

Sermon preached by Revd Rachel McDougall

St Paul's Canterbury

Epiphany 4A – Start up Sunday

Sunday 2nd February 2020.

'Blessed to be a blessing'

Here we are at Start up Sunday. I can hardly believe its February and we're hitting the start button for the year! Starting back can certainly have its moments. On my first Sunday back there was a hail storm and I ended up dealing with flooding and hail damage. A reminder to expect the unexpected!

Beginnings are important. They are exciting and scary all at the same time.

Jesus' start up day with his disciples began with the blessings we heard this morning. This was the first thing he said to his disciples 'blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the pure in heart.

I wonder if that's how your first day back at school/work began – being told you are blessed.

There was a friend who would always say to people 'you're such a blessing!'

It felt good to be addressed like that, to be recognized and valued.

And this is what Jesus says to the disciples. Blessed are...

He doesn't begin by saying what they lack and what they've got to learn or what hoops they'll have to jump through to be his followers, or even that they'll have to earn his approval.

To follow him and to trust in him is to be blessed if not completely now, then in God's future reign which is coming.

He's just called them to follow him and he says to them that they are blessed, like my friend saying 'you're such a blessing'.

Well what does it mean to be blessed? It is not a word we use every day.

Some people translate it as happy, but how can you be happy if you're mourning or persecuted? It can mean 'how fortunate'.

Deeper than the words is what it feels like to be blessed.

There is something about being recognized that you are named and not alone, that because you are you are blessed.

We begin as being blessed, as being loved. And it isn't just for now, but also for the future. I wonder what it means to begin things from being blessed and loved?

We are blessed because we are loved and we each have the gift of life. Life is a precious gift to be thankful for.

Blessing isn't something that is earned but is something we live into as it is part of who we are – blessed and loved.

Blessings are not just for the select few, or for the successful but for everyone but even more so for the poor, those who mourn, the merciful and the pure, those who thirst for what is right and who are humble in the way they go about things.

We name blessings at particular times in our lives, at particular moments when we name God's loving presence as being there in the changes that happen. For we all need to be reminded at times for it is easy to forget that God is there in all the busy-ness.

Today as we start up for the year we name that we are blessed as we begin this new year. We are blessed in that God walks with us through the year.

Jesus reminds us that even when we are vulnerable when life is difficult we may know blessing.

There is hope in that God's love is forever and that God's love lasts.

There may be times when we forget that we are blessed. And Jesus' words remind us that there are difficult times and situations people face, yet somehow God's love and direction is particularly focussed there on those who are vulnerable who do struggle.

Today also reminds us that as we are blessed we can be a blessing to others. Each of us through who we are and what we do can make a difference.

How can you be a blessing to someone else this week?

Jesus is saying that you are blessed when you live out of the freedom of being blessed and the hope of God's reign that will come in full.

We become a blessing to others as we live into the blessings of love that we have received and live as Jesus lived.

When we are non-grasping in our attitude to life, when we are gentle with one another, when are passionately committed to justice and show mercy rather than take advantage and are pure in heart and seek what is right even when there is opposition the blessings will last forever.

Jesus' concern was there for those who are poor and meek and mourning, for those who are pure in heart, those who belong for what is right and those who show mercy to others.

To live out of blessing is to do what the God says in the prophet Micah: to do justice to love kindness and to walk humbly with others.

Today is a good day to reflect on how each of us are blessed? Can you name your blessings?

It is often so easy to take for granted the blessings we have received.

How can your life be a blessing to others? Can you be kind? Can you listen to someone? Can you see a situation that you can do something about?

God does keep showing up in our lives often where we least expect it. God's light and love are always there both now in the present and in the future.

Blessed are you says Jesus.

As Ronnie McBrayer says: 'The beatitudes are no spiritual 'to do' list to be attempted by eager rule keeping disciples. It is a list of qualities God brings to bear in those who follow Jesus'.

So be blessed and be a blessing to others.

*Lections:
Micah 6.1-8
Psalm 15
1 Corinthians 1.18-31
Matthew 5.1-12*