

Can you Imagine? A Gospel Reflection by Brian Wigger

What is usually called the “Sermon on the Mount” in Saint Matthew’s Gospel is generally referred to as the “Sermon on the Plain” in Saint Luke’s Gospel. Both gospel texts include what are known to us as “the Beatitudes,” words from Jesus for the good of all.

In our Gospel this weekend, St. Luke describes Jesus as coming down from the mountain and stopping at a level stretch of ground, where a large crowd had gathered to hear the teaching of Jesus and thus the name, “Sermon on the Plain.”

Imagine Jesus walking onto a large flat area (we all have an image of Jesus with long brown hair parted in the middle; thin, narrow nose; sandals and brown tunic). Now, imagine a great crowd of people who follow him from Judea, Jerusalem, and the coastal regions of Tyre and Sidon.

Imagine, 85% are ordinary people, the people you can barely tell apart, the poor and oppressed, Jewish folk but also many foreigners from Tyre and Sidon, all people without any real social value. Imagine the other 15% who came from Jerusalem, the important people, those who society valued, no doubt quite remarkable.

Jesus blesses the common ones and he woos the important ones.

Imagine the look on the faces of the people when they heard this.

Imagine hearing Jesus telling the insignificant people they are blessed when they are hated, excluded, insulted, and denounced. He tells those who are thrown away by society that are blessed. He tells them to “*rejoice and leap for joy!*” They are perplexed because people rejoice in things that have value; they dance for joy only in good times. They wonder to themselves, “Do we have value? Are we good?”

Now imagine hearing Jesus telling the important people that they should beware. They are perplexed. Why be concerned? They have good fortune, security and their satisfaction in life?

With which group of people do you identify? Do you feel blessed or woed?

The gospel this weekend is Luke’s version of the Beatitudes which are a basis for the moral life, that is, how we are to live.

If Jesus blesses the insignificant, the poor, the foreigner, and the oppressed, then so must we. If that is true, then who are those people we are to bless?

Radical stiff... stuff upon which we will be judged someday.

Jesus was a questionable pregnancy. His mother Mary who was about 14 years old was found pregnant the father was not Joseph. Can you imagine the scuttlebutt that went

around? Questions about Mary's character, questions about paternity. Are we pro-life or just pro-birth?

Jesus was a terminal case as he hung on the cross. He was dying and people wanted to hurry his death and be done before sundown. People fled the scene rather than being around a dying man, everyone except Mary and John and a few faithful women.

Jesus was a homeless man as he had nowhere to lay his head.

Jesus was a migrant. He had been a foreigner. He fled Egypt for a better life.

Jesus was someone the Pharisees hated and demanded vengeance and retribution as they shouted "Crucify him" three times and showed no mercy.

Jesus was considered mentally ill even by those from his home town we are told.

I find myself asking, do I see why Jesus blessed all those common, insignificant people and do I see why he wooed the 15% who were the uncommon ones, the ones of high value?

Blessed is our parish at St. Stephen! A common but blessed parish! Blessed are we who are hungry for the Eucharist! Blessed are we who weep for our losses! Bless are we when we are excluded! We are worth more than we can possibly imagine! Blessed are we indeed!