

Sermon for Sunday 16 February 2025

**Jeremiah 17: 5 – 10; 1 Corinthians 15: 12 – 20;
Luke 6: 17 – 26**

The Beatitudes – Luke’s version

We live in tumultuous and troubling times. President Trump has continued to dominate the news this week. He’d already made a start on tariffs and international aid. This week it seems his focus has been more on international politics. Over the last few weeks, since his inauguration, it feels as if the world has changed. European leaders are struggling to catch up – or even to make sense of what is happening. Suddenly we seem to be in a world where power is wielded by a few strong and wealthy individuals rather than by our long-established institutions of government and co-operation. We shall doubtless see in the coming weeks and months how much of this is posturing, and how much is reality.

Meanwhile, nearer to home in Germany, with elections coming up next week, we see also the resurgence of support for the far right, especially amongst young men. And here in the UK, despite our new government, the gap between rich and poor does not seem to be diminishing.

Luke’s Beatitudes stand out against all of this – a bit like solid rocks in a rough sea. I wonder if you noticed that Luke’s version is not quite as you might have expected? We’re all probably more used to Matthew’s, which is the one we read on Remembrance Sunday.

Jesus has just chosen the twelve, and has come down to the plain, surrounded by his disciples. A great crowd have gathered – of the mentally and physically sick. They’re all struggling to get close to him, because just to touch him is to be healed, such is the power coming from him. Jesus looks at the crowd of downtrodden desperate people, and he speaks to the disciples. “Blessed are the poor, the hungry, those who weep, those who are excluded, those who are defamed because they

follow Jesus. And woe to those who are rich, full and happy.” Here, it’s not the spiritually poor who are blessed, as Matthew has it, or those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, but the actually poor and hungry and downtrodden.

Jesus’ words here in Luke are perhaps more radical and more uncomfortable for us than Matthew’s because we are not, on the whole, poor, hungry or persecuted. So how do we read them. Do they simply condemn us for being – on the whole - comfortable? Should we feel guilty?

I suggest we need to read them in the light of Mary’s words in the ‘Magnificat’ which comes just a few chapters earlier in Luke’s Gospel. She exults in what God has done for her and for all of humanity through the child she will bear: “He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich empty away.” Seen in the context of eternity, the victory

is already won. God has acted and will act to reverse all that is unjust in our present world. Despite appearances, God is firmly in charge and he has a plan. There will be a reckoning. Jesus is firmly on the side of the poor, the marginalised, the people no one wants, those who are different. The bullies are not going to win in the end. Those who are poor, sick and downtrodden now are blessed because in God’s kingdom they will be filled with good things.

So how do we respond?

Firstly, by holding onto our faith in Jesus and the hope of the Magnificat and the Beatitudes. They are our solid rocks in the sea of confusion and change.

Secondly, we can take courage from the example of others. People like Bishop Mariann Budde, who is not afraid of speaking truth to power. It was Bishop Mariann who urged Donald Trump to be merciful. She talked about unity being founded on honesty and humility, she talked

about Jesus' example. She said "In the name of our God, I ask you to have mercy upon the people in our country who are scared now." She directly mentioned gay, lesbian and transgender children, migrants and asylum seekers.¹ She has since, of course, been reviled and threatened by some. I've just discovered she's written a book called 'How we learn to be brave'. I'm going to read it!

Another example I've come across recently is Alexei Navalny, the former opposition leader in Russia who died a year ago today in a Russian prison camp. His diaries have just been published, and they reveal just how much he was sustained by his Christian faith. Even in prison he still fasted during Lent. And the Beatitudes were especially important to him. He learned them by heart – not only in Russian, but also in English, French and Latin. In one of his diary entries he says "My job is to seek the kingdom of God and

¹ The Guardian, accessed 14 February 2025

his righteousness, and leave it to Jesus and the rest of his family to deal with everything else..."²

Two extraordinarily brave people – not afraid to live out their faith whatever the consequences might be. Examples to encourage and challenge us in these challenging times.

I'd like to finish by taking us back to the words of today's collect, which I thought was extraordinarily apt.

"Almighty God, who alone can bring order to the unruly wills and passions of sinful humanity; give to your people grace so to love what you command and to desire what you promise, that, among the many changes of this world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found."

Amen

² Church Times article 14 February 2025

Revd Diana Young