

# Open Your Eyes ...

*... what is God showing you today?*

---

*A sermon given on the Third Sunday before Lent - 16th February 2025, by the Mission Priest, the Revd Eileen Connolly, in Beverley Minster*

*Luke 6:17-26*

Challenging words today!

I've been challenged on a number of points this week: on Wednesday, I went to watch an artist, Martin Joseph, and he was at the Parkway Cinema; he was on stage there; I remember watching him when I first became a Christian in my 20s; he was very much like a prophet then; thirty years later, he's still the prophet; he's still the angry young man; he's still the man who rails against the injustice of the world. I started to think, What have I done with my life? Every now and again, you get a wake-up call and I think today in this reading, it's a bit of a wake-up call - maybe a call to action.

Jesus spoke these words, we call them the Beatitudes. He'd just picked his disciples and he was starting off in his three-year ministry. In Luke, he comes down to the level of the people, and he's speaking to the people, but he is speaking to his disciples, really. If he's speaking to his disciples, then he's speaking to us as his church today. Strikes me, his very presence was life-changing for many, because it says 'Power was coming out of him' - can you imagine that without even speaking, the power of God was bringing healing and deliverance, forgiveness, restoration? (I imagine if I'd been one of those disciples that had been chosen, I'd have been well chuffed. I'd have been thinking, wow, privileged, excited; what's going to happen? Look at what's happening with the people. I've been thinking, he's chosen me. Life is going to be great.) And then he speaks and his words matter. What does he speak about? He speaks about those people who are blessed by God. Let's just take that word blessed and look at it a little bit more closely - it comes from the Greek word makarios - it doesn't mean that if you do such and such a thing, you will be blessed - for example, if you are poor, then you will come into the Kingdom of God by being poor. Rather, it refers in a theological way to a sense of one 'standing with God', perhaps saying that these people are especially close to the Lord.

Now, Matthew has his own 'sermon on the mount' and it often shadows this shorter gospel of Luke. In Matthew, you've got nine blessings and no woes; in Luke, you've got four blessings and four woes or warnings for those who seek to follow him. The first group of people that Jesus marks off as especially favoured by God are the poor. Matthew waters it down and spiritualises a bit by saying, blessed are those who are poor in spirit - but Luke doesn't pull any punches. And as Jesus looked around in the crowd, he would have seen people who were rich and people who were poor. But it was those who were poor, who had no one else but God, who lived in relationship with Him. The next group are those who weep, those who mourn, those people who have known loss and suffering and have not kept it hidden; then, those who are hungry; in Luke's gospel, it means physically you have nothing to eat - Matthew spiritualises it to mean something else. Then in the middle between the blessings and the woes, there's this hinge of those who are excluded, hated, reviled, and mistreated because of their faith in Christ - they too are a special category.

And I wonder, what is it about these groups of people that transports them into the very presence of God? Why was it that in his first main speech in Luke, Jesus said, 'Don't look at the power. Look at the ones who are poor'? Is it that in their poverty, in their loss, and in their pain, they have the potential to experience something which those of us who are rich, comfortable, or secure will never experience? That when all you have is God, he becomes more than you will ever need. Is it that your poverty, your need, your pain, and your suffering offers you the opportunity to reorient your life towards the God who heals, restores, forgives those who ask, seek, and knock? When you do this, you see differently; you see the Kingdom of God; you allow him to come in and rule and reign; you take yourself off the throne of your life and allow him to enter - in a way that when your bank account is healthy, your belly is full and your social calendar is 'chocker', you most probably don't experience.

I wonder what it is. I think it's about seeing that when you are in need, you see God. When you are not in need, it's as if your eyes are closed to his presence. The message of Jesus is so radical because it turns on its head the way we value people and possessions in our society. God includes those we tend to exclude - he counts as rich and blessed those we tend to see as poor and outsiders. It poses us a real challenge: how we see people, personally and to us as a church. If this is our God, what are we like as a church? If Jesus came to show us what God is like and his teaching has authority, and this gospel has the potential to turn upside down our world, if this is so, the challenge is to ask, 'How am I living at this gospel? How am I following after Jesus today?' Or am I the one to whom Jesus is saying, *'Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation? Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry; if you're laughing now, you will mourn and weep; when all speak well of you, woe to you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.'* - a warning that if we are not careful, wealth has the power to isolate us from God and from the rest of the human community. Perhaps what we need to ask today is, who are the ones who are poor and mourning and excluded in our community, and how are we showing the love of God to them? We think about the warnings against riches and think, is Luke saying that we're doomed if we're rich. But he writes about Zacchaeus, who was very rich, and he met Jesus, and it did turn his life upside down.

How then shall we live in the light of these words of Jesus? What is our part to play in the mission of God in our families, our communities, our Church, and our world? We have our [Minster] vision, 'Vision 28' where we seek to make a difference. My role as Mission Priest [involves] looking at how do we reach out, how do we serve our neighbourhoods; what is ours to do at Beverley Minster for such a time as this? How can we open our eyes to the needs and hear what God is saying? How can we partner with God with what he's actually already doing - he's always at work in the world?

The Beatitudes are not the doctrine of Jesus to his disciples, they're a call to action - and so too for us today. They're the words of Jesus calling us to action in 2025 in Beverley. Perhaps it starts with each one of us asking God to open our eyes, open our eyes to the needs around us and when we pray that, we spend some time noticing what God is drawing our attention to in our own lives, in the world around us. Once we have noticed, it's us asking 'What are you saying and what do you want me to do about it?' This is where the church family comes in - we need to take time to discuss what we feel God is saying to us and discern together what the next step is.

So what is God speaking to you about? What are the things, the people, the situations, the problems that really resonate with you. We each have a part to play in the mission of Beverley

Minster, and we each have a part that only us can play. So what is God drawing to your attention?

I found by John Mark Comer the 'New Beatitudes', which I thought would be interesting to finish with. They say:

*Blessed are the down and out, the unemployed, the underemployed, those without qualifications, those who are spiritually simple, who really have very little to offer because they are in the Kingdom of God.*

*Blessed are the sad, the depressed, those grieving the death of a loved one, the failure of a marriage, another miscarriage, the racism, sexism of our nation, because one day God himself will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*

*Blessed are the quiet, the shy, the socially awkward, the uncool, the badly dressed, the people with only six friends on Facebook, because one day they will be free from the tyrannies journey of what others think of them, and they will take up their rule as king and queen over God's world.*

*Blessed are the messed up, those who just can't get it together, the addict, the mentally unstable, the overweight, those from abusive homes, for they will one day be so full of God's life that they won't know where to put it all.*

*Blessed are all the Christians in a post-Christian culture that is hostile to all they believe. Even though they are made fun of, looked down on as stupid and weak and behind the times, they get to share in the cross-shaped life of Jesus and the Kingdom of God.*

Let's just take a moment to respond in our hearts to what the Holy Spirit may be saying to you and me today.

# Reading Text

## Luke 6:17-26

<sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. <sup>19</sup> And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them. <sup>20</sup> Then he looked up at his disciples and said: 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. <sup>21</sup> Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. 'Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. <sup>22</sup> 'Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. <sup>23</sup> Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. <sup>24</sup> 'But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. <sup>25</sup> '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. <sup>26</sup> 'Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.