

November 3, 2013
Luke 6:20-31

I want to read from you verses 17-19 prior to moving forward.

¹⁷ He [Jesus] came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. ¹⁸ They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. ¹⁹ And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them. (NRSV)

Jesus and his disciples had been atop a mountain. Jesus had been praying and then he chose 12 to be called Apostles. In some sense, Jesus has set them aside for a new purpose as his followers. No longer simply followers, but soon to be messengers and ambassadors for the kingdom of God Jesus has come to earth to reveal and usher in. After Jesus' death and resurrection, filled by outpouring of the Holy Spirit they will be his hands, feet, and voice in the world.

And then Jesus comes down the mountain where he encounters a large crowd full of disciples who had been following him and others from across the region of Judea and even surrounding territories such as Tyre and Sidon – Gentile territories, foreigners, enemies. We can only imagine that crowd was comprised of people of all different walks of life. Poor and rich. Young and old. Sick and healthy. Male and female. Powerful and weak.

There Jesus is. On level ground with the masses and yet the twelve seemingly stand on higher ground causing Jesus to look up at the them as he delivers a startling message.

Why I have always wondered? When you read this text where do you find yourself? Is it a part of the crowd interspersed among the wide variety of peoples gathered? Is in those whom hear Jesus' message of

grand reversal in the kingdom of God as news of great joy and leap in response to it? Is it in those who may hear a startling word of alarm and wonder if this kingdom is for you? Or is it with those 12 not yet fully integrated with crowd?

I imagine at different junctures of our lives we may resonate with all these people. Jesus' teaching may indeed at times be the soothing music our ears need, or the calming touch our aching bodies long for. When we cry out in agony at the loss of a child. When we fall to our knees after an early morning phone call a parent has died. When we are at a loss for words upon hearing that diagnosis, we have a terminal illness. When we receive the news, our job is being eliminated. When we receive the foreclosure notice in the mail because market prices simply aren't high enough to cover the expenses. When we have been bullied and felt abandoned. When we have felt excluded by the church.

Other times, his words may be the wake-up call to stir us from our comfortableness and complacency. Still, other times we may resonate with those 12 looking down on Jesus. Called and set aside for kingdom work, but not yet fully ready to journey with him all the way down on level ground with the masses. Frightened by what we may encounter there. Still trying to rest comfortably with Jesus on the mountaintop in prayer. Even fearful to hear those words Jesus proclaims may be directed toward us. That following Jesus may indeed come with the real possibility of losing everything. Following Jesus may in fact lead us to be hated, reviled, and mocked because his way, God's way, is adamantly opposed to so many of the ways of the world.

The ethic Jesus sets us aside in our baptism as saints washed in the waters of his grace, is one in which calls us to act in a way contrary to the ways which so often are lived out. An ethic that loves even our enemies. An ethic that calls us to give. An ethic that seeks not the interest of self but rather the interest of the other. An ethic that leads not to revenge but rather to reconciliation and new life. An ethic and way of life that leads us to follow Jesus all the way down the mountain on level ground with those whom we at times may not desire to be on level ground with.

At times, I have wondered why this text was chosen for All Saints Sunday. What in the world does it say about being a saint? Perhaps, it was chosen because as God's called and set aside saints, we do indeed find ourselves at times in each of these places outlined above. Being a saint means that we live confidently in the promise we come to God as sinners in need of the healing only Jesus provides and are freely bathed in the gift of new life. Being a saint means we are already blessed because we are reconciled to God. We are set aside by God, like those 12, to partner with Jesus in being his hands, feet, and voices in the world. We are led by the Holy Spirit, as saints, to venture down the mountain and onto level ground with all people. Saints and sinners. Sick and healthy. Rich and poor. Clean and unclean. American and foreigner. Democrat and Republican. Friend and enemy. This is the ethic which Jesus' saints are to live by.

You are saints beloved church. This is your identity. Wear it boldly. Wear it proudly. Wear it confidently. No one can ever strip you of this identity. God has made you saints. God has set you aside as saints. God has joined you through baptism into the priesthood of the saints. We are not saints alone, but we are saints together. We are saints that stand on top of the mountain with our Lord and Savior in prayer and we are saints that go down the mountain with our Lord and Savior to be on level ground with Him as he walks side-by-side with so many the world would never view to be saints. Be saints' people of God! Be blessed saints reconciled to God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ! Amen.