

“Really Blessed”

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Jeremiah 17:7-10 + Luke 6:20-26 = Luke’s Beatitudes

Almost exactly 12 years ago a celebrity died in Texas. It was all over the news. Can you think back and guess who?



If you Google the obits around February 2007, you are most likely to come up with Anna Nicole Smith who died February 8, 2007. No need to go into how a self-absorbed person with no boundaries and millions of dollars can waste a life. Yet she’s not the one.

I’m talking about a truly great Texas woman who died January 31, 2007: Molly Ivins, the columnist who brought to her art “down-home humor and biting wit.” Texas has always produced its share of larger-than-life characters. The Scripture that very next Sunday was our text today, Luke’s Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Plain. A coincidence? I think not.



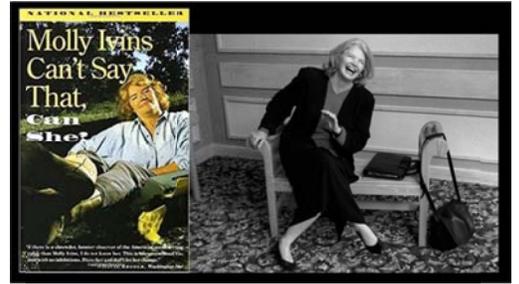
Molly Ivins was a syndicated columnist and print journalist on newspapers from the *Texas Observer* to the *New York Times*. In death, she was lauded from *The Lufkin Daily News* to the *Washington Post*.



From one of the many obits in the *New York Times*: Molly Ivins “delighted in skewering politicians and [in] interpreting, and mocking her Texas culture.” From another: she “cultivated the voice of a folksy populist who derides those she thought acted too big for their britches.” How many times do you hear the phrase “too big for their britches” in the *Times*?

People either loved her or hated her. Her supporters saw her as a populist ~ her detractors called her columns “manufactured cornpone.”

I first discovered Molly Ivins while a missionary in Indonesia. Moneta Prince, would get Molly Ivins' books sent to her by her mother (also named Moneta ~ another Texas thing). With relish we received and consumed her books.



When I returned to the US, delightfully I could receive her directly. That is until the *Dallas Morning News* got so upset with her criticism that they made it impossible to get her delivered anywhere in Dallas County. Her syndicated column finally landed in the *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, so I asked my father who took that newspaper to clip her columns and send them. Which he dutifully did until my step-mother read a couple and put a stop to that.

E. J. Dionne wrote in the *Washington Post*: “Molly was a genuine populist ... She believed in lifting up the underdog and hated it when the wealthy made excuses for injustice.”



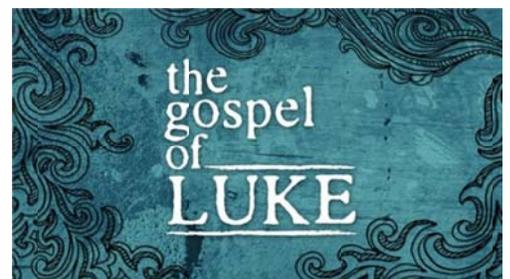
She rose to her editorial heights in criticism of George W. Bush. They had actually been at high school together. Her righteous indignation could burn white-hot against the war in Iraq and with *even greater fervor* in her support for the soldiers fighting that war.

In her last controversial editorial of January 11, she encouraged all her readers to, pardon my French, “raise hell” over Iraq. She was capable of offending almost everyone at one time or another.

Some considered her a secular saint, others the Devil in blue jeans and some both. She preached an unvarnished truth as she saw it.

The Lufkin Daily News: “Molly fought hard for those who need a champion, the have-nots and poor, those dispossessed by the powerful. She railed just as hard against corruption, wrongheaded public policy, and corporate greed.”

She was irreverent and irrepressible and at the same time faithful to the Word. I am waiting for the book to come out “*The Gospel according to Molly Ivins*” ~ a hard, radicalized Gospel sort of like... the Gospel of Luke!



The Gospel of Luke was a gentile, marginalized Gospel for a gentile, marginalized community. Molly Ivins in a different age would have most certainly been part of the community which produced the Gospel of Luke ~ a prophetic, Gospel of God's tough love ~ a Gospel full of grand reversals and surprises, a Gospel of God's reign.



And that is precisely Jesus' point in Luke's version of the Sermon on the Plain ~ that the Gospel offends us, or rather it *should* offend us, but we water it down so it doesn't anymore. The Gospel *should* challenge us to broader faith and greater acts of self-sacrifice but long ago we have domesticated it, receiving joyfully God's good grace but without accountable response.

Luke's Beatitudes are radically different from Matthew's, despite their surface similarities, and those differences *should* make us quite uncomfortable. Matthew lays it heavy on the blessings and light on the curses in that version of the Beatitudes, whereas Luke's beatitudes are equal: four blessings and four curses, Matthew spiritualizes them: remember it is "the poor in spirit" in Matthew to Luke's "the poor," those actually in physical poverty. It is those who "hunger and thirst for righteousness." a metaphor in Matthew, but Luke has those literally who hunger for food.

<p>BLESSED are you</p>	<p>who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. who are hungry now, for you will be filled. who weep now, for you will laugh when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man.</p>
<p>Woe to you</p>	<p>who are rich, for you have received your consolation. who are full now, for you will be hungry. who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.</p>
<p>LUKE 6:20-26 (NRSV)</p>	

The two deaths of Anna Nicole Smith and Molly Ivins in such close proximity: "Coincidence? I think not!"

Luke 6:24

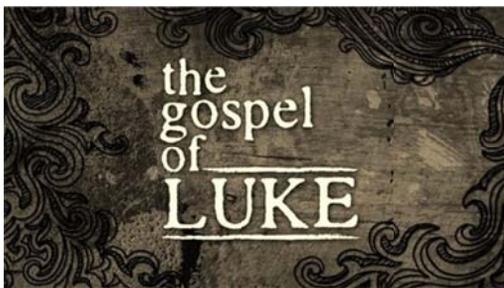
But **woe** to you who are **rich**,
 for you have received your
consolation....

These two lives illustrate well Luke's blessing of the poor and cursing of the rich. Consider: what is Luke's explanation for this preferential option in God's reign for the poor? Explanation: the rich have already received their consolation.

Anna Nicole Smith: one comment on the tragedy of her life pointed out that she, a self-absorbed person with a lot of money and publicity ~ was she happy? "I think not!"

Was there ever a life which shows more clearly money cannot buy inner peace or happiness? If anything great wealth is a curse ~ acquisition can consume us ~ exactly Jesus' point.

God's love is tough. That's Jesus clear meaning ~ tougher than we can ever imagine. Naturally we would rather dwell on the love side than the curses. God judges strength where we see weakness and casts woes where we presume God's blessing. God's wisdom reverses our common wisdom. God elevates those considered cursed by the world and brings down the ones our world considers the blessed ones.



The preachers of "name-it-and-claim-it" theology, the purveyors of the Gospel of Prosperity, who equate wealth with God's blessing on the righteous, who preach if we are righteous we will be wealthy and if we are wealthy it is clear that we are the righteous ones. These preachers haven't read Luke.

Or Mark for that matter ~ or Matthew or John if we are being honest.

God's love is tough love ~ stripping away our humanly constructed adornments and laying bare our souls ~ striking down the bulwarks we build against pain and suffering ~ the insular cocoons we build to drown out the anguished cries of our neighbors.

Those cursed bulwarks as Jesus identifies them:

- wealth
- satiation
- derision
- acclaim



God's tough love reveals each for what it is ~ at best an ephemeral and temporary respite ~ a diversion from our calling ~ a distraction from our God given humanity. At worst these are revealed as all derived from the manipulation and oppression of others.

In contrast, our calling is to be God's realm, to engage the principalities and powers, the elemental spirits trying to rob us of our humanity. As Jesus identifies God's realm here it is:

- to end poverty
- to stop hunger
- to demand justice
- to extinguish hate

To build God's reign.

The Gospel according to Matthew and the Gospel according to Molly Ivins both agree with Luke's on at least one thing:

“Strive first for the kingdom of God and it's righteousness, and all these things will be added to you as well.” [Mt 6:33]



The real things. The things which last.