

At every Sunday Eucharist, right before we get up to go, we are blessed in the threefold name of God.

I remember when I was living in France, I made periodic visits to my family here in the United States. As a part of these visits, I made sure to meet with my bishop. It was my way to stay connected with the Episcopal church, since there were no Episcopal churches in the area where I lived at that time. At each visit I asked for a blessing. One time, as I was kneeling at the altar rail during communion, the bishop laid hands upon my head and not only pronounced a blessing, but prayed that in my going forth in mission, I would be a blessing to everyone I met. It made a big impression on me, and even now, 25 years later, I consider that blessing to be indelible. It is just as real and instrumental in my ministry as it was 25 years ago.

In the book of Genesis we get to know the story about Abraham, and how God tells him to go from his country and his kindred and his father's house to the land that God would show him. Then God says an extraordinary thing: "I will bless you... so that you will be a blessing."

One of the characteristics of a disciple is to be a blessing: one who is sent into the world in the name of Jesus Christ. The disciples walk and eat and sleep where Jesus walks and eats and sleeps. They are with him when he teaches and heals and when he reaches out to those on the margins to include them in the kingdom of God. And as they follow Jesus and learn from him, he sends them out to accomplish his mission. He gives them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. He sends them to proclaim the good news, "The kingdom of heaven has come near." As part of this proclamation, he tells them to "cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers,* cast out demons."¹

Disciples are blessed not just as an individual, but as a people who have been called, sent, and blessed by Jesus Christ. We are that people. We are the community of the blessed, and the more we let God empower us for service, and the more we put our lives on the line for the sake of those who have been silenced

¹ See Matthew 10:1-10

and taken advantage of, the more the hope that is part of our calling becomes visible—the more it is made available to those who need it.

To be blessed is to know that one is included in the coming realm. To be blessed is to participate in kingdom of God. Blessing reassures the community it is the beneficiary of God's goodness, justice, and love. When the beatitudes say that the community is blessed, they are not saying that everyone is cheerful and hunky-dory. They are saying that even in the midst of hardship, the community can look forward to the coming realm and know that they are secure.

The beatitudes are encouragement to the community of faith who struggles to live according to Jesus' promise to be with them always. They are a reassuring promise that when disciples go out to accomplish Jesus' command to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and when disciples teach each other to obey everything that Jesus had commanded them,² they will continue to experience the presence of the risen Lord.

When I was a young woman in my twenties, I told my mother that I was going to become a nun and move away to be a part of the community of sisters. She told me that if I did that, I would be dead to her, and she meant it. She would neither look at me, talk to me, or acknowledge my presence in any other way. I was shocked, but not destroyed by that conversation. I remember feeling a quiet strength and peace envelope me during it, and as I tried to imagine what it would be like to back down and stay home, I knew I couldn't. I knew I had to go, and I knew that if God were faithful enough to call me into such an amazing adventure, God's love and wisdom would be enough to take care of my mom, too.

The beatitudes are like fuel for our engine and sustenance for our journey. They are to be taken as a whole as a reminder that we belong to God's beloved and that Jesus is entrusting us with his mission while at the same time, strengthening us with his presence so that we can do the work he is giving us to do.

² See Matt 28

As we contemplate the beatitudes, we realize that the first human being to show us what they look like in real life, is Jesus. In large part, the beatitudes are Jesus' beatitudes. They tell us what life in Jesus is like and show us what it is like in the kingdom of God. What they don't do is tell us how to earn a place in God's kingdom. What they don't do is give us a measuring stick with which to judge ourselves as undeserving or as falling short of God's grace. You see, we have already been given a place in the Kingdom of God. If we want to accept our place in the kingdom, and we desire to live according to Jesus' promise to include us in it, then what the beatitudes show us is what that kingdom life is like.

Kingdom life is a community where feeling like a spiritual neophyte is normative, and where trusting God for everything is the only way forward. It is a community that isn't spared from suffering and who experiences grief and mourning, and yet is comforted and strengthened in the midst. It is a community dominated not by the loudest or most pushy, but who is governed by meekness and humility. It is a community where mercy and justice are one and the same thing. A community where life is neither too hard to be endured, nor so easy it doesn't allow for the challenges of growing together in trust. It is a community based not on perfection, but on forgiveness—forgiveness of self and forgiveness of others. It is a community that knows how to receive God's grace and how to share that grace widely amongst itself and with the world. It is a community whose members work for peace and who let God's light shine through all they are and do. It is a community that knows it is gathered together by love, in love and for love.

Amen.