

## **Sermon 13 February 2022 – Blessings and Woes. Christ our hope. Trust in God**

In whom do we place our trust? In whom do we place our hope? The answer to these questions will determine the way in which we live. Or, we could say, the way in which we live reveals the answer to these questions.

When we think of our relationships, we realise that the ones that are good, fruitful and solid are the ones in which there is a high level of trust. Where the people we share these relationships with, are the ones we pin our hopes on. Hope's of sharing our dreams. Of being there for us when we are in need or wish to share our joys with. And so... a very basic/core element of any relationship is trust. And at the heart of our readings today is the issue of trust. How blessed are those who trust in God and follow God's ways. Who know they can rely and depend on God in all circumstances. And how sad for those who do not trust in God. Who choose to follow the ways and values of the world.

Jeremiah, together with the people of Israel, is living in exile. Jeremiah has been calling the people back to live according to God's ways. To place their trust in God and not in kings and rulers and the worship of idols. They believed that they would go back to Jerusalem. Back to their practices of Temple worship. They were putting their trust in human beings, and he warns against it saying, "The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse (deceitful) - who can understand it? (17:9). He tells them they are going to be living in exile for a long time and that they need to put their trust in God and choose how they will live in their current situation. His message to them and us is that good fruit – righteous living - no matter the circumstances will be produced if we are rooted in God. If we place our trust in God and follow God's ways we will be "...like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream" (17:8). Sustained and nourished by God.

Similarly, the psalmist says that it is our dependence on God – our trust in God - that sustains and gives life. That if we delight in God's law; meditate on it "day and night" we will bear fruit like a tree that is well grounded and nourished. And not be blown around like chaff in the wind (1:4).

In the Corinthians reading, Paul says that our hope lies in Jesus Christ. It seems some of the believers in Corinth were denying the resurrection of the body. Something that is still hard for some to believe in today. Paul reminds the Corinthians that Jesus rose from the dead, as a human being. So, he asks them, based on this knowledge, how then can they

say that the resurrection of the body does not exist. For if our faith in Jesus stops with his death then we have no new life to look forward to. Then what they, and we, believe makes no sense and if there is no resurrection then we are “affirming death rather than life.”

(<http://montreal.anglican.org/comments/cpr06m.shtml>) For it is through his death and resurrection that we receive redemption and eternal life. So then, if Jesus was raised from the dead then we too can trust God to raise us from the dead to new life. This is Paul’s argument – his reasoning. He says that Jesus is “the first fruits of those who have died” – the forerunner or model or example of what will happen to all who have died. Jesus’ resurrection is core to our belief in eternal life. And if we believe this – if we take our faith seriously - then Paul says we can trust God to also raise us from the dead. And if we believe this then we need to live lives that reflect this belief. For it is in trusting in God and God’s ways that we receive life rather than death.

In the passage before today’s Gospel reading, Luke tells us that Jesus spent time in prayer on the mountain and then chose his disciples. Now in today’s passage, we read that he comes down with his disciples to the level plane. To be among the ordinary people. Making himself present and accessible to heal – their diseases and troubled spirits - and to teach.

And what a radical teaching – a difficult one – which turns everything upside down. Giving us insight into God’s values - kingdom values - verses worldly values. Re-shaping our thinking and perspectives of what is important to God. Jesus says,

- “Blessed are you who are poor” (6:20), and “Woe to you who are rich” (6:24).
- “Blessed are you who are hungry now” (6:21) and “Woe to you who are full now” (6:25).
- “Blessed are you who weep now” (6:21) and “Woe to you who are laughing now” (6:25).
- “Blessed are you when people exclude you” (6:22) and “Woe to you when all speak well of you” (6:26).

We all want God’s blessings. No one wants to be poor, hungry, weeping or hated for who and what we stand for. The Jews did not see these as blessings and neither do we in our world and our lives. But neither do we want the woes. This is probably tied up in our understanding of what the words “blessed and “woe mean. We assume woe means cursed. But if we look up these words in a dictionary you will see that some synonyms for blessed are adored, holy, exalted. When you look up woe, you will find synonyms like

sadness, sorrow, regret, filled with despair. And in my reading for this sermon, I discovered that the “underlying Greek words that are translated as "blessed" and "woe" are better understood as "How honourable ..." and "How shameless ..." (David Ewart, [www.holytextures.com](http://www.holytextures.com))

So... we see that what Jesus is saying is that the poor are honourable. Respected and valued in God's eyes. And we too should honour, respect and value them. Not something we easily and readily do, isn't it? We sometimes see those in need as lazy or burdensome. But according to this passage, theirs is the kingdom of God. Woe on the other hand is more of a warning. Jesus is saying look out – be careful –you who are rich, full, laughing and well-spoken of. Be careful that the path you are on does lead to shameless behaviour – injustice, disrespect, apathy. Watch out that you don't place pride and satisfaction – your trust - in the material and physical things of this world rather than placing your trust in God. Rather than taking seriously the values of the kingdom of God. Values which call us to recognise the value of all God's people, including those in need, the poor, the marginalised and excluded.

We are called to make a difference. Not only in giving to those in need but in actively working to change systems of injustice that lie at the heart of people being in need. We are called to honour, respect and value all people – including the poor, hungry and marginalised. For all are made in the image of God.

Yes, when we do this, we will probably find ourselves being excluded from the “respectable” circles. But that is the cost of discipleship. With this teaching Jesus challenges our priorities. Jesus challenges our apathy, our comfortableness and the fact that we so easily look the other way when we should be taking a stand. Jesus has come down to the plane – drawn near to people - to be in the very midst of the very people who are need. Those are places and spaces we need to be found in as followers of Christ. The cost of discipleship is indeed heavy. Yes, Jesus calls us to a different way of living. Giving us an opportunity to be transformed and become more like him.

I pray that God will renew our trust in him so that we may walk in the way of righteousness. I pray, in the words of the hymn we sang before the Gospel, that God will Breathe on us and fill us with life anew. That we may love what God loves and do what God does until our will is one with his to do and to endure.

Amen