**Sermon Sixth Sunday after Epiphany. 13 February 2022**

**Jeremiah 17:5-10, Psalm 1, 1 Corinthians 15:12-20, Luke 6:17-26**

I wonder today how many of us have played in team sports in our younger days or still engage in some sport where there are two sides, two teams? Ian loves cricket and has done for most of his life. He has actively been a part of his local cricket team and I’m sure he would be the first to tell me about the joys of winning a game but also of the disappointment of coming awfully close to winning and yet lose the match. This kind of sport literally places people into two separate camps, our team and the other, us and them.

This week our gospel reading encompasses that great passage known to us as the Beatitudes. What strikes me about the beatitudes is the way the Blessings and the Woes, in a way, are a bit like what I described about team sports, either someone is blessed because they are poor or hungry or weep or because people are hated due to their belief in Jesus OR a person suffers (woe) to those who are rich, or are full, laughing or spoken well of.

This does not sound at all like the Kingdom of God to me. At least that’s the way I picture it. Blessings here, woes there. But I would like to suggest another way. Before I do that though, I would like to provide a little background. The word blessed is well enough and easily understood. But the word woe may sound like something terrible. In the Old Testament the word woe in Hebrew is hoy which is best understood as a sigh or cry of dissatisfaction or pain. In Luke’s gospel, written in Greek, woe is translated as ουαι pronounced ooh- ah’-ee is also connected to grief but is almost like the sound one makes when getting the wind knocked out of them… or punched in the gut. It is also an expression of judgement, it means ‘alas’ or almost like ‘oh no’. My grandson has learnt to say ‘oh no’ quite dramatically and I get the sense of this word everytime I hear him say ‘oh no’! Woe is quite possibly signifying impending doom, condemnation or the wrath of God and so it is used as an expression to emphasize something in the sentence in which it is used. Interestingly, the gospels record Jesus using the word woe more than anyone else in the bible.! The Gospel of Luke has twice as many woes (13 occurences) than the nearest book in the Old Testament. (Ezekial has just 6) and only Matthew has nearly as many (12).

But what does any of what I’ve just said relate to us. All of us, at one time or another have been touched by differing circumstances in our lives. The good, the bad and the ugly, messy times. Times of blessing, joy, happiness, abundant living as well as times of woes, times of distress, sadness, grief. The truth that God brings to our lives is that God is with us in it all. You and I are never alone, and God is with us in whatever our situations might be.

As humans we try to get by in life by going it alone. The thought that I can do this and I don’t need God to intervene or to help. What stops us from drawing closer to God, from a desire of wanting God to walk with us in our lives can either spring out of fear or shame. Fear because we think that God will take over that for which we have held on so tightly to. And shame because shame has the effect of making us feel small, flawed, and never good enough. But God desires to be with us in all of it, no matter what.

There is also something surprising about this passage too! Earlier in Epiphany, Jesus was in the Temple reading from Isaiah, and earlier still Mary sang her Magnificat which reflected Hannah’s song in the Old Testament. Jesus is doing something surprisingly similar. The poetic nature of these blessings and woes may well have come out from Jesus knowledge of the scriptures but also from hearing his mother’s song. A mother who quite possibly sang that song not just once but over her child many times over. In Mary’s Magnificat, there are similarities to the blessings and woes. Listen, ‘His mercy is for those who fear him …. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty’ (Luke 1:50-53).

Luke draws our attention to the prophetic nature of not only Mary’s song, but also of Jesus in the temple reading from Isaiah, ‘the spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor’ (Luke 4:18). And here today in Luke’s gospel, Jesus is bringing not just the prophetic voice to the disciples but helping them to see that no matter what, whether they or we are in the midst of blessing, or in the midst of grief, sorrow or hardship, God is with us. But more than this, there is no us and them. This gospel is not a competition between who is experiencing blessings or who is experiencing the woes but rather that in those times in our lives, God’s invitation to us is to embrace the idea that God is with us, with all of us and that we are all in this together. I am reminded of the hymn, Brother, sister, let me serve you.

1. Brother, sister, let me serve you;
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.

2. We are pilgrims on a journey,
and companions on the road;
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.

3. I will hold the Christlight for you
in the nighttime of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
speak the peace you long to hear.

4. I will weep when you are weeping;
when you laugh I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow,
till we've seen this journey through.

5. When we sing to God in heaven,
we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together
of Christ's love and agony.

6. Brother, sister, let me serve you;
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that l may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.

As we journey with God, may each of us know God’s peace and love and that we may share that love and grace with one another and to with those we love and care for.

Amen.