

St Michael and All Angels

Ōtautahi Christchurch

16 February 2025

Homily

Luke 6:17-26

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.
18. They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases, and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured.
19. And everyone in the crowd was trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.
20. Then he looked up at his disciples and said:
“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.
21. “Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.
“Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.
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 how their ancestors treated the prophets.
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 how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

Opening Prayer

Merciful God,
in Christ, you make all things new
transform the poverty of our nature
by the riches of your grace.

Context

This morning, our Lectionary has presented two further readings that help to frame and reinforce today's gospel. Firstly, Jeremiah (17:5-10) introduces the gospel's theme of 'cursing' and 'blessing.' Verse 5 of Jeremiah states, "Cursed are those who trust in human beings, who depend on mere flesh and blood for their strength, and those whose hearts have turned away from the Lord." Meanwhile, verse 7 introduces the counter theme of cursing, which is 'blessing.' The author writes, "My blessing is on those people who trust in me, those who put their confidence in the Lord."

Next, our epistle in 1 Corinthians (15:12-20) explores why Christ, as the "first fruits of the dead," represents an essential theme in Christian life. Namely, the same power that resurrected Christ from the dead is present in the life of every Christian. Thus, Christ's resurrection guarantees that our death will be drawn into the "life of the world to come," resulting in a new humanity in Christ (Ephesians 2:15). Moreover, 1 Corinthians notes that if this is not the case and our hope in Jesus is merely tied to our quality of life in the present age, then we should be pitied.

So... where are these themes leading us? My suggestion is this: our supporting texts are beginning to construct a picture of the 'values' of 'God's new kingdom.' Whereby a reliance on our own strengths will lead to 'woes,' as though we are living under the weight of a curse because "we have turned away" from the provision of the Lord.

Secondly, suppose our apparent confidence and faith in God is actually a faith that is bolstered more by our own sufficiency and strengths rather than God's character of blessing. In that case, we are to be pitied because this indicates that we do not understand that the present hardships are often a result of the fallen creation. And, by disregarding God's

determination to bless his creation, we can often overlook God's hand at work as he undoes the values of the old order by taking the people who are considered to be 'last' in this world and making them the 'first' in his new kingdom. Thus, our text states, "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh."

Furthermore, our gospel reading from Luke occurs within the narrative of Jesus praying all night on a mountain and, from that event, announcing who will be the chosen twelve disciples. Thus, Jesus brings down from the mountain the names of those who will be the purveyors of the new covenant—a new Law of Grace.

Additionally, Jesus teaches, heals, and proclaims the values of this new kingdom by encouraging those present to "love their enemies, resist the urge to judge others, recognise the significance of bearing good fruit, and the importance of 'living out' what we have heard and received from God" (Luke 6:12-49).

Themes

There are several themes worth exploring in our Gospel reading. The first theme emerges by observing that, like Moses, Jesus descends from a mountain after encountering God and provides divine guidance to the people. Next, we note that Jesus preached from a 'level place,' known as the Sermon on the Plain. In the biblical sense, the word "level" often refers to areas of disgrace, idolatry, suffering, hunger, annihilation, and mourning (see Jeremiah 9:22; 14:18; 30:4; Daniel 3:1; Joel 1:10, 20; 2:22; 3:19; Habakkuk 3:17; Zechariah 12:11). However, at the same time, the prophets foresaw that God would renew the level places.

So it is in these desperate parts, the 'level places,' that Christ preaches hope and promises life to those who feel weighted down and trapped.

The Scripture states that these people came "to hear and be healed." Indicating that Christ had a two-fold ministry of words and practical care. This public two-fold ministry of Christ continues to challenge us today, calling all Christians to embody their faith publicly.

Therefore, rather than viewing our faith as a matter of private conviction and personal belief, if true, then the Christian faith is not merely ‘personal belief’ but instead a matter of universal cosmic importance for all of creation and humanity, and as such, must be lived out in the public spaces.

Christ’s warning to those who are rich, satiated, laughing, and living off a favourable reputation is not an attack on people who have experienced some form of prosperity. Rather, it is a condemnation of individuals who amass their wealth and comfort without any regard for the lives of the people around them. It is worth noting that later in the Gospel, Luke (12:48) asserts, “Everyone who has been given much will be required to give much.”

Interestingly, Luke’s Sermon on the Plain shares themes with the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. The book of Ezekiel (16:49) writes, “Behold, the iniquity and sin of Sodom was that her city was full of pride, had an abundance of food, and enjoyed carefree ease, yet they did not help or strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.”

Gospel Proclamation

Now, in contrast to the better-known Sermon on the Mount from Matthew, in Luke, Jesus speaks to us from a flat plain, a ‘level place.’ It is also helpful to remember that for the audience at the time, a ‘level area’ denoted a place of disgrace, suffering, and mourning.

Therefore, Christ’s presence in these ‘level places’ signifies that the Spirit has come to redeem and renew areas of despair. Thus, “while standing in the broken, level world, Jesus teaches about the values of God’s new Kingdom and the coming renewal.”

Luke “contrasts the worldly perspective of happiness and success with a viewpoint from God’s Kingdom.” Consequently, God’s kingdom urges us to place value on spiritual wealth and to embrace a life that is blessed by our trust and confidence in the Lord.

Finally, the crowd gathers around Jesus for two reasons: to hear his teachings and to receive healing. Christ's actions reinforce God's message of blessings. The power coming from Jesus signifies the authority with which he operates. Christ's healings provide the foundation of the Church's ministry of light and liberation, that is, to free individuals from both oppression and demonic influence. Thus, Christ's ministry involved both preaching and meeting people's needs.

Today, the Spirit calls us to do the same. We are to reject any sense of self-satisfaction, complacency, and comfort that anaesthetises our care for one another and God's creation.

As such, our collective ministry as Christians is to recognise the broken and level places in the world and, like Christ, reach out with hands of compassion and healing.

May it be so.

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