

You are blessed

How we see the light only when it's dark

a Homily by The Rev. Andrew Downs

All Saints' Observed C | Luke 6:20-31
November 6, 2016

When I went to vote on Thursday, I drove around the one-way streets trying to figure out where to park. I found a spot on the street and crossed. The sun was out. Our unseasonably warm weather confuses my family. We keep wondering when it will finally cool off. Maybe this will be the week we put away the shorts.

I walk past a ribbon statue, which seems to honor life itself, clicking and crunching the leaves, no longer alive. "Vote Here" signs are plentiful here at the back of the building. None visible from the front. I couldn't see them when I planned to drive here, passing the Courthouse many times, certain that Google had given me the right spot.

But now that certainty is assured. And as I approach the doors, another man comes from the other direction, both of us taking different doors to get to the same line inside.

The line to go through the metal detector.

And I remember my first vote was in college; I voted absentee. With a punch card. They supplied the pin. The instructions told me to check the ballot so that each punch was clean. Now I'm going in (there's no line) and I'm using a touch screen. I still check. Twice. And on my ballot print out. Again. These are the ones I chose.

I leave the Courthouse, not with complete confidence in the future, but confident in my choice. That how I voted would make our collected world better.

And yet I'm anxious. I know I'm not the only one here who is. We usually are around election time. Four years ago I resolved to have an election service the next time

around. I didn't know it would be here, but I wanted it to be a regular thing we do. When I came here, I circled that date. Little did I know others would feel the same way.

That it would feel so in the now.

I am anxious. But I'm not afraid.

I don't have the blind confidence that GOD will fix what we screw up. Nor do I believe that elections are so inconsequential that it doesn't matter what we do.

I'm not afraid because Christians are called to drive away fear. To rise above it. And embrace the Holy Spirit's embrace. So I'm anxious, but not afraid.

And usually, the idea of honoring all our Saints and Souls in a liturgy of celebration is the last thing I'd want to do this week. But if you read about our saints (like in *Lesser Feasts and Fasts* or *Holy Women, Holy Men*) you will find stories of people who live in anxious times and overcome great reasons to fear.

You'll read about people who embody the gospel of loving GOD and our neighbor as ourselves. Whose sacrifice is profound. And you'll read stories of incredible people like King Kamehameha and Queen Emma of Hawaii, Samuel Isaac Joseph Scherechewsky, and Richard Hooker. Stories of love for all people and great devotion to the *missio dei* (the mission of God).

You'll read stories which remind us of our families: our fathers and mothers, grandparents and cousins; or of mentors and teachers, doctors and nurses, therapists and

directors who have unveiled the holy and revealed divinity with absolute grace.

Stories of generous hearts and profound mercy.

Mercy keeps coming up in my life.

Like it does in the gospel by the writer we call Luke. Cries of mercy and healing. The need for Jesus to come and save. And I keep feeling like that one who cries out to him. I keep begging for mercy. For my imperfections. My anxiety. Perhaps my confusion over what Christ is really up to in the world.

And we get this story today, known as the Sermon on the Plains with its blessings and woes. Like the Beatitudes with attitude or the Sermon from the dark side of the Mount.

It seems to me that the Beatitudes are so what we need right now, with their subtlety in response to anxiety. They are the gorgeous reflection of living in challenging times as people of faith. People who can see the suffering of their neighbors and have the conviction to stand in the breach.

But this sermon is good for us, too. It subverts our sense of blessing and curse. For Jesus names all our wealth as poverty, our fullness as lacking, our happiness as sorrow, and all our fame as false. So that to be truly happy is to give beyond the bounds of our lives and beyond what makes us good. Giving to our very souls. Generously, confidently, and without regret.

And what if we take this passage today and we forget everything we've been taught about being people of faith, as good Christians for just a moment and we don't hear these blessings and woes like prescription or rule or judgement. That we hear these words, not as Jesus telling us about kinds of people or creating rules to be followed.

What if we hear something else?

What if we hear Jesus breathing out a blessing upon the world. Upon us now, in this moment, for this time and place. And what if we take all that anxiety, confusion, anger, frustration, fear, and we receive this blessing from him. Breathed upon us, not long, long ago, but now. Here. This second.

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

"Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.

"Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

"Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice 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."

So blessed are you. You who fear and ache. You who are sick and homesick.

Blessed are you who are great big orbs of stress. And carry the anxiety in your bones.

Blessed are you who share posts on facebook. And in your memes and cat videos.

Blessed are you In your insufficient tips and generous living. In your unjustified criticism of yourself or your neighbor.

Blessed are you. For this is living. This is participating in the missio dei and drawing the Kin-dom closer. We are called to help arrange our common life.

You are being blessed. Forgiven and granted mercy.

You are being blessed. Reminded of your promises, and renewed in the waters of baptism.

You are being blessed to be a blessing to the world. Leap for joy!