

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. ²²“Blessed 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. ²⁶“Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

²⁷“But 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.

I cannot remember his name. I cannot remember his title or anything about the work he was doing though I think it may have had something to do with troubled teens. But I remember just like it was yesterday two things he said.

He told about his aunt who had raised him – what she said when as a teenager he got into trouble. “You sat on the burner, baby, you sit on the blisters.” Her way of saying that she refused to protect him from the consequences of his misbehavior. “You sat on the burner baby, you sit on the blisters.” He told us how those words changed his life. He learned to take responsibility for what he had done.

The other thing I remember is that he taught me a response for the day when my child would come home and declare to me, “You are the worst father in the whole world.” He said, “This is how you respond – Wow. Nobody else has such dumb rules that they have to follow – wow! Though he did not make the connection I think he was teaching me what Jesus is teaching in today’s gospel.

But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Ever feel like you were a victim? Spend years sacrificing for a child, and hear that child declare, “You are the worst mother in town, I hate you.” What can a victim do then – Scream back in anger? Cry, become depressed? A victim might do either. When a victim is cursed, a victim can curse in return – try to get even – or just give up – powerless.

But Jesus does not call his own to be victims. He knows that there is power when the one who is being cursed can return a blessing. A parent could just say Wow and not take the anger in and let it control.

Blessed are you who are poor, yours is the kingdom of God.

Does poverty define a person- make one a victim – no power, no hope – someone to be pitied? Jesus declares a blessing – these poor ones before Jesus will be defined by what God has planned for them.

Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Lacking food makes a person weak – unable to fight off disease. A victim. Jesus declares a blessing because one day the hunger will be no more.

Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Sorrow can feel like it owns us and shall own us forever – a crushing weight. But Jesus speaks a blessing knowing that laughter will come once more.

You are not victims – you are blessed by God no matter how the world sees you. Every day look at yourself through the eyes of Jesus. He loves you and gives you power to bless those who curse you and pray for those who abuse you. You are not victims, even in the face of death.

Today we are remembering people who have died. Death has cut us off from them, silenced their words and ended their deeds among us. In this world death can be the most powerful force of all and all humans simply victims. But God has broken that power in raising Jesus from the dead. Wow! Mary Magdalene saw him, Peter and the

disciples touched him and ate with him, Saul was blinded by him, his whole world turned upside down by Jesus raised from the dead. We hope that everyone that we love will be embraced by the risen Jesus, raised with him to life that is eternal. You who gather are staking your lives – all that you have and all that you are – in trusting that you are not victims but beloved children of the God who raises the dead to life eternal.

Wow.

Could poverty really be turned into riches, hunger into feasting, sorrow into joy? God has declared that God will not be a victim of human sin, God will not be a victim of human hatred, God will not be a victim of human abuse, God will not be a victim of human cursing. Jesus suffered under all of these but they did not own him, Jesus was crushed by death itself but death did not own him. Jesus lives.

Live in faith and hope that nothing nor no one can own you except God. Poverty, hunger, sorrow, or abuse cannot own you. Neither can riches or being full or laughter own you. You belong to God, both now and forever.

Amen.

