



Revd Ro's Reflection on The Third Sunday Before Lent 2022 Year C

1 Corinthians 15.12-20

Luke 6.17-26

Our gospel reading last week dealt with the miraculous catch of fish on Jesus' orders and his calling of the fishermen. After this Luke tells us of Jesus' ministry as he teaches in the synagogues and heals those who are sick. The crowds gather wherever he goes but opposition to him is growing. This opposition from the religious groups who are trying to trap him, even now right at the beginning of his ministry, is ominous.

^{6.6} 'On another Sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught, and there was a man there whose right hand was withered. ⁷The scribes and the Pharisees watched him to see whether he would cure on the Sabbath, so that they might find an accusation against him.'

Jesus has also called Levi, a tax collector and we know that he has specific followers whom he has called. We are told by Luke,

^{6.12} 'Now during those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God. ¹³And when day came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles:'

Jesus goes to the mountain, to be quiet, to pray to his Father to ask for guidance. He then calls all his followers (and there seem to be many) and he picks twelve from them, his chosen band of disciples. These men, apart from the traitor, are the ones who will carry the message of Jesus and build on the foundations he has laid.

As we read the gospel passage for today we will remember 'The Beatitudes,' we are familiar with these as told by Matthew and they are referred to as 'The Sermon on the Mount.' These central teachings occupy something like three chapters. The Beatitudes are often read on Remembrance

Sunday and are set for All Saints Day. I have dealt with them in my Reflection for All Saints. When I was nine years old my parents bought me a bible. It was a small King James Version and I loved it. I still treasure it though I confess I can't read it without my glasses now! It has beautiful illustrations and one is of Jesus delivering 'The Sermon on the Mount.' Our reading today from Luke is sometimes referred to as 'The Sermon on the Plain' ; it does have echoes of Matthew's but it is different.

Jesus has spent the night up the mountain in prayer to God. He calls his followers to him on the mount and he calls out twelve of them. Twelve is a highly significant number here. The disciples and anyone seeing this would understand the symbolism. It is clearly allied to the twelve tribes of Israel. Luke, who is always specific in his detail, means us to recognise exactly what Jesus has done. He has chosen representatives of Israel and they will have to understand God's new way and be the nucleus of the newly formed community of Christ.

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.'

Once again the symbolism is clear; Jesus descends from the mountain to give God's teaching to the multitude. It is reminiscent of Moses descending from the mountain to give God's Law to the people of Israel. Well, this is God's new law as promised of old. The crowd wait for Jesus; people have seen his power and heard the wonder of his teaching. His fame has spread far and wide. The religious powers are often present and show their opposition to his teaching. As Jesus stands here he is going to drop a boulder into Jewish society and its ripples will change the world. So Jesus begins by teaching and healing those who come to him for cures. He does this in God's name and in God's power. 'For power came out from him and he healed all of them.'

²⁰ 'Then he looked up at his disciples and said:'

This is very significant, yes the crowd would have heard him but his words are directed to his disciples, his faithful band of chosen followers. He is telling them very clearly, the rules of the new way. It may be that when we hear the words 'Blessed are you' we think that these are a set of instructions for behaviour thus you will be blessed if you live like this. Actually, if you look at them it is not like that, Jesus talks of states of being. Jesus is announcing the advent of God's kingdom. This is God's way, the poor will be rewarded and the hungry will be filled. Think of Isaiah 61, part of which Jesus read in the synagogue at Nazareth.

¹⁸ 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

Think of the Song of Mary, 'The Magnificat.' God's way turns the world's values upside down, Jesus' way is countercultural. This is the promise of God foretold again and again throughout the scriptures. The good news is that at last the downtrodden, the hungry, the poor will be blessed, will

be freed and their suffering will be relieved. However, for God's new way to come about things on earth must change.

What Jesus is saying I think, is that God's Kingdom values must be lived out on earth. Attitudes and behaviour must change to be in accord with God's way. Think of the Lord's Prayer, 'Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,' that is it in a nutshell. Jesus is not talking of a spiritual place where people go after death. It isn't that at all. 'on earth' is the key to it. With the coming of Jesus, God's Kingdom has broken into this world, Jesus' way is countercultural, and it is revolutionary, it flies in the face of convention; it is God's way not the accepted human way. The Kingdom values turn the world's tinsel values upside down. Jesus is saying this to his apostles, the newly chosen few and to all who hear his message, that their lives must be governed in this new Kingdom way. However Jesus' words hold a warning. It will be hard for all who follow him, not just because they have no wealth or position or any of the things that the world holds dear but because there will be persecution.

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.'

Jesus is quite specific, people will 'hate' you, and it's a hard hitting word. They will 'exclude' you and that is hard, it saps the spirit. The people who worship the worldly accepted values will reject those who follow Jesus because his way opposes them. But says Jesus, do not be despondent, instead rejoice. You are doing what is right in God's eyes, you are the chosen ones. In other words they and anyone who chooses Jesus' way must take up their cross and follow him. It was the same for God's messengers, the prophets. They faced persecution and death. Jesus will walk that path; the disciples will walk that path. But their reward is great because theirs is the Kingdom of heaven, the Kingdom that has come into being with Jesus, God and man. That is the promise to all who follow him and commit themselves to him.

Jesus then turns his attention to those who do not follow God's values but choose the worldly ones.

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.'

Jesus is referring to those who put themselves first and by doing so often oppress others, those who live by the world's standards instead of God's. His warning is for them. They have had their 'reward' in this life. Let's just look at one, 'woe to you who are rich.' I don't think Jesus is necessarily condemning everyone who has money. Think of all those philanthropists throughout history who used their wealth to help others. It is 'the love of money that is the root of all evil.' It is when earthly things cause people to oppress others or when they become a person's motivation in life, when they get in the way of God's teaching, that these things often become idols themselves. It is when

people see power, wealth, status or success as all important, when these become the driving force and they ignore the less fortunate, that is when things have gone horribly wrong. The world may see success in these terms; the Kingdom of God turns that on its head. Those who give all to God, who follow him and care for their fellows, they are choosing the way of the Kingdom.

As we reflect on today's reading it is useful to pause and to think of how Jesus' words apply to ourselves, to our lives and to our behaviour. Everything we do should be motivated by Jesus' way not our own selfish desire or materialism. The time will come when God's Kingdom will come on earth, when things will be as they are in heaven. We as Christians have a role in that process; it is our role to be governed by the Kingdom values and to try to live them out in our lives.

Our reading from 1 Corinthians follows directly from last week's. It is always helpful because we can see how Paul continues his argument. Paul had reiterated the central tenets of the Christian faith, specifically Jesus' death and resurrection. When Paul begins with 'Now' he is saying, 'therefore'. There were some Corinthian Christians who were saying there was no resurrection of the dead, presumably because it fitted in with their old world view, their previous set of beliefs. Very few people in the ancient pagan world believed in any form of resurrection. That belief simply will not do now. It has to be jettisoned. Paul has shown the truth of the resurrection of Christ and all is dependent on that, the Corinthians Christians have heard the message of Jesus Christ and the resurrection is central. Last time we saw how Paul pointed to living witnesses to it; people to who Jesus appeared in bodily form,

^{15.5} 'and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.'

Then of course Paul refers to his Damascus Road encounter, he saw and spoke with the risen Christ. Paul is quite clear in his words here; they constitute a careful and reasoned argument. Paul at the beginning of the chapter stated this,

^{15.1} 'Now I should remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, ² through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you.'

The question now follows, ¹² 'Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?' They were obviously saying that there was no resurrection for anyone after death, but to maintain that it follows that they are saying that Jesus was not raised from the dead, – if that were the case the repercussions are catastrophic.

¹³ 'If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; ¹⁴and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain.'

I watched the film 'Whistle down the wind' the other day. A group of children believe they have Jesus in their barn; in fact he is an escaped criminal. What is so beautiful is their faith. Eventually the little boy who realises the truth says, 'He's not Jesus, he's just a feller.' Well says Saint Paul so much hinges on the resurrection. Without the fact of the resurrection Jesus would be, 'Just a feller.' no doubt a great one, a leader, a great teacher who taught moral truths for humanity but he would not

be part of the Messiah or God incarnate. In other words, says Paul, if you don't accept the resurrection from the dead you don't accept Jesus' resurrection. Everything hinges on it, Jesus is the Messiah, he is the Lord of the world, and he will come as King once more in God's newly restored order. We believe this because Jesus was raised.

Jesus' death on Calvary was part of God's plan; Jesus walked that way knowingly to fulfil the purpose of God. Jesus,

⁷'emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
⁸ he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.' (Philippians 2)

Without the resurrection the faith that Paul and the apostles proclaim would be false, the faith of the Corinthians would be 'in vain'

¹⁵ '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. ¹⁶For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. ¹⁷If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.'

Here Paul spells it out clearly, Christ, by his death and resurrection, won Salvation for them and all who follow him. If the resurrection did not happen 'you are still in your sins'. If what you are saying were true ¹⁸ 'Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. ¹⁹If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.'

Pitied because they spread a gospel which is empty, believing empty promises. It is the **but** which follows that turns everything right way up.

²⁰ '**But** in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.'

This is like a joyful shout, a proclamation of the wonderful truth. Because Christ has been raised every truth, every promise falls into place. All is dependent on the resurrection. It is because of the resurrection Jesus is hailed as Messiah, King, God and man. Christ died and was raised; he won eternal life, he won salvation for all who turn to him. The resurrection is central to the faith, to who Jesus is, so no one who claims to follow Christ can reject this. You simply cannot be a Christian if you do not believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, says Paul.

We are followers of Christ and every week we repeat the central tenets of the faith in the words of the Creed, creed means 'believe.' We accept Jesus as our Lord and God and now we have to live out Jesus' teachings. If we go back to the gospel passage we know that sometimes this will lead to opposition and unpopularity. But to stand up for what is right in this world, to follow Jesus' teaching is our commission. Jesus is not exclusive, he is for all. To quote another except from 'Whistle down the wind,' the three children think they have a proprietary claim on him because he is in their barn but as another little girl says very forcefully, 'We can see Jesus if we want to, he is not your private

property.' Jesus is for all people. It is by living in his way that others will be drawn to him and his way of justice, goodness and love.

'Hail the Lord of earth and heav'n, praise to thee by both be giv'n. thee we greet triumphant now. Hail the Resurrection thou.' Charles Wesley

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