

IN ST. LUKE'S ACCOUNT OF JESUS' FIRST SERMON TO A LARGE CROWD, THE BEATITUDES IS AT THE HEART OF HIS MESSAGE. HE LISTS FOUR, UNLIKE ST. MATTHEW'S SERMON ON THE MOUNT. MATTHEW LISTS EIGHT. AND TO EACH OF THE FOUR BEATITUDES LUKE PRESENTS THE OPPOSITE - - - IF BEATITUDES ARE "HAPPINESSES" THEN THESE OPPOSITES ARE "WOES" OR TROUBLES. SO, JESUS BLESSES THE POOR, BUT EXPRESSES ALARM FOR THE FUTURE OF THE RICH; HE TEACHES THAT THE HUNGRY ARE TO BE SAVED, BUT HE HAS SEVERE DOUBTS ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THOSE WHO ARE WELL FED.

LUKE TELLS THE STORY OF THE FAMOUS SERMON AS IF THE EVENTS OCCURRED ON A PLAIN, WHEREAS THE SERMON ACCORDING TO MATTHEW WAS DELIVERED ON A MOUNTAIN SIDE. ACCORDING TO MY SOURCES, THE REASON HAS TO DO WITH LUKE'S STORY OF JESUS AND THE WAY HE TELLS IT. WHENEVER LUKE TELLS OF JESUS GOING TO A MOUNTAIN, HE IS ALMOST ALWAYS ALONE AND IT IS TO PRAY TO HIS FATHER IN HEAVEN. FOR LUKE, ONLY A COUPLE OF TIMES DO A FEW OF HIS FOLLOWERS GO WITH HIM - - - TO MOUNT TABOR THE SCENE OF THE TRANSFIGURATION AND TO THE MOUNT OF OLIVES, THE SCENE OF THE AGONY IN THE GARDEN. BUT IT IS SOMEHOW FITTING THAT THIS SERMON WHICH SPEAKS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IS SPOKEN TO ALL OF THOSE PEOPLE ON LEVEL GROUND.

IN A SENSE, JESUS COMES DOWN TO OUR LEVEL BECAUSE HE WANTS TO SPEAK DIRECTLY TO US. AND HE WILL DELIVER A SIMPLE, BUT POWERFUL MESSAGE.

THE BEATITUDES HAVE BEEN PART OF OUR THINKING FOR SO LONG IT'S POSSIBLE TO FORGET HOW RADICAL THEY WERE IN JESUS' OWN TIME. THE TRADITIONAL VIEW OF HAPPINESS IN HIS DAY AND AGE WAS THAT HAPPINESS WAS GAINED BY ACQUIRING MATERIAL THINGS. THE MORE PROPERTY, POSSESSIONS, MONEY -- THE MORE PLEASURES A CITIZEN OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE HAD THE HAPPIER HE WAS THOUGHT TO BE. CAN YOU IMAGINE THAT!

CHRIST POINTED OUT THROUGH HIS TEACHING THERE WAS ANOTHER AND A BETTER KIND OF HAPPINESS NOT FOUND IN THE POSSESSION OF MATERIAL GOODS. THE BEATITUDES ARE LITERALLY AN ATTITUDE TO BEING, AN ATTITUDE TO LIFE THAT HAS MORE TO DO WITH BEING, BEING THE BEST POSSIBLE PERSON WE CAN. THIS OTHER KIND OF HAPPINESS IS A SPIRITUAL ONE. "MY KINGDOM IS NOT OF THIS WORLD", HE SAID TO PONTIUS PILATE. THIS 'BEATITUDES' HAPPINESS IS ETERNAL AND LEADS TO THE JOY OF THE WORLD TO COME.

CONSIDER ONLY THE FIRST TEACHING: BLESSED ARE YOU WHO ARE POOR; THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS YOURS. ONE OF JESUS' PRINCIPLE TEACHINGS WAS THAT GOD HAS SPECIAL CARE FOR THE POOR AND THE PERSECUTED. IF BEING WEALTHY MEANT HAPPINESS IN JESUS' TIME, THE OPPOSITE WAS ALSO TRUE, POVERTY WAS A DISGRACE -- IT WAS EVEN CONSIDERED A PUNISHMENT FOR SIN BY THE PHARISEES. THE POOR DID NOT ACCEPT THEIR LIFE

GRACIOUSLY, WITH DIGNITY. THEIR CHIEF AMBITION WAS TO GAIN WEALTH.

CHRIST TRIED TO CORRECT THIS FALSE IMPRESSION NOT ONLY BY THE WORDS OF HIS FIRST GREAT SERMON BUT BY HIS LIFE AS WELL. JESUS WAS POOR HIMSELF BY CHOICE. THE SON OF GOD WAS BORN POOR AND LIVED AND DIED IN POVERTY. HE TAUGHT BY WORD AND EXAMPLE THAT OUR MAIN CONCERN SHOULD NOT BE FOR THE GOODS OF THIS WORLD, BUT FOR THOSE WHO NEED US.

AS FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST WE ARE OUR BROTHERS (AND SISTERS) KEEPERS IN THE SENSE THAT WE MUST NOT CLOSE OUR HEARTS TO THOSE WHO NEED US. DISCIPLES OF JESUS, THE SUFFERING SERVANT WHO CAME NOT TO BE SERVED BUT TO SERVE MUST BE PERSONS WHO LIVE THEIR LIVES BY PUTTING OTHERS NEEDS FIRST. AS MEMBERS OF HIS CHURCH WE MUST INVOLVE OURSELVES IN HIS MINISTRY OF HEALING, RECONCILING, BINDING UP WOUNDS AND WIPING AWAY THE TEARS OF LONELINESS AND PAIN.

ALL RIGHT I KNOW YOU GOT MY POINT EARLIER BUT I'M GOING TO SAY IT PLAINLY. IN OUR CONSUMER CULTURE LIKE THE AGE OF ROME, IT SEEMS THAT SO MANY ARE FOCUSED ON FOLLOWING FASHIONS AND TRENDS, ON OWNING THE LATEST BIG SCREEN TV, IPAD, OR CELL PHONE. WHEN POSSESSIONS AND WEALTH BECOME OUR FOCUS THE GOSPEL OF TODAY IS AN IMPORTANT REMINDER.

THAT IS, IN THE SPIRIT OF THE 'BE ATTITUDES' JESUS LOOKS EACH OF US IN THE EYE TODAY - A FEW DAYS AFTER VALENTINE'S DAY AND HE WANTS US TO GIVE HIM OUR HEARTS.

MORT WALKER AND DIK BROWNE ARE CARTOONISTS. ONE OF THEIR CREATIONS IS THE COMIC STRIP "HI AND LOIS". PERHAPS SOME OF YOU HAVE SEEN IT. SOME YEARS AGO ONE OF THEIR STRIPS SHOWED THE FAMILY ON A TYPICAL MONDAY MORNING.

IN THE FIRST FRAME HI THE FATHER OF THE FAMILY AND AN ACCOUNTANT BY PROFESSION IS DRIVING TO WORK. HE SAYS TO HIMSELF... "ANOTHER DAY, GOING TO THAT SAME OFFICE TO WORK ON THE SAME NUMBERS I'VE WORKED ON A THOUSAND TIMES BEFORE." IN THE SECOND FRAME HIS WIFE, LOIS, IS CLEANING A FLOOR AND SAYING TO HERSELF... "ANOTHER DAY CLEANING THIS SAME HOUSE THAT I MUST HAVE CLEANED THOUSANDS OF TIMES BEFORE." IN THE NEXT FRAME WE SEE THE OLDER CHILDREN ON THE SCHOOL BUS. ONE IS SAYING TO THE OTHER... "ANOTHER DAY GOING TO THE SAME SCHOOL, WITH THE SAME TEACHERS, WORKING ON THE SAME STUFF WE'VE BEEN WORKING ON FOR A THOUSAND DAYS ALREADY."

FINALLY IN THE LAST FRAME, WE SEE TRIXIE, THE YOUNGEST CHILD SHE'S ABOUT TWO AND SHE'S STANDING IN HER CRIB LOOKING OUT THE WINDOW, WIDE AWAKE AND FRESH FOR A NEW DAY, HER ARMS ARE UP IN THE AIR AND IN HER MIND SHE'S SHOUTING FOR JOY... "ANOTHER DAY" IN HER YOUNG LIFE THIS IS NOT JUST ANOTHER DAY. NEW THINGS WILL HAPPEN TO HER THIS DAY. SHE IS READY TO BE ASTONISHED, READY FOR GOD TO APPEAR, USUALLY IN THE FORM OF A SUNBEAM.

IS IT ANY WONDER JESUS SAID THAT CHILDREN AND THOSE
WITH THE HEART OF A CHILD WILL INHERIT THE KINGDOM OF GOD?
IN TRIXIE'S 'BEATTITUDE' WE SEE PURITY OF HEART.