

**Traditional Home service
Sunday 13th Feb**

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, who alone can bring order to the unruly wills and passions of sinful humanity: give your people grace so to love what you command and to desire what you promise, that, among the many changes of this world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.
Amen

PRAYER OF PENITENCE

Let us return to the Lord our God and say to him:

Father, we have sinned against heaven and against you. We are not worthy to be called your children. We turn to you again. Have mercy on us, bring us back to yourself as those who once were dead but now have life through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

PRAISE

Let everything be said and done in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God through Jesus Christ. Sing psalms, hymns and sacred songs:

Let us sing to God with thankful hearts.
Open our lips, Lord:
and we shall praise your name.

HYMN 1 (Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven)

READINGS - Jeremiah 17.5-10
1 Corinthians 15.12-20
Luke 6.17-26

TALK

CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.
Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Spend some time praying for our nation, our community and our families.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

HYMN 2 (For all the saint)

CONCLUSION

God the Father, by whose glory Christ was raised from the dead, strengthen you to walk with him in his risen life; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always.
Amen.

HYMNS TO USE

1 Praise, my soul, the King of heaven,
to his feet your tribute bring;
ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
who like you his praise should sing?
Alleluia, alleluia!
praise the everlasting King.

2 Praise him for his grace and favour
to our fathers in distress;
praise him, still the same as ever,
slow to blame and swift to bless;
Alleluia, alleluia!
glorious in his faithfulness.

3 Father-like, he tends and spares us,
All our hopes and fears he knows;
in his hands he gently bears us,
rescues us from all our foes:
Alleluia, alleluia!
widely as his mercy flows.

4 Angels, help us to adore him;
you behold him face to face;
sun and moon, bow down before him,
praise him all in time and space.
Alleluia, alleluia!
praise with us the God of grace.

1 For all the saints, who from their
labours rest;
who to the world by faith their Lord
confessed,
your name, O Jesus, be for ever blessed:
Alleluia, alleluia!

2 You were their rock, their fortress, and
their might;
you, Lord, their captain in the well-fought
fight,
and in the darkness their unfailing light.
Alleluia, alleluia!

3 So may your soldiers, faithful, true and
bold,
fight as the saints who nobly fought of old
and win with them the victor's crown of
gold.
Alleluia, alleluia!

4 One holy people, fellowship divine!
we feebly struggle, they in glory shine
in earth and heaven the saints in praise
combine:
Alleluia, alleluia!

5 And when the fight is fierce, the warfare
long,
faintly we hear the distant triumph-song;
and hearts are brave again, and arms are
strong.
Alleluia, alleluia!

6 The golden evening brightens in the
west:
soon, soon to faithful warriors comes
their rest,
the peaceful calm of paradise the
blessed.
Alleluia, alleluia!

7 But look! there breaks a yet more
glorious day;
saints all-triumphant rise in bright array
the king of glory passes on his way!
Alleluia, alleluia!

8 From earth's wide bounds, from
ocean's farthest shore
through gates of pearl, ascending, they
adore
the Father, Son and Spirit evermore:
Alleluia, alleluia!

Sermon - Matthew Beeby

A 1st world conundrum

The beatitudes. How we love the beatitudes today. By that I mean to say, how we all experience God's blessings. We talk about God's rich blessings to our lives. How has God blessed you and me?

We talk about family. Good marriages. Good children. Good grandchildren. Not perfect marriages, not perfect children, not perfect grandchild, but good people whom we dearly love.

We talk about the blessings of friends. Good friends.

Mostly, but not always, men have good guy-friends and women good gal-friends.

We have old friends and new friends, and friends bring such pleasure to life.

Blessings always bring pleasure to life. Other blessings? The list is endless: good health and a body that works. A good job to pay the bills, including dinner out. A good car that gets you to and from work.

A good church. A good community of people with like-minded values.

Good surroundings, beautiful countryside, the coast not too far away.

. A good God, who loves you in Jesus Christ who died on the cross for you. A good God who created all the blessings of life we enjoy.

A good century in which to be born. All of these things bring pleasure to life. In fact, we have beer commercials that advertise "a good life." The beer commercials show a group of men around a fire, after a day's fishing, opening a cold beer and mellowing out. "It's a good life," one of them will say.

In Biblical times, the opposite of blessings are curses or woes. If blessings bring happiness to life, curses or woes bring unhappiness. In other words, life can be miserable at times. If the marriage isn't working out, life can be hell on earth. Our kids can be a pain at certain times and bring great misery.

A friend is surprisingly absent when you needed him or her, and you discovered this wasn't a friend after all.

You lose your job. Awful. What are you to do now for income? You discover that you can't pay the bills. Your car breaks down. Your body breaks down. Your marriage breaks down. Your plans break down. Life can be filled with all kinds of misery and pain.

The Bible called them woes or curses. Sometimes, we feel our marriages are cursed. Sometimes, during an illness or death of a loved one, we feel our lives are cursed.

Good times. Bad times. Blessings. Curses. We all feel and experience them all.

It is with these images that we approach the gospel of Luke and his account of Jesus' beatitudes for today. We find Jesus offering his disciples his first teachings about life and happiness.

Jesus' words in Luke are not like smouldering embers, these are like bombshells going off. Jesus' words in Luke are not like electrical currents that are invisible, this is forked lightning.

Jesus dropped a bomb. Jesus threw a lightning bolt. You must think a bomb that shatters everything around it. You must think lightning bolt that flashes across the sky for all to see.

"Blessed are the poor and the hungry." A bombshell. A lightning bolt. No one had ever said that before.

In the Old Testament, it was clear that the rich and full were blessed. Their riches of camels and cattle brought pleasures and fullness to their lives.

That is also true of us today in the twenty-first century. The rich and full are the blessed. With enough money to buy a home, pay the bills, go on a vacation or two a year.

The rich are thought to be smarter, quicker emotionally, quicker intellectually, more adaptable to land on their feet. Living like kings compared to the rest of the world. That is what it is to be blessed. ... But Jesus turns all that on its head. Jesus turns everything upside down and inside out. He drops a bomb that explodes in our lives. He throws a lightning bolt that we all see.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor. Blessed are the hungry. Woe to the rich. Woe to the full stomachs." How odd. How unusual. How upside down. ...

It seems like the author of the book of Matthew couldn't handle it, and so he watered down the words of Jesus or made them more palatable when he wrote: "Blessed are the poor...in spirit. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst...for righteousness."

Matthew spiritualizes the beatitudes of Jesus, so we all agree and nod our heads in assent. We all know the wisdom of being humble and poor in spirit. We all know the wisdom that we Christians are to hunger and thirst for righteousness and right relationships.

We know the wisdom of that. People who are genuinely humble are on the right track. People who are passionate for right relationships are going in the right direction. We nod in assent. We agree. ...

But when Jesus drops the bomb: "Blessed are the poor and hungry, Woe to those who are rich and full," we don't quite get it. His words are such a reversal to all common sense. His words explode our world.

There is this radical and unusual theme of God's exaltation of poor and hungry people in the New Testament that is not found in the Old Testament.

There is not one trace of this theme in the Old Testament where God clearly rewards with material blessings. But this theme is found throughout Luke and its companion book Acts.

It is also clearly found in the book of James, chapter 5, that says, "Come now, you rich, and weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted; your gold and silver have rusted; and their rust will be laid up as evidence against you." Such words would never have been written in the Old Testament.

What are we to do with these Scriptures? What are we do to with Jesus' persistent theme in the Gospel of Luke that warn of the dangers of the riches of wealth and plenty of food?

We live in a first world church. That is, compared to the rest of the world, we live in a very wealthy community. We have homes and jobs and retirements. We take our vacations.

We eat too much and compared to the rest of the world, we are much too fat. What are

we to do with these Jesus bombs that explode right next to us?

What are we to do with these Jesus lightning bolts that flash in our skies and light up the fact that God's primary values may not be our own?

How do we talk about materialism in today's world when we ourselves are all so materialistic? That is, our deeply held inner prejudice is to maintain our middle class lifestyle with all its comforts and pleasures.

Don't challenge my middle class lifestyle and all its pleasures. How we do handle this theme of Jesus? "Blessed are the poor and hungry. Woe to the rich and well fed."

Equally indicting are Jesus' words, "Blessed are you when people hate you, revile you, exclude you, and call you evil ... because you are a Christian, a follower of Christ."

In our society, no one hates us, reviles, us, excludes us, and calls us evil because we follow Christ and belong to a church.

What does it mean to be a Christian in a rich world? What does it mean to be a Christian in a middle class world?

What does it mean to be a Christian when people live in nice homes, have good retirements, and plan nice vacations, all of which we call being blessed? How do we fit all of this into Jesus' beatitudes in Luke?

Do we simply ignore Luke's version and listen to Matthew's version which is much more palatable for our lives? Ah, that is a good solution. We will live and listen to Jesus' beatitudes in Matthew, "blessed are the poor in spirit and those who hunger for righteousness," and we will ignore Luke's more harsh words against the richer people of the world. We will listen to Matthew and ignore Luke. There's our solution!

Yet we don't feel good about that. We sense that something may be terribly wrong with our Christian lives when it comes to money and materialism.

How do we live as middle class Christians in a rich culture when the vast majority of Christians are poor around the globe? How do we handle this? How do we deal with Jesus' beatitudes in Luke in our middle class, materialistic world in which the vast majority of us live?

That is the focus of today's sermon.

First, as we all know so deeply well, money and what it can buy does not bring true happiness. We tend to privately believe that enough money certainly helps to bring blessings to our lives.

Deep happiness had to do with invisible qualities like loving family, loving friends, loving God, loving life. These are invisible qualities inside of a person, and not related to material qualities.

Again and again and again, God in the Bible tells us that true happiness and joy come from those qualities that are invisible. Love is invisible and happiness always grows best in a garden of love.

You can be poor and still have hearts of love. Your bellies can be hungry and still have hearts of love.

True joy always comes from hearts filled with love. A primary goal in life is not the accumulation of material possessions (good job, good house, good recreation) but the accumulation of loving relationships with God and neighbours.

That is what Jesus said. What is the abundant life? To love God with all your heart, mind and strength and your neighbour as yourself. That is where your time and energy is to be put.

We need to confront our addiction of material possessions that we think lead to happiness. These addictions to material possessions are even more addictive than drugs.

The wisest of wealthy people understand that their happiness does not come from material possessions.

Second, we are to be motivated to share our gifts with those around us, and one of the primary gifts that God has given to us is to have been born in the UK.

We cannot be a Christian and not share; we cannot be a Christian and not share your love to your poorer family around the globe. We are to share our material gifts with those less fortunate.

We need to affirm our commitment to them the same commitment found in the book of Acts:

There is to be no poverty found in the first Christian community, and there is to be no

poverty found in our Christian community either. That's the way God wants it.

We need to take care of those poorer members in our community first and there will be plenty of resources left over for taking care of our neighbours around us and around the globe.

Third, we learn from the poor and hungry and persecuted. How much can we learn from these people in our own country and around the globe?

Within our society here in the UK, the poor and hungry are often single mothers with children.

We need to listen to them and their perceptions about work and jobs here in the UK.

We need to respectfully listen to the homeless men who come to our homeless shelter. We need to listen to our neighbours in need around the globe.

Fourth, as you know, I am as capitalistic as most people. A key strategy is to try to create economic systems where people can earn their own money and bread and not rely on self-demeaning handouts. We need to work with others to create more economic systems that enable people to benefit directly from their own work.

The question is: what does it mean to be a committed Christian when you are middle class and living in one of the wealthiest nations?

What does it mean to us when we hear the words of Jesus from the beatitudes of Luke? "Blessed are the poor and hungry. Miserable are the rich and the full." These words are like bombshells exploding around us.

These words are like lightning bolts flashing across our sky. In our materialistic words and souls, what do these words of Jesus mean to our lives of faith? Those are the questions for us today?

Each of us Christians who live in the First World and are middle class, we wrestle with what it means to be a Christian in our rich society.

Amen