

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson

13th February 2022 - Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings (Year C): 1st: Jeremiah 17:5-8. Psalm: 1. 2nd: 1 Cor 15:12. 16-20. Gospel: Luke 6:17. 20-26.

A world turned upside down. Is that today's world? To the people hearing the words of Jesus we have just heard, they would think it was Jesus who was doing that. Do we not occasionally sing the *Patrick Appleford* hymn in which each last line speaks of 'turning the world upside down.'

Jesus pronounces a series of 'beatitudes' followed by a contrasting set of woes. Luke's beatitudes are similar yet different in some ways from Matthew, and each is balanced with a warning. Who are the blessed, the happy in this vision of God's kingdom? It is the poor, the hungry, those who weep, those who are despised, hated and rejected by the world.

In contrast, says Jesus, "Alas," woe to you who are rich, are full, who laugh, who are spoken well of by the world. It all appears to turn the accepted world order on its head. And it certainly would have been against the expectations of those who heard it.

Much conventional religious teaching in Jesus time contained the message that people's situation in the world reflected whether or not they found favour with God. As so obviously those who were rich and powerful, those who lived lives of plenty must know God's favour. Those who had nothing were out of favour with God and were being punished.

So it is easy to see why Jesus' teaching would have been regarded by the religious authorities as subversive. But is Jesus describing a world turned upside down? Or is he depicting the way in which an upside down world is turned the right side up?

Luke begins the ministry of Jesus with the sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth, as we had a couple of weeks ago, in which he announced that he had come to bring good news to the poor, to set the down-trodden free. Even before that Mary's Magnificat proclaims that the Lord has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.

Jesus' birth is announced not to the rich and powerful, but to shepherds, among the outcasts of society. All this sets Jesus proclamation of the gospel in the context of a world in which God had always intended that the lowly, those disregarded by the world, should have a valued place in God's kingdom.

In essence the gospel is akin to the 1st reading from Jeremiah and to the Psalmist. Jeremiah poses a stark contrast. To rely on self, some other human being, power-politics or military might, is bound to disappoint as surely as a bush in the desert is doomed to wither and die. To trust in the goodness and faithfulness of God is certain to bear fruit, just as will a tree planted in a favoured, well-watered spot.

Jeremiah is speaking at a period of great political instability; Israel's leaders tended to look for military support from within or around the nation. Jeremiah is adamant that the solution to life's problems (military, political, and social ones included) lies the personal sphere of trust in and loyalty to God. All picked up in the Psalm.

Jesus is speaking of a kingdom in which God's intentions for the world are restored. Things are put back as God means them to be, not so much overturned as put back the right way up. So Jesus calls us not just to sit back and wait for it to happen at some time. He calls us to work for it now, every time we pray thy kingdom come.

The best commentary on these beatitudes is Jesus' own life. In the course of his life he experienced poverty, not only the poverty of deprivation, but the poverty of standing alone among the crowds, the poverty of total reliance on his Father. He experienced hunger, not just the hunger that can be answered by bread, food; but the hunger that can only be satisfied by doing what is right. He had reason to weep

and mourn, not only at the loss of a dear friend but at the lost opportunities of his own people. Jesus was no stranger to being held up as a clown for the amusement of all; he knew the experience of rejection, betrayal and abandonment.

The reason for the woes is not given here, but may be sought in other parts of Luke's gospel. It was their attitude to others that condemned them. God looks on the heart.

During the course of this year of Luke we shall get the answers to the woes in some parables that only Luke records, esp. the rich man and poor Lazarus. Justice, compassion, care for **everyone** are at the very heart of God's kingdom.

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