

Yr B All Saints Sunday 11 5 06 Anne-Marie Jeffery

[Ecclesiasticus 2:\(1-6\)7-11](#); [Ephesians 1:\(11-14\)15-23](#); [Luke 6:20-26\(27-36\)](#)

This past Halloween, after accompanying a young friend trick and treating through the crowds that thronged up and down the streets on Capitol Hill, I happily retired to my apartment to watch *Corpse Bride*, an animated movie about the living and the dead. It seemed appropriate for All Hallows eve. I enjoyed the movie so much that I also watched the special features on the DVD. One of the things, that was discussed in the special features, was how they created the difference between the two worlds– the world of the living and the world of the dead. The world of the living is a very austere place – very Victorian, set in shadows with hues of blues and gray. Hardly anyone smiles. Faces are grim and stern even though they are about to have a wedding. The world of the dead is quite the opposite. It is a big party. It is colorful and people dance and laugh. People seem to be finally free to enjoy who they are. If you haven't seen *Corpse Bride*, I recommend it. It is an interesting movie and very whimsical.

The difference between the two worlds of *Corpse Bride* came back to me as I was reading this morning's gospel. The beatitudes that we read in Luke all seem to promise a better life in the future if our life is terrible now. We are blessed if we are poor, hungry, weeping and when people hate us, for later we will have the kingdom of God.

Later we will be filled, will laugh and will have a reward great in heaven. I thought of the world of the living in the movie – the upstairs – the blues and grays, the sad and sour faces and then the world of the dead - the colorful happy world below, where people were joyous and having fun. Is this what this gospel is saying? Does God want us to live dreary lives in poverty, in hunger and hated by the world waiting for the joyous time when the kingdom of God arrives? It is hard for me to believe that. Let us go back to that word that begins the beatitudes, "Blessed". It is a wonderful word, but is it for us? Maybe it is just for the poor. It is true that God has a preference for the poor.

Gustavo Gutiérrez, the liberation theologian, comments that, God has a preferential love for the poor not because they are necessarily better than others, morally or religiously, but simply because they are poor and living in an inhuman situation that is contrary to God's will. The ultimate basis for the privileged position of the poor is not in the poor themselves but in God, in the gratuitousness and universality of God's agapeic love. However, God blesses all of us. As one commentary says "One of our problems today is that we have forgotten the power and the art of blessing. The election of Israel began with God's promise to bless Abraham and his descendants and make them a blessing to all the peoples of the earth.ⁱ God wants to bless us. God wants good things for us. The commentary continues to say that "the beatitudes call us back to the power of blessing and being blessed. They are not first and foremost ethical demands or eschatological promises. They are pronouncements of blessing."ⁱⁱ

We are missing something if we hear as I did, that only the poor and hungry will receive God's blessings. Listen to the gospel again – this time from *The Message*, Eugene Petersen's translation of the bible into today's language. First the blessings. **"You're blessed when you've lost it all. God's kingdom is there for the finding.**

²¹ **"You're blessed when you're ravenously hungry. Then you're ready for the Messianic**

meal.

"You're blessed when the tears flow freely. Joy comes with the morning.

²² "Count yourself blessed every time someone cuts you down or throws you out, every time someone smears or blackens your name to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and that that person is uncomfortable. And then that other part, the one that is really hard to hear. ²⁴ "But it's trouble ahead if you think you have it made. What you have is all you'll ever get.

²⁵ "And it's trouble ahead if you're satisfied with yourself. Your *self* will not satisfy you for long.

"And it's trouble ahead if you think life's all fun and games. There's suffering to be met, and you're going to meet it. ²⁶ "There's trouble ahead when you live only for the approval of others, saying what flatters them, doing what indulges them. Luke 6:20-26 (MSG)

With language that is closer to how we talk these days and knowing that these words have to do with the goodness of God's blessing, you may begin to see something more than a dismal way of life on this earth waiting for the joy of the kingdom of God. God has a good vision for us. God blesses us. God wants us to know that when the things of this world are no longer in the way, we can truly embrace God's blessing. God wants us to know that God comforts those in trouble.

Problems arise when we think we have it made and we get satisfied with ourselves.

God calls us to a different way of life where the rules of the world do not apply. God blesses us and God upholds a way of life for us that is different from the ways of the world. Look our baptismal Covenant – what we promise in our covenant is not so different from what the beatitudes call us to. In our baptismal Covenant, we say that we will continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, we will persevere in resisting evil, we will repent and return to the Lord, we will proclaim the Good News of God in Christ, we will seek and serve Christ in all persons, and we will strive for justice and peace among all people. These all have to do with turning to God, to sustaining our life with God, to helping the poor and fighting for justice in the world. These promises have to do with knowing that the things of the world will not sustain us and that our true source of nourishment comes from God. We don't do them alone –we do them with God's help. Our response is "I will with God's help".

One preacher says that "*In our Baptisms we are called to be and become saints. If we concentrate on the idea that saints are very, very good people, nearly perfect, then we will miss the point. Many saints have been very bad, while becoming rather goodⁱⁱⁱ*".

The key is "with God's help". The key is remembering that we are blessed by God, that we are the beloved of God. Because God loves us, he calls us to this way of life that spreads God's love all over the world. We answer this call in our baptism. Today Nora and Susie will be baptized. Today two more people join our community in answering this calling of God to be saints, to live a way of life that doesn't follow the rules of the world.

God has blessed us. Sometimes it may not seem like it when we look at the state of the world, but sometimes we catch a glimpse of God's blessing as I think we did

yesterday at the investiture of the Episcopal Church's new presiding bishop, when the crowd thundered their responses in the worship - singing a new song to God in the hope of renewed communion. God wants what is good for us. We are God beloved and yes, God asks us to meet some very high standards, but in God's calling and in our struggling and muddling to answer God's call, we are being blessed. We are the saints of God - those who came before us, we who are here now and those who are to come. We are blessed.

ⁱ The New Interpreter's Bible

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ⁱⁱⁱ Sermons that Work, http://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermons_that_work_3186_ENG_HTM.htm, The Very Rev. Anthony F.M. Clavier is dean of the European Institute of Christian Studies, and is responsible for lay, ordained, and post-ordination training in the Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe. He is also editor of LEAVEN, the journal of the National Network of Episcopal Clergy Associations. E-mail:deanclavier@free.fr