

Jesus on a level place

Sermon: Rob Lamerton
15th February 2004 (Epiphany 6)

Jer 17: 5-10; Psalm 1; 1 Corinthians 15:12-20 ; Luke 6: 17-26

I wonder why Luke writes this story differently from Matthew who set the whole scene in the mountain so it was the "sermon on the mount" Luke however, deliberately places Jesus "on a level place". We heard of Jesus praying in the hills and calling the twelve whom he named apostles, then: "and 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 Judea, Jerusalem, and the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, we hear of Jesus healing, cleansing away unclean spirits ... of power evidently coming forth

It is almost as if Luke does not want Jesus pictured as delivering his major speech in a religious setting.—mountain tops were associated with religious experiences ---

But this sermon on the plain appears to be in the midst of people—or as the hymn puts it

"Where cross the crowded ways of life."

...it is in the midst of crowds seeking healing for their diseases and the oppression of spiritual forces which destroyed their lives.

The sermon is directed to the disciples and is aimed at those who have chosen to follow Christ and will therefore know they have the grace of the Holy Spirit to live them out.

In the gospels Jesus says "follow me" .

Paul in his writing uses the term "in Christ" which means living in relationship with and being enabled by the spirit of Christ dwelling within.

The challenges Jesus puts before his newly appointed followers are difficult, to say the least: to be poor, hungry, weeping and hated (like the prophets)

It is a tough calling—but it is the way to blessedness because it drives the faithful to an ever deepening relationship with God—who gives the grace of the Holy Spirit to overcome.

Matthew puts it slightly differently:

the poor—are poor in spirit

the hungry — are hungry for righteousness

because ultimately it is a question of our relationship with God.

The poor, the hungry, those who weep and are hated—have no material benefits and are dependent on God. When things get even worse than this, and death comes to us—even then, our hope is in God—that we belong ultimately to God.

Paul's words in 1 Corinthians remind us that to be in relationship in Christ is to share in Resurrection life.

Such a hope enables us to live without some of the benefits of our wealth, food and wine, happiness, and approval.

We have a society which has everything and yet we have a problem with depression and suicide.

We have a society which loves its food and drink (note the cooking shows and magazines) and a great problem with alcoholism and obesity.

We have a society intent on keeping people happy—entertained; filling our time with events and movies. And yet many are unable to be creative.

We are often fearful of upsetting people for fear of losing friends and losing face.

Jesus' warning is to people who are wealthy, well fed, happy with their lot and popular, because these are temporary and fleeting.

What concerns me too is that these are the factors used to measure the growth of national economies and that every nation wants **increased** growth.

I wonder about the sustainability of such levels of growth world wide, and what strains it will put on resources.—already we have concerns about water! timber etc...

What is a real difficulty is that larger, wealthier nations' growth is often based on the use of foreign resources.

I am grateful for the Diocesan Environmental Commission getting us to do some homework on just how *environmentally* friendly we are!

Just recently in *The Canberra Times* there were two special articles on a page

1. One pointed to the wonderful advances in medical technology and treatment which would improve and prolong life.
2. on the same page just below was an article about
3. The dangers to the planet and concerns about the survival of the human race and extinction of species of animals if global warming continued.

It doesn't take much thinking to work out that all the medical technology and treatment is useless if we don't manage our environment to the point where life is enabled.

[This week: cloning/Mars/and the war in Iraq and Israel]

It seems pointless too if with the development of our cities there are insufficient dwellings available to rent at reasonable prices.

The fact that in this story from Luke's gospel that Jesus directs his message to those he has just called and that he delivers it "where cross the crowded ways of life"—in the midst of the hustle and bustle of the world around -----

that we have a ministry to remind people of the things that are really necessary...

NOT wealth, food –plenty, personal happiness, popularity ... for themselves!

We are called to remind people of their intrinsic *value* to God and to the creation of our communities. And that we all live on this God-given planet—for which we must give thanks, value and care. (Clean Up Australia Day!) [it is March 7th 2004]

In the hot weather (44 degrees in Adelaide yesterday) a cool drink is refreshing, even life giving.

Jeremiah and the Psalmist remind us that it is our relationship with God which will sustain us as water sustains a tree, giving life and strength even when all else fails.