

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time
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Jason just got back from Haiti. He is an emergency room doctor, and he went with some other physicians to assist after the earthquake. For days, he practiced what he called 'primitive medicine,' facing broken bones, and grave illnesses with a minimum of medical supplies, and no modern equipment. He delivered a set of twins. They both died. Jason said, "If these children had been born in the poorest hospital in America, they would have been saved. But, in Haiti, everything is turned upside down." As I concluded my phone conversation with Jason, he said to me, "What I saw in Haiti has changed my life. Because, when you see people whose lives have been turned upside down...you start to ask questions about what is really important in your own life."

In today's Gospel, Jesus preaches a message which is intended to turn the world upside down. He preaches the Beatitudes. And despite our best efforts to sugar-coat these Beatitudes, they still have the power to turn our world upside down, if we dare to listen to them. How would your life change, today, if you really believed Jesus when he said:

"Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of heaven is yours.... blessed are you who are hungry...blessed are you who weep...blessed are you when people hate you." How would your world be turned upside down, right now, if you dared to listen to Jesus when he said, "Woe to you who are rich...woe to you who are filled now...woe to you who laugh now..."

When Jesus first preached these words, the Beatitudes overturned a thousand years worth of Jewish piety, a piety which said that wealth, health and power were all signs that God loved you.

Sickness, suffering and poverty were all signs that you had disappointed God. Jesus overturned most of what his Jewish contemporaries thought they knew about God.

And his words COULD have the same effect today. Because, for the most part, we still worship at the altars of power, money, control, and instant gratification. We want it all – we want it now – we want it the way we want it. Then along comes Jesus, quietly happy to turn our world upside down, insisting that it is the poor, not the rich, who inherit the kingdom; it is the weeping, not the wealthy, who hold the dearest place in God's heart; it is the hungry, not the beautiful people, who find real satisfaction; it is the sick, the sinner, the outcast who find a home in God – and the self-righteous, the self-satisfied, the self-indulgent who must wander in the desert of disconnection.

Why would Jesus preach things that turn our world upside down? Well, I think he really, really wants to get our attention! Just as a tragedy like Haiti causes some of us to re-think their priorities, the Beatitudes of Jesus call Christians to think, and think hard, about what is really worth doing in life.

Could Jesus be any more forthright in telling us what is truly important? He says, "Woe to you." Woe to you if you are spending your life chasing wealth. Woe to you if a full belly and full bank account have highest priority in your life. Woe to you if you have worked tirelessly to avoid the pain, the need, the injustice, which afflicts your neighbor. A life focused on consuming, having, hoarding, is a life NOT worth living.

But blessed are you who embrace the poverty of Christ – the poverty which allowed him to pour out everything for those he loved. Blessed are you, when you know the deep hunger of your own heart – the hunger for God – a hunger which leads you to feed your hungry neighbor. Blessed are you when you weep – when you

weep over the suffering of your friend, the violence between nations, the injustice which masquerades as ‘life in the real world.’” Blessed are you when you weep – because, after all, Jesus wept - and anything that makes us more like Jesus is, by definition, a blessing.

And, in the end, isn't that is the whole point? You and I are called to live a Christ-like life – to become more and more like Christ. The Beatitudes are a blessing, because those who seek to live them out become more like Christ: the Christ who was poor, the Christ who wept, the Christ who hungered, the Christ who was persecuted.

As we baptize these children today, we embrace them into the family of faith, and God pours his spirit upon them. From this moment on, it will be our privilege to pass on the Gospel to them. We must teach them, in all that we say, and all that we do, that nothing else makes sense in life unless we are focused on Jesus, and loving like Jesus, and becoming like Jesus. If these children listen to Jesus, he will turn their world upside down. When Christ sets our priorities, everything changes.

Woe to these children, woe to ALL of us, if we fail to follow the wisdom of Christ. But blessed are these children, blessed are ALL of us, if we strive to live the beatitudes which make us Christ-like.

So in this liturgy, bring to the Lord whatever has turned your world upside down, and believe that, in our gathering today, is the Risen One, who stands in our midst, with hands full of...blessing.