



SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY
13 February 2022

Disciples are expectant in the sense that they take it for granted that there is always something about to break through from the Master, the Teacher, something about to burst through the ordinary and uncover a new light on the landscape. — Rowan Williams

GATHERING IN

Call to Worship—Psalm 1 from *Psalms for Praying* by Nan Merrill

Blessed are those
who walk hand in hand with goodness,
who stand beside virtue,
who sit in the seat of truth;
For their delight is in the Spirit of Love,
and in Love's heart they dwell
day and night.
They are like trees planted by
streams of water,
that yield fruit in due season,
and their leaves flourish;
And in all that they do, they give life.
The unloving are not so;
they are like dandelions which
the wind blows away.

Opening Prayer

Holy Spirit, Source of eternal love,
come to me this day.

By the waters of life I rest.
Quench my spirit
with your grace and truth.

My roots sink down into your mystery.
Ground me in you,
hold me steady in every storm.

When I flee from your presence
or seek to go my own way:
Draw me back with your pure love.

My heart turns to you,
Jesus my teacher, companion and friend.
Lead me to everlasting life.
Amen.

ENCOUNTERING THE LIVING WORD

After calling the fishers as disciples, the Gospel gives the rest of the chapter over to Jesus' inaugural teaching. The portion you will read today puts Jesus in the midst of a large crowd. But notice he will turn to his disciples—those who have left everything behind to follow—for this lesson. Listen with the ear of your heart for the living Word.

Scripture Reading—Luke 6:17–26

Jesus came down with the twelve 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 Jesus 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 prophets."

Personal Reflection

- What word or few words stand out for you at this time?
- What might the Spirit be saying to you in them? How do they speak into what is happening in your life right now?

After gathering together the twelve, Jesus begins to teach them about God and God's vision for the world. This is the true definition of what it means to be a disciple—a student of the master.

We, too, are called to be disciples—students of Jesus—for the Christian life is made up of life-long learning. Given that we are created by God and made in the image of God, we might view discipleship as being a reminder of who we are. Rather than being a stretch toward that which is beyond ourselves—like an external idea of perfectionism or moral high ground—growth in the Christian life takes us deeper into who we have been created to be.

That said, even the most studious among us may find being a student of Jesus challenging from time to time. The process itself is necessarily like my struggle to transition from mathematics to algebra. Some of you might remember the year when math goes from digits and definitive answers to letters which denote variables. (2xs, 3ys and parenthesis) What?! This isn't English class... how did those letters get in there?!

In a similar way, discipleship involves being jarred out of our usual perspectives and previously obtained knowledge. In order to mature and grow, there must come a shock to the system that—if we let it—can plunge the roots of our faith deeper into God and cause our love to branch out in new and fruitful ways. Today's Gospel reading attempts to do just that—jar us out of our comfortable position—though we may not recognise it at first.

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.

The beatitudes, as they are called, might be so familiar they have lost their edginess. We may hear in them only consolation—that is, hopeful words when we and those we love are poor, in need, or sorrowful. But the teachings of Jesus were *and remain* prophetic, revolutionary and instructive. So, unlike Matthew's version that only includes the blessings, Luke goes on to pair each blessing with a corresponding woe.

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.

One might question his technique here. I mean, is this *really* the message Jesus wants to convey at the start of his ministry? It is so unlike the spin and positive announcements we see from our leaders as state and national elections loom on the horizon.

Well, in short... yes.

For in this teaching, the Gospel makes the trajectory of the Christian life and the kind of community we are called to be abundantly clear. As a septuagenarian friend recently said to me, "If I am growing increasingly poor as I move towards death, then I am heading in the right direction."

Jesus' teachings are unambiguous and uncompromising. They call into question many of the views and priorities that are promoted by our culture and, for this reason, they can be offensive. It is this offense, this rattling to the core, that has the most to teach us—if we (like my septuagenarian friend) have the courage to sit with the rattling and let it speak.

As an example, we might think of the responses following the appearance of Brittany Higgins and Grace Tame on the Press Club last week. Theirs was a no-holds-barred presentation. They expressed freely their disappointment, anger and fed-upness at the abusive systems that are sustained by silence and inaction, especially on the part of government leaders. Many felt unnerved if not deeply offended by Brittany Higgins and Grace Tame.

Yet these two women are in good company. For as Jesus taught and many throughout history have shown, speaking truth to power and standing in solidarity with the wounded and marginalised usually creates a stir. So, might it be that in our strong reactions to this stirring exists a seed that leads to growth? Rather than hardening our hearts with judgement or avoiding change with a quick dismissal, might we hear the Spirit of Christ speak to us in the upset, the rub, and even the offense?

Another difference between Matthew and Luke is the location of the teaching we heard today. In an attempt to identify Jesus with Moses, and in particular his reception of the commandments from God on Mount Sinai, Matthew places Jesus on a mountain for his inaugural lesson.

By contrast, Luke makes a point of situating Jesus on the plain. Luke's Jesus is *among and with*. We see him giving instruction *for life in the midst of life*. We might say Luke's Jesus is on our level and perhaps even a little in our face. He does not remain at a distance but is always walking into homes, sitting at tables, moving alongside and generally interrupting things with heavenly wisdom.

I find this difference hopeful and encouraging. Sometimes we think being a student of Jesus is a special venture for particular people. It's for those who are trained, set apart, professionals. The average Joe or Jane, on the other hand, reads the Bible and has trouble making sense of it; it does nothing for us, if we attempt it at all.

Or we sit down to pray and get restless and distracted; it doesn't seem to accomplish anything besides causing us to remember all the things that are not getting done as we sit there. Consequently, we might wrongly conclude that "spiritual stuff" is not for us. We're happy to "leave it to the experts." But Luke's placement of Jesus among the disciples on the plain assures us this is absolutely not the case.

Christ meets us *right where we are* and each moment contains wisdom for those who choose to see and hear.

On Monday, the spirituality group for women gathered at the Botanic Garden to explore photography as a spiritual practice. After a brief introduction that included a few suggestions for how we might spend our time, the women were off in different directions.

For an hour, they sauntered through the gardens. I spied them kneeling down to look closely at a plant, pausing to take in the sky or watch a bird. They appeared to be simply enjoying the garden, but their recollections afterward confirmed they were being disciples. They beheld and heard the Word of God woven in and through all things.

When they returned to the circle, each one spoke of a unique experience and insight. None of the stories or revelations were the same. Same garden, same Spirit speaking. But each one of us received personalised wisdom and encouragement.

Friends, the true demise of the church throughout history has always been a lack of discipleship among its members. Leaders and people alike become malformed, rigid and unloving when we stop listening for and being formed in the Spirit of Christ. And just because we are in church and do churchy things does not mean we are being students of Jesus.

The need for those who seek to *know and live* the loving way of Jesus is great in our world. We have a significant contribution to make. And the renewal of genuine faith and Christian community always begins through return, the remembrance of who we are and why we've been created. So may we be like the trees in this morning's psalm, planted by the waters of life, expectant and drinking deeply of the Spirit's grace and love everywhere.

Song

"We are Dreamers"

written and performed by Pat Mayberry

We are dreamers daring believers in love, we are
We are creators justice, peace makers, we are, we are

And we will reach high like the tall trees to the sky
and with our hearts strong we'll sing this dreamer's song
May the darkness be our shelter
and the light an open door
cuz' there's a place of all our faithfulness
Of this, our hearts are sure.

We are healers passionate weavers of love, we are
We are lovers, blessed, beloved we are, we are

We are survivors, fighters, revivers of love, we are
Earth's sacred keepers, restless truth seekers, we are, we are

You can listen to this song on Spotify, Apple Music or by following this YouTube link:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6uD8uANY440>

RESPONDING WITH OUR LIVES

Prayers of the People

Author of Creation:

We dream with you of a world in which love and kindness put an end to divisions and hostilities. And so we pray for places where the threat of violence exists in the world, in our country, in our homes and in our hearts. Make us courageous disciples of your love, we pray: form us to be people after your own heart.

We dream with you of a world in which freedom and justice rule. And so we pray for ideologies that stifle and suppress, for places where people are excluded because of class, gender, identity or religion. We pray for the regrets, guilt and self-diminishment that inhibit full participation in life. Make us courageous disciples of your love, we pray: form us to be people after your own heart.

We dream with you of a world in which compassion and ennoblement have their way. And so we pray for attitudes and prejudices that hold others down or at arm's length, for systems that disempower those who are marginalised and disadvantaged, and for judgements that hide in the corners of our minds. Make us courageous disciples of your love, we pray: form us to be people after your own heart.

We dream with you of a world in which community and care thrive. And so we pray for St. Andrew's, for the challenges of being church in these pandemic years, for those in our community who are struggling physically, mentally or spiritually, and for our growing edges. Make us courageous disciples of your love, we pray: form us to be people after your own heart.

Blessing—Ann Siddall, Stillpoint Spirituality Centre and Faith Community

Sisters and brothers in Christ, we have a calling
to take the life and love we have celebrated here
out into our daily lives, our everyday world.

We are not called to go out as those who are perfect,
or who have all the answers,
but as those who share the struggle,
and have found a deep spring to quench our thirst.

So go from this community with the blessing of God,
the companionship of Jesus Christ,
and the guidance of the Spirit.

Amen.