



Sunday, 16th February 2025

6th Sunday after Epiphany

Jeremiah 17:5-10

Psalms 1

1 Corinthians 15:12-20

Luke 6:17-26

The Rev'd Margaret Peel-Shakespeare

Today we are in the 6th Sunday after the Epiphany and we are only two Sundays away from the beginning of Lent! We officially begin Lent with Ash Wednesday on 5th March. As we hear the blessings and the woes from Luke's gospel today, it must be in light of the season before us. We are preparing to begin the season of penitence and fasting and our scripture is preparing us to hear, to listen, to look.

Luke is inviting us into a different view of the text. You may recognise these words from the Beatitudes found in Matthew 5. The words in both gospels are similar but Matthew focuses on blessings such as, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." (Matthew 5:9) while Luke offers blessings he also adds in woes, as in "Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry." (Luke 6:25)

For some this may be a bit confronting, why does Luke not stick with the pattern of blessings? Could it be that Luke is offering a broader perspective?

In Matthew 5, the Beatitudes, Jesus has gone up on the mountain to be away from the crowds and has a quiet moment with his disciples. For Matthew, this is where Jesus offers the beatitudes, the blessings for the disciples to know and consider.

However, in Luke's version of the story, Jesus has been on a mountain praying all night, he chooses his disciples and names them apostles but rather than pulling them aside to speak to them, they all go down to the plain together, the level ground where the crowds are waiting to see and experience Jesus the healer.

Luke brings Jesus in among the people and invites us to a different perspective. One that offers a view of blessings and woes. The words from Jesus come while he is on level ground with the crowd, not above them on the mountain.

He's telling them and perhaps reminding them of how to act and in that process how to be more like their rabbi and how to draw close to God.

Luke employs couplets and opposites, similar to Matthew, to create a comparison such as full and hungry or weeping and laughing.

*Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.
Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh. (Luke 6:21)*

Some may think that “blessed” relates to happiness or luck. Yet, it is more likely that blessedness here relates to living into the fullness of God not simply fleeting happiness.

The blessings and woes would also be spoken into a crowd where Jesus knew those in authority in Israel and even Rome would have influence. He was speaking to all levels of the community with these words, not simply to individuals in the crowd.

Jesus is inviting us to follow him and walk in his ways. He has just called his disciples and appointed them apostles in the preceding verses and now he offers for us to come alongside and step into the kingdom of God with him. To live our lives in a way that reflects God’s world and not just the world around us.

How do we live our lives? Do we pray everyday (formally or informally)? Do we consider others in our world when we make decisions? These things matter.

Jesus offers to the crowd a different perspective on living that would have challenged those in authority and it may feel challenging to us too. The point is that he invites us to draw near to the presence of God.

So what in your life brings you close to God? Can you think of moments or times when you felt close to God and then imagine moments you felt far away from God? Jesus seeks to draw us into the love of God as realised in God’s kingdom.

Jesus is speaking into the basics of life by bringing up food, hunger, weeping, laughing, wealth or poverty but he takes us deeper than those things and leads us to

look within ourselves and be drawn to him. The truth is that no matter what else is going on in your life, God is enough. Even if you are struggling with grief, loss or debt or pain, our God brings us hope because God is enough. So let's remember today that Jesus is speaking to the crowd on a level plain and comes to all of us teaching us how to live so we may be truly and fully alive in God.

Amen.