

Sunday 16th February 2025

The Third Sunday before Lent

Gospel Reading

Luke 6.17-26

Jesus Teaches and Heals

17 He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. 18 They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. 19 And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

Blessings and Woes

20 Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

‘Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

21 ‘Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.

‘Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

22 ‘Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. 23 Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

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

25 ‘Woe to you who are full now,
for you will be hungry.

‘Woe to you who are laughing now,
for you will mourn and weep.

26 ‘Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

Homily

Fish come in all shapes, sizes and colours. Despite these many differences, they do have one thing in common – they swim. So too it is with Christians. We are a diverse people spread across the whole world, but with one enduring thing in common. We all love God. We are all swimming towards the same eternity.

If a fish spent its whole life wondering why it couldn't climb a tree, it might not be the happiest or most fulfilled of fish. Because fish were not designed to climb trees, and that is not their purpose. So too it is with Christians living against the backdrop of this material world. If we spend our lives working towards having the biggest house, or the most comfortable nest egg to retire with, or being proud of ourselves because we work far more hours than our neighbour, we are rather missing the point of being Christian.

Being a Christian is about who we are on the inside, about prizing those things that God has created in us at our baptism and living that out every day. That is what Jesus is talking about when he uses the Beatitudes to kick off the Kingdom Manifesto. He doesn't speak as if this is some future version of ourselves that we will become. He says "are."

"Blessed are..."

Now.

Let's look at the Beatitudes and work out what they are telling us to value:

'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.'

There's a couple of ways we could paraphrase this. Firstly, we might say, "Blessed are you who are financially poor because financial wealth isn't what make you blessed in God's eyes." Or we might say, "Blessed are you who give away excess wealth to charity because God's kingdom values sharing and mercy over selfish hoarding." But a third way to look at this might be to say, "Blessed are you who recognise that you need God in your life." This not only encompasses the first two, but also echoes St Matthew's version of the same saying, which says "Blessed are the poor *in spirit*."

'Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.'

Another one that might apply to both our physical and spiritual lives. "If you're physically hungry now, take heart – you are Blessed and life after this one will not be like this." Or in a spiritual sense, "Blessed are you who are spiritually hungry and who want to know God and to live life with God's values, because God will fill that void inside."

'Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.'

What Jesus wants us to weep for and mourn here is the version of ourselves that we leave behind when we are no longer ruled by the same values as the secular world around us. The revelation of Jesus' grace and forgiveness shows us how broken we are and how much we need Him.

As a people who have been given the cleansing gift of baptism and the promise of eternal salvation, we are all blessed with spiritual values that are about following God, and leaving the material things of this life behind us.

But do we all acknowledge them?

Do we live our lives by them as standards of our behaviour, and nurture them within ourselves?

Amen.

Conversation Questions

1. Verse 17 says, "He came down with them and stood on a level place..." Why might that be important?
2. Read verses 22 and 23. This is about being brave about declaring our faith out in the world. One way to paraphrase these verses might be to say, "Blessed are those who are brave enough to live openly for Christ, because they will receive the kingdom of heaven." How brave are we - do we live openly for Christ, and what does that look like?
3. Is there anything else from the passage not already discussed that speaks to you? What is it?
4. What will you do this week in your Monday-to-Saturday ministry in response to what you have heard today? #everydayfaith

Prayer

Spend some time in prayer, responding to what you have heard today and listening to what God might be saying to you.

Collect of the day

*Almighty God,
who alone can bring order
to the unruly wills and passions of sinful humanity:
give your people grace
so to love what you command
and to desire what you promise,
that, among the many changes of this world,
our hearts may surely there be fixed
where true joys are to be found;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,*

*in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.*

(or)

*Eternal God,
whose Son went among the crowds
and brought healing with his touch:
help us to show his love,
in your Church as we gather together,
and by our lives as they are transformed
into the image of Christ our Lord.*

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