

Reflection Luke 6: 20 – 26 Linda E Hunter 11th September 2024

Our reading from Luke this morning could be titled 'The sermon on the Plain or Blessings and Woes'. What is Jesus talking about? Who is Jesus talking to? What message do we find in the text for us today?

What is Jesus talking about?

Luke's sermon has a radical slant but focusses in on the need to recognise the nature of the community Jesus is calling into being, and therefore the necessity its members have to respond with mutual love, tolerance and acceptance. Jesus' actual words include four blessings. We have first the blessings. Being blessed means to be favoured by God and in doing so receiving - possession of the kingdom, being satisfied, or laughing, and having a great reward in heaven. Each blessing is preceded with, or announced with Blessed are you – then the people who are blessed and then the reason for the blessing. For example. Blessed are you – who are poor (**who is blessed**) – for yours is the kingdom of heaven (the **blessing**). Of course, as you heard, the first 2 blessings focus on present blessings, the last 2 focus on future blessings.

Then we have the woes. Woe is a way of pronouncing God's curse or judgment on someone.

The woes follow the same pattern as the blessings - each woe is preceded by Woe, to you, followed by the person who is cursed and then the curse. The first woe speaks to something already present. The second and third woes look to the future. So just as with the blessings, some of the judgment occurs now, and some later, at the final judgment. Notice that these woes are the exact opposite of the blessings: poor/rich; hungry/full; weep/laugh; and revile you/speak well of you.

Jesus is giving clear orders of how he sees his vision of God's work going forward. Four promises (blessings) four warnings presented almost in the same way as Israel's scriptural codes in the book of Deuteronomy. Here God is fulfilling his promises, which will mean good news for some people.

Who is Jesus talking to?

Jesus is talking to a large group of disciples. Those who gathered to hear him came from a wide variety of places. For each of them this sounds like a personal message– Blessed are YOU who are poor, who are hungry and so on, Jesus is not talking about the poor in general. He talks to the disciples directly as the poor, the hungry, the weepers, and the excluded.

He is declaring that, in line with God's past promises, those standing on the outside, who show little sign of good fortune, and who are suffering for their allegiance to him, are those who are being blessed. Drawing attention to those in need of healing could be a way of underlining that Jesus' work and teaching was for all

What message do we find in the text for us today?

Have you ever seen the Monty Python movie "Life of Brian. We watched part of it when I was training and this was the illustration used. Jesus goes up on the mountain side to teach the people. A huge crowd gathers, some of those on the edges so as Jesus talks, they ask each other what has been said, one of the characters in the movie - desperate to know what Jesus is saying asks a man who is ahead of him the crowd — "what is he saying, I can't hear?" The man checks with a person in front of him, who in turn checks with someone else and then the message is relayed back — the Master says - "Blessed are the Cheese Makers. "This is really a reminder to us of how often we get wrong what Jesus has said, we misinterpret it, we don't listen or hear properly. It makes us think too about who is blessed and who is not. Who are the blessed ones anyway? Who is it that God favours? And who is that God looks disapprovingly at?

It may seem that those who succeed in life are the ones that God favours. These are the blessed - while those who struggle with depression and despair, - those who live in poverty are the cursed but is that really what Jesus taught? Jesus was not spelling out four ways to arrange life to be happy. Think about it.

God reverses all our expectations. He understands our pain, despair, fear. The promise of Christ in the Sermon on the Plain in the Lukan account, is that there is joy on the other side of grief, laughter on the other side of tears, fulfilment on the other side of hunger, and joyful reward on the other side of the abuse and the ridicule we receive because we believe in him. This is the way things are inside and outside of the kingdom.

Jesus gives this message to encourage those who are suffering for him. Jesus says, there will be a day of reckoning for those who do this to his disciples. And he is saying, it will be worth it. The rewards of the kingdom more than outweigh what is lost in this life. Jesus is challenging us. What are his promises and warnings for our world, for people who will hear his call and follow him?

We must all answer for ourselves. If we choose Christ, the other choices we have to make in our life fall into their proper place. Christ will come first and all other decisions will follow. In him we will find true happiness and perfect freedom. In a world where there are too many choices Christ offers us a simple one, **believe** and **do not be afraid** to show others that you believe too.