

Reflection on Luke 6:17-26

If there is a single central theme or image to Epiphany, it is light. Epiphany begins with the light of the star leading the Wise Men; and it ends with the shining radiance of Jesus' garments at the Transfiguration. In between, this image of light haunts many of the readings and collects throughout the season. Luke's telling of the beatitudes, which we just heard, fits right in with this - as the purpose of the beatitudes is to shed some new light on old ways of thinking.

It is all too easy to imagine that the beatitudes are about us; that they are commands for how we should live, and what we should do. Jesus is simply describing reality, he is not telling the disciples, or us, or anybody else, to do anything.

Another misunderstanding for their meaning has been for the world. That is, the beatitudes have been presented as ways to help folks live well in the world; or at least as things to do that will make the world a better place. It has been suggested that if we would only be spiritually poor or hungry, or persecuted, that this will bring out the best in others and they will be the better because of it. Jesus was not trying to shine any light on how the world works. They are not about the world, just like they are not about telling us how to act.

The beatitudes are about God, they are about who God is, and who God blesses, and what the kingdom of God is like. They tell us what matters to God, they tell us who is especially important to God, and they tell us what God pays attention to.

Jesus gives us this information about God - hoping that such knowledge may have a valuable effect on us. Jesus offers us his picture of God's values and God's priorities; and he offers them as an alternative vision of life. The idea is that if we can see, really see, whom God considers blessed, or happy, then we will at least know the road to blessedness, and perhaps be able to use that knowledge.

The beatitudes are a glimpse into the heart and mind of God. Jesus is trying to shake us loose from that assumption, and give us a different vision of life, one that has its foundations, not in the world, but in the very nature of God.

Now, what we do with this is up to us. Remember, we are not getting a bunch of moral laws here. We are being offered a new vision of our world and our lives. The point is not that we must obey a rule that says 'thou shalt be poor and persecuted'. The point is that, by this light, we can look at the mind of God and discover all sort of new possibilities.

So we have some new light on God. The question is: if God is really like this; if God has the preferences and the priorities of the beatitudes, then what could that mean? How could our lives be different, how could you be different? That's the issue, and that is the question Jesus leaves us with. It's a good question, and worth considering in your life.