

*Sermon preached by Revd Rachel McDougall*

*Epiphany 6C*

*Sunday 13 February 2022*

*All in the crowd were trying to touch him... Blessed are you*

Jesus looked up at his disciples and said: Blessed are you who are poor for yours is the kingdom of God.

Jesus' blessings and woes make us feel uncomfortable.

There is a bluntness to them in Luke's gospel.

There is no get out of jail free card here.

It is easy to hear them and go on a guilt trip and think that any of us fit into the blessing categories.

Let's face it according to these words none of us are blessed.

None of us actually want to be in Jesus' favoured categories.

Who wants to be poor, hungry, weeping or excluded?

We all want to be well thought of – it's what social media promotes - selfies anyone?

Our society promotes the exact opposite: being rich, full, laughing and well thought of.

Jesus' words leave us feeling uneasy as being poor, weeping, hungry and excluded do not seem like much of a blessing.

It would be easy to say well none of us are real Christians by this measurement so I might as well sit down.

Where is the good news here?

How do we hear these words in a way that is life-giving.

One thing that can be said is that these blessings do describe Jesus – one who is poor, who weeps in the garden of Gethsemane, who is reviled and excluded and killed and is raised by God and brings into fuller reality the reign of God.

The context of these words is also important.

In Luke, Jesus comes down the mountain and stands on a level plain in the midst of crowds of people.

They are desperate to hear him.

It is a mixed group from all over the place, some who are troubled, sick and unclean.

In the middle of this needy crowd they are all trying to touch him.

Jesus isn't looking down at them from a great height, he doesn't keep himself at a distance.

He stands in the middle of them and looks up at the disciples and says the blessings and woes.

It is so different in Luke from Matthew's version said from the mountain top with a longer list of blessings and no woes.

It is interesting that when we think of the beatitudes, the blessings we automatically think of Matthew's version as they are easier to digest.

So what is going on here?

Jesus addresses his words to his disciples, his appointed followers with the needy crowd in the background.

Blessed are you...

For a speaker to deliver a series of blessings was reasonably common place, but not in this format.

These words would've made people sit up and listen.

For Jesus those who are poor, those who are hungry, those who weep, those who are excluded have a special place in God's heart.

It is not saying that thou shalt make yourself poor, upset and excluded.

He is speaking of the reality of life that different kinds of people find themselves in.

All of us at some point in our lives know something of life-changing circumstances that can happen suddenly.

We can find ourselves where we do not want to be.

This is how life is. At some point in life, we are reminded that life is not in our total control and that each of us are vulnerable.

We find that what we have placed our trust in or based our identity on don't last - whether it be money, status or our health.

We don't like it one bit. It is something that is a struggle.

The blessings and woes are addressed to us all.

I wonder where you are poor now?

Where do you find yourself weeping? hungry, excluded?

In other words are you in touch with where you are vulnerable.

Where are you closed to God's love and grace and mercy?

We do not like to admit that we are vulnerable and yet it is precisely in the vulnerable place where we are aware of what we lack that opens us up to God's blessing and love.

Jesus is speaking to our humanity, the vulnerability that we often seek to hide.

As a society we do not value vulnerability – which is why our society seeks to make it more difficult for the excluded (asylum seekers) and those who have a disability and those in aged care.

Our society often prefers not to see them. This is what was so delightful in seeing Dylan Alcott become Australian of the year and his statement about ‘you can’t be who you can’t see.’

Whether we like it or not we are all together on the same ferris-wheel of life that can take us up in the air as well as dropping us to the ground.

Jesus is saying I’m here on the ground for all of you whether you realise you need me or not. I’m inviting you to see where you are and to remind you all that the way things are is not the way things will always be.

It’s part of being human and being connected with each other.

If you’re up in the sky remember those who find themselves on the ground, if you’re on the ground the reign of God is especially yours.

Perhaps the blessing that is offered is the same.

‘Blessed are you who loose your grip on the way things are for God shall lead you I the ways things shall be’.

Desmond Tutu puts it well:

*I have a dream, God says. Please help Me to realize it. It is a dream of a world whose ugliness and squalor and poverty, its war and hostility, its greed and harsh competitiveness, its alienation and disharmony are changed into their glorious*

*counterparts, when there will be more laughter, joy, and peace, where there will be justice and goodness and compassion and love and caring and sharing. I have a dream that swords will be beaten into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks, that My children will know that they are members of one family, the human family, God's family, My family.*

*-Desmond Tutu*

*God Has a Dream: A Vision of Hope of Our Time*

*Lectons:*

*Jeremiah 17.5-10*

*Psalm 1*

*Luke 6.17-26*