Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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February 12, 2022

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“Blessed are you” (Luke 6:20).

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jer 17:5-8; Ps 1; 1 Cor 1:12, 16-20; Luke 6:17, 20-26

French-born anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss often noted the importance of “the outsider” as an observer of the structures of cultures and civil societies. While most people live their lives unaware that their “reality” is an artificial construct (like fish who never realize they are in water), the outsider can analyze attitudes and assumptions and predict changing patterns. Outsiders are often innovators and prophets because they can see alternative futures. Ironically, one generation’s kooks and radicals become the next generation’s heroes and misunderstood geniuses.

When Jesus taught the Beatitudes, he was inviting his disciples to be outsiders who could see the inequalities and injustices built into society and then instigate and model changes that lead to a more compassionate and peaceful future — the reign of God. But, of course, Jesus also knew the status quo resists change and that his disciples would suffer for being different and therefore dangerous.

The Beatitudes call “blessed” the pioneers willing to live the “not yet” values of God’s promises as the yeast already at work in human culture. They effect change by being salt that flavors life with love and light that pushes forward into the darkness of fear and resistance to change. They are the humble, mournful, pure of heart, peacemakers and advocates for justice who will change the world even if they are persecuted in their own time and place.

The prophet Jeremiah describes how those who live on the surface of life are missing the deeper movements of grace and opportunity. They are like plants that are barren for lack of roots into the deep underground wellsprings of wisdom and foresight. They react to events but cannot initiate change or promote new directions because they are clueless and shallow.

Jesus was himself the ultimate outsider, the change he preached, the firstfruits of a New Creation that show what a human being looks like when the image and likeness of God is visible in his or her attitudes and actions. For this daring revelation of divine resemblance in human potential, Jesus was condemned as a blasphemer and a heretic. For disrupting the old order and exposing the self-serving sins of the status quo, he was put to death to save the system and its special interests.

Each of the eight Beatitudes describes Jesus, meek and humble of heart, hungering and thirsting for justice, weeping over Jerusalem, going down under the blows of those who hated and feared everything he stood for as a threat to their own control. They said he must be mad to think anyone would give up power or share their possessions with others. He must be living in a dreamworld promising happy endings to hard reality.

What sealed the validity of the Beatitudes was Jesus' willingness to lay down his life to affirm the future revealed by his resurrection, God's stamp of approval on love as the engine of transformation. Every act of love lives forever, is made indelible in history, while evil dies in the dust. Wherever a single heart leans out for love and refuses to give in to fear and hate, the world moves closer to the Beloved Community, its irrepressible and unstoppable Omega point, life with God forever.

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