

Holy Living

- [Jeremiah 17:5-10](#)
- [Luke 6:17-26](#)
- [Psalm 1](#)

I am reading a book by Angela Parker who is a New Testament scholar. Dr. Parker is not just a New Testament scholar, she is a *womanist* New Testament scholar. If you are not familiar with the term womanist, it means that she identifies as a black feminist scholar.

The title of the book is “If God still Breathes, Why Can’t I? – Black Lives Matter and Biblical Authority.” In it she talks about her experience of being trained not just to be a bible scholar but to be a white male bible scholar. Because the way most of us hear Bible passages comes from the white men who have studied and interpreted the Bible since the Reformation. That has begun to change in the past thirty years but not fast enough for Dr Parker who has found herself silenced in her Biblical interpretation and who claims that the ideas of Biblical inerrancy and infallibility are used to reinforce the power of white people, particularly men; and to reinforce white supremacy.

It’s a short and fascinating book which is available from the San Luis Obispo library once I have returned it. The reason I bring it up this morning is that it has made me think a little differently about the beatitudes that we just heard. How would it be, I wonder, if rather than try to understand exactly what Jesus meant when he said things like “But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation,” we were to imagine what Jesus might say today – would it be the same or would there be other things or different things?

I can hear the white male theologian in my head saying you can’t change the Bible, you have to allow the Bible to change you. To which I respond – if we look at Biblical interpretation through the past two millennia what the Bible “says” has changed. If we were in St

Benedict's monastery back in Monte Cassino in the 6th century we might hear it quite differently.

So let's be daring. Let's imagine that we are speechwriters for Jesus. He is due to speak at Morro Rock tomorrow and wants some short pithy sayings that will speak to the hearts of his listeners. In the next couple of minutes please think about what you think Jesus would or should say. Each saying will take the form "Blessed are you who.... For..." or "Woe to you who... for". Do discuss this with someone else if you can do so within current safety protocol, otherwise commune with yourself in your own heart.

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So what do you have? Let's start with the Blesseds...

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As I read them over, found that the beatitudes listed here in Luke are still very relevant.

But thinking about our baptismal vows and the realities of life in the 21st Century I added a few:

- Blessed are you who seek for Christ in all persons for you shall find him
- Blessed are you who work for social justice for you shall know peace
- Blessed are you who walk lightly on the earth for you shall find blessing

Each one of those can also be a "woe to" statement, and if you look at the passage from Luke you will see that his "blessed are" statements all have a corresponding "woe to."

So I think we can see that the beatitudes as stated here in Luke are still very relevant to us today but there is more that we might add to

complete the picture of holy living. And this isn't surprising because the challenges of holy living are going to be the same and yet different in every age. In every age we will read scripture a little differently as a result of new understandings. And in every age we will realize that older readings and the ancient text may be used to oppress in a way which is not life-giving. Which is not a reason to discard them but a reason to look with new eyes, with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Which is what Dr Parker and other womanist scholars are doing – asking how can the Bible be the life-giving word of God for us today as we seek to create a just and equal society in a country founded on slavery and rife with racism.

Eco-theologians are doing the same thing with planetary awareness. They are challenging us to read the Bible and live our lives in a way which is life-giving for all of Creation. Earlier generations took the Bible to mean that humanity is the most important part of creation and that everything else is for our use and can be discarded when no longer needed. But today, when we have finally understood that we are using the earth's resources at an unsustainable pace and that what we use does not get magically replenished, it is time to pause, reassess our understanding of Scripture and to raise up the texts which talk about care of the land, and of God's unstoppable love not just for humanity but for all of Creation.

Back in Genesis 1 we learn from the ancient story of creation that God looked at everything God had made and saw that it was good. Yes, humanity is good in God's eyes but so are wolves and sparrows and ground squirrels. We now see that we are not separate from the environment, we are part of the environment and from that perspective, holy living means caring for every aspect of creation.

Jesus did not directly include this in his teaching. There are many things which we grapple with today that Jesus did not include in his teaching.

It is important for us to remember that Jesus was not a white male academic scholar but a 1st century Jewish itinerant preacher. There were many things that were so obvious he did not need to teach about them. One of these was social justice.

The narrative of the ancient prophets is that if you hope to live peacefully in your land, you need to follow the commandments of God. The commandments that Jesus summed up as loving God with all of you and your neighbor as yourself. We, with our individualistic ways, always interpret the prophets, and Jesus, as speaking to us as individuals, whereas Jesus would have heard the prophets speaking to the nation as a whole. When God says through Amos, “let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” (Amos 5:24) God is speaking to the whole people of Israel not just to individuals. And it is in the context of corruption in the law courts and cheating in the stores.

The point I’m trying to make here is that holy living means following the things that Jesus said, but also some of the things he didn’t say because they were either so obvious that he didn’t need to say them in his day – like the importance of legal and social justice. Or because they wouldn’t have made sense – like “seek and serve Christ in all persons” which is an extension of Jesus’ teaching in the light of the resurrection and ascension.

Holy living today includes everything that Jesus said, and a whole lot more. And as our awareness of racism and oppression and corruption change, so do our understandings of holy living. Yet that is our calling. We are to be like the trees mentioned in the first reading, and the psalm - planted by the river which gives life. And the work of the Holy Spirit is to nourish and nurture us as we learn how to live holy lives, lives which, like trees absorbing carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen, bring life to the world.