

St Brandon's 30.10.22 Ephesians 1:11-end; Luke 6: 20-31

## All Saints

One of my vivid memories of childhood is my Dad waking up and sneezing loudly, at least six times, every morning.

And we'd all shout, from every corner of the house, 'Bless you!'

These days if we say 'bless you, bless them', we're usually referring to a baby, old lady or pet!

**Blessing**, I suggest, is far more important than a throwaway comment...

And Durham Diocese has the strapline:

***Blessing our Communities in Jesus' name for the transformation of all***

Our first reading describes the astonishing inheritance we have as those who receive, live and share God's blessing. And just before the today's passage, Paul greets the Ephesian Christians like this:

*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,*

*To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus....*

*<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,*

*who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing....*

Today, with our gospel reading as the focus, I want to consider how

***blessing*** is central to our identity as Christians, as saints, of today as we mark All Saints Day. And also to think how we ***participate in blessing***, as churches and individual disciples, in Jesus' name – for the *transformation* of all – what might that mean? In some Bible versions, the word *blessed* is rather unhelpfully translated 'happy'. God's blessing, about which Jesus is speaking, doesn't match our prevailing view of happiness, indeed we may experience

blessing most deeply when life is really tough, as Jesus says here in Luke 6.

God's blessing comes through

**poverty, hunger, sorrow, exclusion and rejection**

-hardly an advert for the Christian faith!

Yet the recognition of **poverty, hunger, sorrow, exclusion and rejection**, is increasingly relevant in today's world and on our doorsteps, in our communities: this is a powerful reminder of where God's priorities lie.

And unlike in Matthew's parallel version of these 'Beatitudes', there's no spiritualisation here. Luke doesn't talk about being 'poor *in spirit*' or 'hungering *for righteousness*', virtuous as those qualities may be. No, in this passage Jesus tells it like it is: when we are poor and hungry, we are blessed.

Is this, I wonder, because acute need drives us to depend on God more directly and immediately?

Which is not an argument to allow the injustices and inequalities in our world to continue, but quite the opposite – it is a call to generosity, campaigning, living out God's values, in order that others may receive God's blessing. And lest we think this is a one-way process- we in leafy Brancepeth giving to our less fortunate neighbours, let us remember that we may be materially rich, yet poor in other ways.

I chatted with a friend who visited Uganda with her church and shared her memories of the community where they'd gone to help with building an orphanage. She said,

*We strolled in with our money, education and expertise.*

*By our standards they had little money, scant education and no building qualifications, but they had faith, real faith.*

*They worshipped Jesus joyfully, they relied on the Holy Spirit to guide them and they knew that everything they had was a gift from God. They also knew they were blessed and they shared God's blessing with us.*

*We received far, far more than we gave on that trip.*

I wonder if you've encountered Christians with faith like that, and if so, where? It seems to me that faith in Jesus can be most contagious in places where people are not particularly wealthy or cushioned against tough reality, but in communities where people travel together through the tough times, weeping and laughing, knowing they need each other and God. When we open ourselves to receive God's blessing, when we dare to step beyond what is known and safe and to trust God, then we receive and share God's blessing.

It's clear that Jesus *expected* his followers to be in risky places, because the first verse we read says:

*He looked up at his disciples and said,*

***Blessed are you who are poor.....hungry and so on...***

Jesus looks at them all, not just the twelve who became apostles, but everyone following him, which includes *us* two thousand years later.

It's not an easy call, to follow Jesus and live by God's priorities, it's the way of the cross.

But it's also the way of the Kingdom of God, the way of love, hope and peace, bringing joy, laughter, treasure in heaven, eternal life in and through Christ - the greatest blessings we can ever ask for or imagine.

I could end there, but.... Immediately after the blessings, Jesus issues three warnings: the 'woes'.

Whilst we tend to trivialize this word: '*Woe is me!*' we must *heed the wisdom of Christ*. Living in our affluent, materialistic society, it's vital to reflect and be honest about our default tendencies - to ignore the needs of others, to put wealth and security ahead of God's priority for the poor, to seek human approval and favour.

I know I need to *heed the wisdom of Christ*.

One of Jesus' favourite sayings, which occurs in today's passage, is:

*'I say to you that listen'*

It used to be 'He who has ears to hear...' in the King James version.

***Do we have ears to hear what Jesus is saying to us through these warnings?***

And does our hearing translate into the choices we make, in our daily lives?

Because unless it does, we will not experience the fullness of God's blessing.

One story made me laugh this week, amidst much grave news.

A government minister, who shall remain nameless, was the subject of a tale told by an environmental activist, who campaigns daily outside the offices of DEFRA, dressed up as a badger. She's not there to thank the staff as they arrive, but to challenge and protest. The minister might well prefer her not to be there, yet every day he greets the badger politely, acknowledging her presence and opinions...I wonder if it even makes him rethink some policies? The journalist telling this story wondered whether our treatment of people dressed as badgers is a fundamental mark of character...?

It's a silly story, but I hope you get my point.

Our daily behaviour *will* demonstrate our values, and do so most clearly in

relation to those who *aren't* our friends or allies.

The activist put her beliefs into action by being there every day. The minister showed courtesy towards someone who the media would label an enemy.

Perhaps we might ask ourselves what we do habitually, which demonstrates what we believe, and to reflect on what that shows?

We have been blessed by God who has called us to be his beloved children, through Christ. We will receive a glorious inheritance of blessing.

Between our redeemed past and our promised future, let us live as those who heed Christ's wisdom, dare to trust God by living generously and even riskily, and so receive and share God's blessing day by day, wherever we are, for the transformation of all.