

Luke 6:17-26

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. They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them. Then he looked up at his disciples and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. 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. Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets."

To Jesus' listeners, the Beatitudes made little sense. For folk who believed that you reaped what you sowed, that blessing came to those whom God favoured, to hear Jesus seemingly randomly bless people was such a contrary notion. The Beatitudes conflicted with every norm and tradition that folk knew, so radical were they. The Beatitudes are not a list of conditions. It's not a contract that Jesus is setting out. Not – you will be blessed *if* ... To hear that those who were usually invisible were in God's sights; to hear that God blessed the lowly and the lonely – those whom others barely noticed; to hear themselves described as blessed, was as shocking then as it is now. That message was a huge surprise to those who heard Jesus say it and continues to surprise us today.

COCU14C.Readings

The Season of Epiphany is unusually long this year – due to the lateness of Easter. It still has another two weeks to run before Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent.

What, for you, is the Epiphany (your 'a-ha!' moment) in the teachings this week?

This is a good opportunity to spend more time on those lectionary readings that focus on Jesus' ministry and teaching. Luke's blessings and woes tie in well with Jeremiah's warning that God sees beyond the external things to look on our hearts and with Paul's struggle to convince the church at Corinth that resurrection matters – what we do in this age affects God's judgement in the future.

Unlike the Beatitudes shared in Matthew 5, this version (possibly shared on a different occasion) also contains woes. As well as calling the poor, the hungry, those who mourn and the reviled blessed, Jesus proclaims woe to the rich, to the full, to those who laugh and to those who are popular. This setting emphasises the context of better things to come for those who need consolation as well as acknowledging that the pleasures others experience now will not last forever. Investing in those things that are not lasting takes away from the energy that might be invested in the things of God.

We are the people in God's sights today. Known and loved and blessed. We don't look at Scripture to determine where God is in our story today, what we find is that we are included in God's story. Beloved and blessed. Writing the story alongside God. Are we prepared, today, to live into our blessedness? To take up our mantle as God's people today, and, knowing ourselves beloved and blessed to see with God's eyes? Noticing those who are so often overlooked and seeing them as also beloved and blessed? Not looking for potential, but celebrating what is? How might we live into that blessedness?

(from Starters for Sunday)

Psalm 1

Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers;

**but their delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on God's law they meditate day and night.**

They are like trees planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither.

In all that they do, they prosper.

The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;

**for the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.**

This first Psalm in the 150 that are contained in the Canon has been suggested as a Psalm that unlocks the rest that follow: it distinguishes between the righteous and the wicked and sets out clear markers for each, a thread woven throughout the Psalms. Contrasting the wicked and the righteous, the Psalmist exhorts that we follow the way of righteousness. The Psalmist reminds us that we have choices to make in the path we follow – the way of the wicked or the way of the righteous. Not only does the Psalmist identify those things we must not do – take the advice of the wicked or sit in the seat of the scoffers, the Psalmist also identifies the preferred actions of the righteous – delighting in the law of the Lord and meditating on God's law day and night. Those whose choice is to wait on God and to seek to follow God's law and to spend time in God's word will remain with God while those who prosper in wickedness will be unable to withstand the judgement of God.

Jeremiah 17:5-10

Thus says the LORD: Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the LORD. They shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when relief comes. They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.

Blessed are those who trust in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay

green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit.

The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse - who can understand it? I the LORD test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings.

*Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden; cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by
the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit, so that we may truly love You and worthily
praise Your holy name; through our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

This familiar prayer echoes the words and sentiments of the Jeremiah passage, and is often offered at the beginning of services of worship, a timely reminder that God sees beyond what is visible to others and judges on the fruits of our offerings

1 Corinthians 15:12-20

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ - whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul is guiding the church community he founded in a mêlée of pastoral and ethical issues that have arisen in his absence. He attempts, remotely, to guide the Corinthians on how to live as new Christians in their particular context and culture, a perennial challenge affecting the church in every age. In this passage, he turns to issues of doctrine and, in particular, resurrection. Influenced by historical beliefs and philosophies, there is some dispute over whether or not it is important to believe in bodily resurrection. Paul wants the Corinthian Christians to grasp how fundamental resurrection – that of Christ and later believers – is to the Christian faith.