

Jesus was raised, grew up, and did his ministry as an observant Jew. I don't know if you know this-- but Jews bless things. A lot.

Good Jews bless things many times a day. They say a blessing when waking up, they bless their food, they say a blessing when seeing a comet, they even bless new outfits. Really! They have blessings for pastries, fruit, vegetables, and wine.

Every Jewish blessing begins the same way:

Baruch Adonai Elohenu, Melech Ha-Olam! Which means: Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe!

Jews bless things, but they first bless God from whom all the things come.

Their blessing does not bestow holiness. They are acknowledging that the holiness is already there.

People in Jesus' day were also used to blessing God, blessing things, people blessed Caesar, blessed rulers, and blessed the rich.

No one would ever think of ordinary people as a blessing, and they especially would never think of blessing the beggars- which is the meaning of the word *poor* that is used in this passage.

No one would think of blessing poor people. Except Jesus.

Unlike the mainstream of his time, but true to his Jewish upbringing, he believed people of faith have a great obligation towards the poor. And more than that-- they are not just people to be helped, and pitied-- but they are blessed.

*Blessed are you poor. Blessed are the hungry. Blessed are those who weep now. Blessed are you when people hate you, revile you, and say evil things about you because of the Son of Man. And just a few verses later he says: Love your enemies, pray for those who hate you, bless those who curse you.*

It's easy to

- bless God,
- bless food,
- bless *things*—

It's easy to

- bless those we love,
- bless those who we respect,
- bless those who are like us.

It is harder to bless those we disagree with, harder still to bless enemies.

Jesus makes the point that *we are all blessed*-- no matter what our circumstances.

Even if the circumstances we are in currently don't look the best, we need to know that we are still blessed by *Baruch Adonai Elohenu, Melech Ha-Olam* --God, King of the Universe.

Blessing something-- or someone—often gives us the grace to see another being from God's perspective.

Blessing something does not confer holiness. Jesus' blessing does not bestow holiness on the people.

It acknowledges the holiness that is already there.

"May you be blessed and a blessing," is a benediction from the New Zealand Book of Common Prayer.

May we all be blessed and a blessing...

Here's a story I have permission to recount—a true story. A woman -- we'll call her Jane -- had a child who rode the school bus to school every day. Jane really appreciated the care that the bus driver gave to the children, and how he kept them all safe.

At the end of the school year, she wrote the bus driver a letter telling him so, just a short note, really-- letting him know how much she appreciated him.

Years later she heard that the bus driver had died. She really wanted to do something for the family, even though her kids were no longer in school, but the family of the bus driver didn't know her. She finally decided to take them a casserole.

She knocked on the front door of his house and the bus driver's widow answered the door.

Jane said, "You don't know me, but I wanted to bring this casserole by. My name is Jane --. That's as far as she got.

The widow called to the others inside the house, "She's come, she's come!" She put her hands on either side of Jane's face with great tenderness. Jane looked over the widow's shoulder and there was a copy of the letter she'd sent all those years ago, framed and on the wall.

Baruch Adonai Eloheinu, Melech Ha-Olam!

We are already blessed. Be blessed and a blessing. Amen.