

## **Third Sunday Before Lent 2025 (16th February)**

### **Luke 6.17-26**

#### **A Sermon by the Rev. Jackie Bullen**

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus was speaking to those who were victims and oppressed.

Throughout the New Testament, we hear of Christ showing compassion for the less fortunate in the society of his day - the same compassion that we, as Christians, are called on to show to others now.

This text is difficult to comprehend because Christ is describing the world in ways which are the opposite of how we experience life.

The ones whom the world ignores are the ones who receive God's blessing. The ones whom the world honours are the ones who are cursed, it's a complete reversal of most people's expectations and experience. The antithesis of all that we are expected to accept as normal. Christ is painting a picture of how we could be living, should be living. But to understand his message, we need to ask ourselves who are the poor? The hungry? Those who mourn?

It is easy to think of the obvious answers but what about those who are poor in spirit; how often do we yearn for manna to feed our spiritual needs, or weep for those who do not know God or turn away from Him.

Jesus is encouraging us to look past our worldly perceptions, and to think in terms of our heavenly home.

The list we receive in Luke's Gospel isn't as complete as in the Gospel according to Matthew, and in some ways it gives us a different focus, a different perspective as it were, and part of that message is about loving our enemies, which if we are honest is very difficult to do.

But we also know that there are people who are physically poor, hungry and grieving and they must not be ignored. In the news we see or hear of people doing whatever it takes to get ahead. They want to feather their own nests, usually at the expense of someone else, and sadly we are seeing lots of this happening within our current economic situation.

Many people seem to have their own agenda. Instead of stopping and wondering if the way they live is beneficial to others, they try to satisfy their own selfish ambitions.

We know from theologians, and scripture that Luke was a healer, and through his writings he was showing us that Christ came to remove distinctions between people.

Luke's is a universal Gospel that reminds us that the world is filled with all sorts of people, including those who are less fortunate and yet we are all children of the Living God. Loved by him.

The rich had problems hearing and rejoicing in the Gospel because it told them to change their ways and share what they had. On the other hand, the poor heard the message gladly because it brings hope and liberation.

This is where the Gospel message is vital and life-changing.

Christ is challenging us to reverse the world's way of thinking and let our hearts and minds be ruled by blessing, loving and forgiving those who persecute us.

We must learn not only how to make this change but also go on to exhibit it in our own lives. The Beatitudes must be our attitudes.

We are called to look at our lives and accept the blessings God gives us as a sign of His faithfulness to us and to respond by living in such a way that we show by word and example our faithfulness and commitment to proclaim the Good News of God to others. We need to be prepared to stand up and be counted, and to give of ourselves.

Our behaviour towards others is a natural expression of what we feel within. In other words, we act out what we believe. So, what do we believe, is a good question to ask ourselves.

Do we really believe that at the end of this earthly life we will spend eternity with God our Father? That this earthly life is not all there is?

Jesus warns us that those who satisfy only their physical needs here on earth will experience a terrible spiritual famine.

At times we will find this difficult, and challenging because we are human and we are tempted to look for satisfaction now rather than look to the longer term.

But we are also assured of where our heavenly focus will, in time, lead us through John's vision, that when we leave this earthly life, we will enter a place where God ***will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more.***

To grow as a Christian is in no small part, about beginning to see the world as God sees it, it is to look at the world through a new pair of eyes, and an eternal loving perspective.

Christians have responded to the Beatitudes in many and varied ways over the centuries by becoming advocates for the poor.

That's why we have organisations such as the Trussell Trust which since 1997 has been helping the relief of those in need, Christian Aid, The Leprosy Mission, and countless other organisations, whose goal is to provide for those in need.

Christ outlines what it means to live as his followers, and that is to work together among his people. Working to build one another up so that, as the body of Christ, we can share in the work together and encourage one another so that we all play our part and ultimately share in the joys that come from serving. If we live according to Christ's plan for our lives, we will have a zest for living that knows no bounds.

Christians are not solitary people, we are all connected as one body, here on earth and in heaven, and we remember those who have gone before us and the impact they had on us, and indeed others, and how this interconnectedness has an impact throughout the world.

Our challenge today in the light of this reading is to work out how we work to show grace to others knowing that God has blessed us abundantly with his grace? How do we turn our confidence in God's love for us into love for others?

If we are to change our attitudes to reflect those that Jesus teaches, then we have to be prepared to ask Christ to lead us, and mould us into the people, the body, his church that he wants us to be.

Amen.