Yes!*

Amazing things happen when people trust this blessed promise. A new kind of life happens. These beatitudes are not marching orders, conditions to be met or obligations to be fulfilled. They are gifts and blessings, the consequences of the new kind of life made possible because Jesus is who He says He is.

These beatitudes describe Jesus' life. Because He had the courage of his conviction, because He trusted the promise of His baptism, this is the way he lived. He brought blessings to the cursed. He cursed those infatuated with their blessings. He defied a world imprisoned by the Law of retribution and trapped in the gridlock of "get back and get even." Freed by His

Father's promise, he was able to subvert and sabotage this old world of grudges and pay-backs by loving his enemies, blessing those who cursed him and giving himself away to those who needed help expecting no thing in return.

We "get to" live this same kind of life. Jesus on the highest authority declares that we are blessed in spite of appearances to the contrary. Therefore, we too can dare to subvert and sabotage the old order. We can live lives freely giving ourselves way not only to those in need but even to those who hate us. We can live selflessly offering ourselves to all declaring to the world that there is a blessing loose in this world. Through us God Himself is at work making a new creation. Even we, as cursed and inept as we often appear to be, can audaciously begin to do what so many have given up on: changing the world.