

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time A (Jan. 29, 2023 STM: 7:30

Note: Separate School Homily at 9:15)

Nadia Bolz-Weber suggests that, in order to truly understand the Beatitudes, we need to remember exactly who was in Jesus' audience that day. Because of our biblical chapter divisions — which weren't part of the original text — we may overlook the information that, just before Jesus began teaching on the hillside, "They brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics and paralytics, and he cured them. And great crowds followed him ..." — Matthew 4:24-25)

See, here's why sometimes it's good to ignore the chapter and verse separations. Because it's so easy for us to default to hearing Jesus' sermon on the mount as pure exhortation. As though he is giving us a list of things we should try and be so we can be blessed — be meeker, be poorer and mourner a little more and you will meet the conditions of earning Jesus' blessing. But the thing is, it's hard to imagine Jesus exhorting a crowd of demoniacs and epileptics to be meeker. He wasn't telling them what to try and become. He was telling them you are blessed, and you are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. This was his special class of people to whom he preached.

She continues:

I mean, perhaps there were people in the crowd who totally had their crap together. People who had solid relationships and had paid off their student loans and always backed up their hard drives. People who had nothing they felt shame about and who didn't have terrible secrets and knew exactly what they were doing. Of course that is possible those people were in the crowd, it's just, that's not who we are told were coming to Jesus.

The ones we are told were coming to Jesus, the ones presumably to whom he was preaching, were described as the sick, those who were in pain, who fought with demons, who were broken and addicted and late on their back taxes. Who has more than one ex-wife, and who watch too much Netflix and think that maybe a little heroin might be a good idea. In other words, they were people standing in the need of God. And standing in the need of God is standing in the way of blessedness in a way that having it all together never is.—Nadia Bolz-Weber, "Sermon on that special class of salty, light-bearing people to whom Jesus preaches," Patheos.com, February 13, 2014. patheos.com. Retrieved July 22, 2019.

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus, the Church puts these Beatitudes before us today. Our attention is focused on the idea of blessedness. Those people to whom Jesus preached, the poor, the lame, the crippled, the diseased, were being

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told that He had come to bless them. That they were close to him, that it was for them that the Divine Physician had come. These were people standing in need of God. And you know what? Standing in need of God is a way of blessedness in a way that having it all together never is.

The Church is a place for people who do not have it all together. It is a place for the broken, the wounded, the addicted, the doubting, the grieving. For it is here, within the body and life of the Church, that we find the God who offers us His blessedness. Pope Francis has reminded us that the early Church is depicted as “a field hospital that takes in the weakest people: the infirm.” He goes on to say: “In the wounds of the sick and in the diseases that impede us from moving forward in life, Jesus’ presence, and His wounds, is always there,” he added. “Jesus calls each of us to look after them, to support them, and to heal them.” I love that image of a field hospital. And what is a field hospital? It is chaotic. It is set up in the midst of war and turmoil and noise and fighting. It is there to treat the sickest, the most wounded, those who need a doctor the worst. The Church stands: in the midst of the brokenness of the world for people who do not have it all together.

It is important to note too what is next in the gospel of Matthew. He says:

“You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.^z

14You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden.^j

15Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house.^k

16Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.^l

Jesus was calling these folks, these wounded and burdened and sick “salt and light.” Jesus tells the crowd of broken people that they are the salt of the earth, the very breath of God, created in His image and likeness. And to be the light of the world, he says you do not have to have your life together. You do not have to be perfect. Leonard Cohen said:

“Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.”

There is a crack in everything, even us. That is how the light of Christ gets in. Those cracks come from the choices of our life that we regret, from our addictions, from our struggles and sin. The cracks come from our anxieties and our fears and our doubts. Into all of this, comes the light of the world, the Christ. We stand in need of his blessedness.

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Today you can perhaps think about The Beatitudes differently. Rather than as an exhortation, perhaps you can think about The Beatitudes as a reminder of the grace, love, mercy and healing of Christ that comes to those who stand in need of all of that, in need light that shines through the cracks the make up our wounded bodies and our wounded souls. Amen.

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