

Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> February – being aware of our need of God

Jeremiah 17:5-10

1 Corinthians 15:12-20

Luke 6:17-26

One of the most famous stories that Jesus told was that of the Good Samaritan. I am sure you know it well. The story of a man attacked on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho and left for dead; the priest and the Levite walking past him and the Samaritan – the hated foreigner – stopping to help.

And you probably also know that the story was told in response to a question from a lawyer – an expert in the early books of the Bible – the Torah; so a theologian, someone who took his religion seriously. This lawyer rightly said to Jesus that we are called to love God and love our neighbour as ourselves. He then asked Jesus the question – who is my neighbour.

After telling the famous story Jesus asked him – who was a neighbour to the man who was attacked. The answer of course was self evident. But it left the lawyer pondering two things. First neighbourliness is not limited by cultural, ethnical or any other boundary, and second that part of neighbourliness is accepting that we might be the ones who need help, who need others to be neighbourly to us.

It might seem a little odd to talk about that story when it wasn't the gospel reading for today. But the reason for doing so is that it illustrates well that part of living God's way is to have a desire to live in community where we are willing not only to offer but also to accept help from each other and also from God.

Sometimes we would rather have the view that we can cope on our own; that we do not need help or assistance; that we are self sufficient. I am well aware that I often fall into this trap, and it can lead to all sorts of unhealthy and destructive issues. I think that such an attitude is caused by a misplaced sense of pride and maybe self importance.

It seems to me that in the beatitudes reading which was today's gospel it is this attitude that Jesus is highlighting as needing to change.

Perhaps we are more familiar with the version of the beatitudes that are in Matthew's gospel in the Sermon on the Mount. There are clear differences between the Luke beatitudes and those in Matthew. Luke writes – *Blessed are you who are poor* whereas Matthew has – *Blessed are the poor in spirit*. And again Luke has – *Blessed are you who are hungry now* while in Matthew we find – *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness*

On the surface they appear to give very different messages, but are they really so different?

Looking at the Luke passage for the moment, it simply cannot be true that Jesus is saying there is something about being hungry or poor or being hated or reviled or excluded that is blessed per se. Such things go against all that God is, and all that he wants of people. I think rather that what Jesus is saying is that people who are poor, or hungry, or excluded or in another way on the margins of society will be those who are more aware of their need. In other words those who are less self sufficient and more likely to be prepared to accept help and assistance. And as such they are more blessed because they will also be more aware of their need of God.

This has much the same emphasis as the interpretation Matthew gives. Recently a group of us in the Parish were studying the Beatitudes (actually the version in Matthew), and we saw that a different translation of "poor in spirit" might be "those who know their need of God". Blessed are those who know their need of God. In other words, to live as God wants us to live; to have the fulness of life that Jesus promised; to be truly blessed we need to have God with us. We need his help, his strength, his comfort, his presence. Life without God is not fulfilling. A self sufficient and proudly arrogant independent spirit is not the way to abundant life.

The message of Jeremiah in our Old Testament reading says much the same. *Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord*. Trusting in God means that we are accepting his help, acknowledging that we cannot live without him.

So what's all this got to do with how we live today, with our anxieties and concerns; with the things we are facing up to and trying to live with. Health issues, financial problems, family relationships, bereavement as well as the wider global issues such as climate change, refugees and world poverty.

Simply that we are deluding ourselves if we think we can solve all the problems on our own without the help and support of God. And not only deluding ourselves, but cutting ourselves off from the blessing that could be ours if we trust in him.

Accepting our need of God, then, is not a weakness. It is simply admitting we want to live God's way – the way he always intended. We want to be fully human and as such blessed by God. And it may be of course that God's help – as it often does – comes in the form of help from someone else, another human being. This is the way God acts.

Self sufficiency then may seem to be a strength in human terms, but in the topsy turvy upside down world of the Kingdom of God that Jesus talks about it is a weakness. Blessing comes when we know our need of God.