

“WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?”

Matthew 5:1-12

Crossings Conference, Homily 1
January 23, 2012; Morning Prayer

You are patiently waiting in a traffic jam when a car suddenly speeds by on the shoulder passing up all the traffic and cuts in at the last moment just before the lane ends. How can someone be so rude and inconsiderate? All you want to say is “Who do you think you are?”

I am sure that Jesus encountered a similar reaction when he uttered the Beatitudes. He brashly declares that the world is not as it appears to be and that he has the authority to create new one. Those who heard him must have wondered, **“Who do you think you are?”**

Jesus dares to rearrange the world as we know it. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart . . . and those who are persecuted, reviled and against whom all kinds of evil is spoken.”

Like some brash heckler in a crowd or some speeding driver who cuts in line, Jesus thumbs his nose at a world that has got it all wrong. No wonder Jesus’ critics complained, **“Who do you think you are?”**

It gets worse. Jesus not only defies the social conventions of the world, he dares to contradict God. God gives people what they deserve. God blesses those who follow God’s Law and curses those who don’t. God loves the righteous and punishes the wicked. BUT Jesus insists that God is partial to those who don’t deserve a thing and smiles on those for whom life has gone

south.

Those who heard him must have wondered, **“Who do you think you are?”**

And Jesus sighed, “I’m glad you asked. Watch, listen and you will find out.”

Jesus’ answers startle and surprise. He dares to call the creator of the universe, “Daddy.” As an uppity adolescent in the temple in Jerusalem, he declares that he must be about his “father’s business.” He wasn’t referring to the carpentry business in Nazareth. He audaciously claims that “No one comes to the Father but by me.”

Repeatedly Jesus dares to hang out with sinners as if God approves!

Jesus tells stories that portray what God is up to in him. In these odd stories merit does not matter. Here there is no ladder to climb or pecking order to defend.

Laborers in the Vineyard are all paid the same whether they worked all day or for only the last five minutes.

A shepherd runs a crazy business by leaving behind 99 sheep unprotected in the wilderness for the sake of one dopey sheep that got lost.

A father welcomes home a wicked, ungrateful and undeserving son who had wasted his life in riotous living.

In this new and crazy world God blesses the poor, the hungry, the sorrowful and the outcast regardless of how undeserving they might be.

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

Such an upstart cannot be tolerated! Blasphemy! Jesus must die.

It was people like us who killed Jesus. It was people who wanted to be good, who get out of bed on a Sunday morning to go to church, who go to conferences in the middle of winter . . . in the cold, . . . who could not tolerate this recklessly generous Jesus.

So they, we, hung Jesus on a cross. They, we, mocked him and demanded that Jesus come down from the cross. When Jesus doesn't come down from the cross and dies, they, we, are relieved.

"See, he was wrong. God only loves those who are worth loving. Jesus was misguided. God will not be mocked. Everyone finally gets what they deserve. Jesus, did you actually think that you could get away with undermining God?"

But because that was not the end of the story, we are here today. When Jesus was raised from the dead, all bets were off. It was a stunning conclusion to Jesus' story, every bit as stunning as it was that day when Jesus uttered these blessings on the mountain. When God raised Jesus from the dead, God vindicated everything that Jesus had said and done. Yes, Jesus got it right! "Blessed are the poor, the hungry, the sorrowful and the outcast!"

Because Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, Jesus truly is what he claimed to be. The reversal he authorized in the Beatitudes was not wishful thinking or the deranged dreams of some fool. It was no pie in the sky sweet by and by. It was "the real world!"

When we believe what Jesus says, we "get to" live our lives differently. We "get to" live with honesty, integrity, doing what is right and not just what is approved by the latest opinion poll. In the midst of an anxiety-ridden world, we like lilies in the field do not need to worry about what to eat or

what to wear.

Even when we are at the end of the line, the back of the bus, the rear of the room, the bottom of the list, the last one chosen because no one wants us on their team . . . or as their pastor, . . . sitting on the bench because the coach won't play us, alone on a Saturday night without a date, . . . even when we wonder if we can make ends meet, if we can survive the terrifying diagnosis, . . . even when tears flow down our cheeks, . . . we can rejoice and be glad . . . because standing there next to us with his arm around us is Jesus!

We can turn the other cheek and go the extra mile. We can believe that our dreadful past has been forgiven. We no longer need to be ashamed. We can come clean. We can tell the truth . . . in this brave, new, real world of the Kingdom of God.

So, when someone snidely remarks, **“Who do you think you are?”** we can answer, “Just ask Jesus. He says we're blessed.”

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