

**Dorset South and West Circuit
Service for Sunday 13 February 2022 by Tony Boyden**

Theme: It is our duty and our joy

St Luke's account of Jesus's Sermon on the Plain paints a challenging and very clear picture as to how we should contribute to the building of the Kingdom, a place where all are equal in God's sight.

Call to worship : We are blessed to be here today and to be part of God's family. We are blessed that God is with us, Let us enjoy his blessing as we worship. **Amen**

Hymn: Singing the Faith 720 We turn to you, O God of every nation.

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| <p>1. We turn to you, O God of every nation,
giver of good and origin of life;
your love is at the heart of all creation,
your hurt is people's pain in war and death</p> <p>2. We turn to you, that we might be forgiven
for crucifying Christ on earth again;
we know that we have never wholly striven
to share with all the promise of your reign.</p> <p>3. Free every heart from haughty self-reliance,
our ways of thought inspire with simple grace;
break down among us barriers of defiance;
speak to the soul of all the human race.</p> | <p>4. On all who rise on earth for right relations
we pray the light of love from hour to hour.
Grant wisdom to the leaders of the nations,
the gift of carefulness to those in power</p> <p>5. Teach us, Good Lord, to serve the needs of
others;
help us to give and not to count the cost.
Unite us all to live as sisters, brothers;
defeat our Babel with your Pentecost!</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Fred Kaan (1929-2009)</i></p> |
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A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

Father, we praise and thank you
for the lives you have given us to lead here in your wonderful world.
We are grateful for home and family, work, school and play.
We are glad to be able to witness to you in word
and in deed here and now.
Yet our hope isn't for this life only,
We thank you for the hope you have given us in the hereafter,
that we shall be raised to be with you
and with one another evermore. **Amen.**

A prayer of confession

Merciful God, when we are enticed by the ways of the world, forgetting you, denying your love, **forgive us.**
When we give in to the negativity and pessimism of much of the world, **forgive us.**
When our trust in your grace and love is lacking, preventing us from leaving our comfort zone and serving you, **forgive us.**
When we turn away from your promise of eternal life, having no hope beyond this life, **forgive us.**

When our hearts prompt us to act in devious ways, forgetting your knowledge of us,
forgive us.

Generous God, grant us your forgiveness and by the power of your Spirit, strengthen and empower us to follow your way. **Amen**

Reading: Luke 6 verses 17-26 (NRSV version)

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. They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

Then he looked up at his disciples and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh". "Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

"But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation". "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 . "Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophet

Reflection

Our Gospel reading, Jesus's 'Sermon on the Plain' is addressed to the disciples as much as to the crowd. He begins to unfold what it will mean to be his follower while still grappling with the clamour of a world in need.

Jesus is both outspoken and challenging. He contrasts the poor and then the rich. Notice, unlike in Matthew's Gospel, he doesn't say "blessed are the poor in spirit." He is much more direct than that. He says: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled." No escaping that. More challenging still is when he starts to attack the rich: "Woe to you who are rich for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now for you shall be hungry."

Tough words which hit you straight-on!. Symbolically, Jesus is speaking on the plain, not, as in Matthew's Gospel, up a mountain. It's as if they are all on the one level- all equal before God. Everyone is called to account for the way they live and the way they share all that has been given to them

Jesus words are still a challenge today. How can we hear this passage and ignore the vast and disturbing inequalities and deprivation and destitution we witness across the world, and to a lesser but still significant degree in the UK? Even on our own doorstep there is homelessness; families living on the breadline and wondering how to afford to feed their kids properly; wondering how to pay the fuel bills and so on. Human need, poverty, suffering challenges us. We're faced with moral dilemmas particularly when we contrast it with the buoyant market for glamorous and expensive consumer goods. It causes us to reflect on the gifts and resources we have and how they should be shared.

In one sense Jesus is not attacking a particular class of people. Rather he is articulating an important truth- that we are all equal before God. We are all in some ways rich and in some ways poor and we are all called to account. Being blessed means to realise that

everything in our lives is a gift from God. We are actually interdependent. We need one another and we need God.

We should strive after greater social equality and thank goodness we have long abandoned the complacent thinking behind ‘the ‘rich man at his castle and the poor man at his gate’ As a church we should constantly be aware that in physical terms the world is a fractured “level place”. We need a genuine ‘levelling up’ agenda (to coin a phrase). But we should not imagine for one minute that riches, wealth, self-interest and plenty by themselves will ultimately bring blessing.

The Gospels point to a different meaning of gift; the means by which we give our joy, our attention, our understanding, our knowledge, our humour, our compassion. That way we are giving our humanity and we enrich the person who receives the gift and also ourselves if it is given in the spirit of Christian love. Then our giving reflects God’s generosity and it is at the heart of what unites us as an interdependent and flourishing community. Similarly if we deny someone the chance to give something to us then we disempower them. It is the worst kind of poverty. It makes us dependent like a beggar. Jesus came into the world to release in all of us the grace and gifts of God.

We see that time and time again when people who seemingly have least still want to give. In so-called ‘under-developed’ societies all the village community comes together to bring whatever talents or physical gifts they have to help a member to build a house. St Paul makes clear, too, in his first letter to the church at Corinth; the need for all members to share their talents and skills as the body of Christ. The message of every church, writ large, should be “We understand that everyone is equal not only in the eyes of God but in the eyes of humanity.”

Our role in building the Kingdom – as we move towards realising that vision- needs each one of us to grow together as a giving and receiving and receiving and giving community. In other words, so that all of us can witness and share fully in God’s abundant gifts. Our final hymn wonderfully captures this sentiment. Amen.

Hymn: Singing the Faith 244 Blest are the pure in heart,

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| 1. Blest are the pure in heart,
they shall see our God:
the secret of the Lord is theirs;
their soul is Christ’s abode | 2. The Lord, who left the heavens
our life and peace to bring,
to dwell on earth in lowliness,
our pattern and our King. |
| 3. Still to the lowly soul
he does himself impart,
and for his dwelling and his throne
chooses the pure in heart | 4. Lord, we your presence seek,
a vision of your face;
give us a pure and lowly heart,
a temple of your grace. |

John Keble (1792-1866) & William John Hall

Prayers of intercession

Lord, we pray for those whose hope is for this life only, especially those who are facing their own death, or that of a loved one. Enlighten them, we pray; pierce their darkness with rays from heaven that they might find faith and see beyond.

We pray also for those whose faith has taken a blow due to circumstances – those who have fallen sick, or become unemployed, or who suffer the pain of broken relationships. Amid all their loss, Lord, remind them of the promise of resurrection, and the reality of lesser

resurrections that point the way to it – restoration of health, new opportunities, and the rekindling of love – all leading to rebirth of hope.

We bring before you a world of people with past regrets, bowed down by concerns in the present, and fears for the future. Help us all, we pray, to be uplifted by the reality of Christ's resurrection, which leads to a bright tomorrow beyond all our tomorrows.

Amen.

Hymn: Singing the Faith 409 Let us build a house where love can dwell

1. Let us build a house where love can dwell
and all can safely live,
a place where saints and children tell
how hearts learn to forgive,
Both of hopes and dreams and visions,
rock of faith and vault of grace;
here the love of Christ shall end divisions;
*All are welcome,
all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.*
2. Let us build a house where prophets speak.
and words are strong and true,
where all God's children dare to seek
to dream God's reign anew.
Here the cross shall stand as witness
and as symbol of God's grace;
here as one we claim the faith of Jesus
All are welcome etc.
3. Let us build a house where love is found
in water, wine and wheat:
a banquet hall on holy ground
where peace and justice meet.
Here the love of God, through Jesus,
is revealed in time and space;
as we share in Christ the feast that frees us:
All are welcome etc.
4. Let us build a house where hands will reach
beyond the wood and stone
to heal and strengthen, serve and teach,
and live the Word they've known.
Here the outcast and the stranger
bear the image of God's face;
let us bring an end to fear and danger:
All are welcome etc.
5. Let us build a house where all are named,
their songs and visions heard
and loved and treasured, taught and claimed
as words within the Word.
Built of tears and cries and laughter,,
prayers of faith and songs of grace,
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter.
All are welcome etc.

Marty Haugen (b 1950)

Blessing

Lord, as we step into this week,
may we cultivate our relationship with you.
Help us not only to recognise how blessed we are,
but also show us ways that your blessing
can overflow to others through us. **Amen.**