

COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION
SUNDAY 13 FEBRUARY 2022- 3rd Sunday before Lent

COLLECT

Eternal God,
whose Son went among the crowds
and brought healing with his touch:
help us to show his love,
in your Church as we gather together,
and by our lives as they are transformed
into the image of Christ our Lord. Amen.

Psalm 1

- 1 Blessed are they who have not walked
in the counsel of the wicked, ◆
nor lingered in the way of sinners,
nor sat in the assembly of the scornful.
- 2 Their delight is in the law of the Lord ◆
and they meditate on his law day and night.
- 3 Like a tree planted by streams of water
bearing fruit in due season, with leaves that do not wither, ◆
whatever they do, it shall prosper.
- 4 As for the wicked, it is not so with them; ◆
they are like chaff which the wind blows away.
- 5 Therefore the wicked shall not be able to stand in the judgement, ◆
nor the sinner in the congregation of the righteous.
- 6 For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, ◆
but the way of the wicked shall perish.

1 Corinthians 15: 12-20

The Resurrection of the Dead

¹² Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; ¹⁴ and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. ¹⁵ We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ—whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. ¹⁷ If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have diedⁱⁿ in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.

Luke 6: 17-26

Jesus Teaches and Heals

¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. ¹⁹ And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

Blessings and Woes

²⁰ Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

'Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

²¹ 'Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.

'Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

²² 'Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you^[a] on account of the Son of Man. ²³ 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.

²⁴ 'But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.

²⁵ '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.

²⁶ 'Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

A Reflection from Hannah...

“She's the sort of woman who lives for others - you can tell the others by their hunted expression.”

C.S. Lewis

This quote comes from C.S. Lewis's creative (and often very funny) meditation on evil- *The Screwtape Letters*. It describes someone we have perhaps all met- male or female- that person who society might disparagingly call a 'do-gooder'. Society frequently lumps Christians into that category too; as well-meaning but inexhaustibly 'helpful' people who simply won't let others be and insist on imposing their kindness unrelentingly.

It's not a fair stereotype at all, but it does teach us something about how, as disciples of Christ, we can get it a bit wrong in the way we relate to others. The 'do-gooder' mentality, or, put more offensively 'The Messiah Complex' comes from the assumption that we are the ones with all the agency, all the charity, all the generosity, all the virtue; and we simply impose our ways on the world, for their own good. It is the trap of being there 'for' people, rather than 'with' people.

In our Gospel reading there is one verse that, subtly but powerfully, helps us to see the difference between that misguided assumption and the life that is to be found in Christ. Luke 6: 17 says '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.'

Jesus was level with the people. The teaching that follows are the Beatitudes- the most inspirational, radical, topsy-turvy articulation of how God's Kingdom differs to the ones we construct. But if we have a mental image of Jesus speaking them out, it's probably on a mountain-side, *above* his audience- because that's the way it is described in Matthew's account. Here though, we are reminded that Christ is one of us in a full and real sense. He is stood on a level place with a group of people embodying huge diversity- different stories, different cultural backgrounds, different beliefs, different experiences, different prospects. For each of them, a different beatitude will be the one that pierces their defences and stills their soul. The point though, is that Jesus is not set apart in any way. He is Immanuel- God *with* us. He lives a life of interdependence which affirms our common dignity. Likewise in our reading from Paul's letter to the Corinthians, the final words are 'Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died'. His utter solidarity with us goes beyond the grave and into eternity- there is nothing in the fullness of Christ that is not ours to inherit and live.

So as his disciples today, bearing his image, we pray too that we will be *with* people, rather than simply *for* people. As we ascribe dignity to another, as we recognise our shared humanity and commit to greeting everyone as an equal, we proclaim that the ground is level, we learn from the great diversity around us, and we become, like Jesus, a living beatitude.... rather than a hunter of people to 'help'!