

**Sunday, January 29
Epiphany 4**

**Micah 6:1-8
1 Corinthians 1:18-31
Matthew 5:1-12**

Rev. Fanny Belanger

Well, it's kind of difficult to hear this passage of the Gospel today,
the Beatitudes.

I spent most of my day yesterday checking the news, wondering what was going on
for all these poor people detained in our airports.

I've been through the same customs so many times myself, I could just
feel their pain and their anguish

and I am sure that for a lot of us here, seeing things spinning out of control,

It's hard not to feel angry, fearful or just heartbroken

- and in the midst of that the Gospel of the Lord reminds us the poor and the persecuted
are blessed.

It's not the first time since recently that I find an ironic flavor to this text.

Sam Rodriguez. On inauguration Day.

As the President headed outside on the balcony and the prayers started,

After the archbishop of New-York offered quite a conventional prayer asking God
for wisdom for the new government

Pastor Sam Rodriguez got up from his chair, went to the podium and started reading.

Started reading exactly what we have just heard. The text of the beatitudes.

With no introduction and no comment – not even the introduction from the Scriptures themselves -
Rodriguez stood up and said (read)

“Blessed are the poor, for theirs in the kingdom of heaven

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted....”

All the way down to “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake...”

And then he folded back his paper, and went back to his seat

in a total silence.

I think a lot of people were stunned. I was stunned.

Sam Rodriguez. Never heard about this man before.

He's actually quite someone,

the president of America's Largest Hispanic Christian Evangelical Organization.

What was he doing?

Telling the crowd that the cause of the unheard and persecuted was finally rising
to get the power?

Or was he doing the other way around:

Trying to humiliate the president, well-known, even for his supporters, as much for his wealth
than for his temper?

Or, as I immediately assumed, was Rodriguez just preaching from afar

- not to the crowd gathered there but to his own congregation –

to the low income workers and illegals aliens.

Reminding them who in God's sight, are the true elected.

Who knows what Rodriguez meant? God only.

But I found interesting this deep unease that rose immediately as Rodriguez was
reading the words of the beatitudes.

Unease in the crowd, nobody reacted, unease in the conversations that went on the Internet after that.

Unease inside of me.

What did he mean? Did I understand correctly?

Who does he think is blessed? On which side does Rodriguez think God is?

This feeling of discomfort I guess was very close of the feeling of discomfort that must have seized the crowd the first time

Jesus spoke to them these very words.

(It's indeed easy for us to forget how Jesus's messages were provoking because of course we got used to them.)

But we have heard a lot these past days about *prosperity Gospel* and the thing is we have a tendency to forget that *prosperity Gospel* wasn't invented in America.

Prosperity Gospel is actually older than the Gospel itself.

When you read it with a certain angle - there was also a "Prosperity Hebrew Bible" that pretended that God rewarded

with wealth and health those who pleased him, and those who displeased he cursed with plagues.

- And we know that all weren't admitted in the Temple. Banned, if you will.

The sickness of the sick and the disability of the disable were the proofs they were cursed.

Not worthy of God.

(Think the blind man in John 9).

If something bad happens to you, then you or your parents must have done something wrong.

Interestingly, this belief was not only the belief of the wealthy and the healthy

But the poor and the lame believed it too.

And so not only did they have to cope with their disease

and the scorn of society but they also had to cope with the curse of God and the shame they had of themselves.

And then Jesus comes in as a new Moses and he stands on the mountain and he tells them

They are blessed.

It's little to say like Paul that Christ destroys the wisdom of the wise and all that we have always assumed.

I think all the crowd went silent on that day and they were like:

Who is this man?

Who is he talking to? Is this a joke?

Is he making fun of us?

Are we the lucky ones, really? Should we have hope because against all odds, that God is with us?

Well, *God is with us* – it's the whole theme of Matthew's Gospel and what actually *blessing* means

When we bless at the end of the service what do we except ask that God be with us this day and remain with us

always?

Being blessed does not mean to be lucky, to get what you want, to have it easy.

It means that God is on your side.

God is with the poor and the unfortunate.

God is with those who look like they don't look like

God is with them. Supports them, encourages them.

God is with them: There is a technical term for that -
Liberation theology says that God has a *preferential option for the poor*.

Liberation theology is a movement in theology that pretends that the Gospel
is not so much about religion than about changing the world in bringing social justice
exactly as Micah plans it in our Scriptures today:
God does not require sacrifice or rite (*religion per se*) but
The Lord requires of you to do justice,
to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God.

Liberation theology – a movement that interestingly was born in South America -
pretends that if God was here with us on earth God would be
standing with the rejected in our societies.

and guess what,
actually God was made man and stood on the mountain surrounded by the poor and told them he was
at home with them.

And so if you look for God, you have to look at the poor because this is where you'll find God.

God loves us all for sure, but Jesus says: only the poor are blessed
he does not say the poor and the wealthy.

God loves us all for sure, but Jesus says: only the pure are blessed
he does not say the pure and the impure.

God loves us all for sure, but Jesus says: only the peacemakers are blessed
he does not say the haters of peace.

And so yes – this can make us feel uncomfortable to hear that because
there is judgment in these words too.

We hear Jesus speaking these words and we wonder:
Who is he talking to?

And we don't always know to which category we belong.

The truth is most of us we are often a little bit of both,
meek with some and tough with others, pure in intentions impure in afterthoughts, looking to live in
peace and then suddenly

bursting into a fight for no reason.

And so doubts rise in our hearts when we hear these sentences.

Maybe these days we feel some guiltiness for our privileges too.

But perhaps we don't have to figure where we belong,
perhaps

we are just called to go where we recognize these qualities

It's not so much about who we are or not than in which direction Jesus wants to go.

The blessed are our to go people

we want to serve these people, to serve with these people

because this is with them that God is.

Maybe you have experienced that if you have started serving.

It came to you as a surprise that you were given more than what you've been giving.

And you don't know what you've been given - well you've been blessed and you found joy
(another translation for the word blessed)

because you found God in the poor.

If God is on the side of the poor, we have to make decisions about where we want to go
- as people and as a society -

And so there is judgment in that for us also.

Not so that we are judged, but we need to make judgments and to take decisions.

We have made judgment a bad word

But judgment is different than condemnation and condemnation is also different than condemnation
without possibility of redemption.

Actually, we make judgments all the time,

as soon as we wake up

snooze or stop alarm, tea or coffee, skirt or pants.

All the time, we decide what's best for us, for our family.

We also have to decide what is right or wrong and where we want to go

and the persons we want to be.

And I think these days we have to use our best judgment more than ever

or call it if you prefer: Discernment.

Discerning good from bad, right from wrong certainly -

and more deeply: discerning where is God or not, and where God calls us to be.

With the beatitudes, Jesus teaches his disciples today and
he gives us the code to find God around them.

And how God can be with them.

God is revealed in weakness, in simple people and in simple things.

This is exactly what Paul will be teaching.

In the beatitudes, Jesus teaches us the language of love
and actually

He draws his own self-portrait.

Jesus is not a new Moses coming on the mountain

to give a new law to the people

Jesus comes to give himself to the people

he and them - the poor, the meek, the peacemaker and the merciful,

God does not prefer the poor because he likes them better than the rich.

God is one of them.

God is the poor and meek in Jesus

and in Jesus this is where God's strength of love is revealed.

Yes, the beatitudes can sound ironic, but only if we don't hear them as there are:

A call for resistance.

Being poor in spirit and meek does not mean to be passive.

Jesus reminds us also that love is not only acceptance,

patience and innocence,

Love is also about endurance and resistance. About bringing the Kingdom of God in.

Fighting for justice, discerning, taking action when needed

in a world where God's vision for his children is so often trampled on the ground.

So if we feel heart broken today, we are probably blessed.

So yes, our blessedness will sometimes look like suffering

Yet luckily, we are blessed if we hear Jesus's calls to turn the world upside down with him. Amen.