

South Buxton and Talbot Street Pastoral Charges

Fourth Sunday of Epiphany – January 29th, 2023

Prelude: by Christie Coatsworth

Welcome & Announcements:

- Report of South Kent United Church's Gathering.

Thank you for your support of all our past services, which are posted on our websites - Southbuxton.ca and Talbotstreet.ca

Lighting of the Christ Candle:

Call to Worship:

Eric: People of God, come and gather around deep insight.

People: Feed on words of unusual wisdom, seeing before us an unfolding vision of a renewed and just world as close and real as our breathing.

Eric: Come! Jesus, our teacher, healer, leader, and friend, invites our good and attentive company.

People: Our time together will be blessed.

Opening Hymn: VU 334 "All Hail the Power of Jesus' ..."

- 1 All hail the power of Jesus' name!
Let angels prostrate fall;
bring forth the royal diadem,
and crown him, crown him, crown him,
crown him Lord of all.
- 2 O seed of Israel's chosen race
now ransomed from the fall,
hail him who saves you by his grace R
- 3 Crown him, you martyrs of your God,
who from his altar call;
praise him whose way of pain you trod, R
- 4 Let every tongue and every tribe,
responsive to the call,
to him all majesty ascribe R
- 5 O that, with all the sacred throng,
we at his feet may fall,
join in the everlasting song,
and crown him, crown him, crown him,
crown him Lord of all..

Opening Prayer:

People: We gather in Thanksgiving O God, open to your Spirit and alive to the Christ, who was, who is, and who comes. We offer you our adoration, our acclaim, and our very lives as we worship together. Amen.

Children's Story & Lord's Prayer:

Children's Hymn: "Deep and Wide" (2)

Deep and wide, deep and wide,
There's a fountain flowing deep and wide;
Deep and wide, deep and wide,
There's a fountain flowing deep and wide;

Scripture: Matthew 5: 1 - 12 "Favour"

Reflection: "The Kingdom of Heaven – Jesus' Way!"

The sermon on the Mount is one of Jesus' well known teaching. It is so important to our Christian faith, that we actually take the next three weeks - to the Season of Lent, to share its significance to our Christian Faith. The Sermon on the Mount governs the principal in the Mennonite Church, as in other Antibaptist Churches.

The Sermon on the Mount, also known as the Beatitudes, gives us Jesus' radical vision of what God's reign on earth might look like. The Sermon on the Mount is a vision of wholeness for all people. This vision being presented for the Christian community - is both beautiful and challenging. It is much like Jesus' call to the disciples we talked about last week.

Jesus calls his disciples. They travel throughout Galilee, sharing the good news that God's realm is breaking into the world. It is the type of message that the crowds listening to the stories of Matthew, desperately need to hear.

The gospel of Matthew speaks to a group of new Christians after a disaster. The temple has been destroyed and the people scattered. Jesus is no longer present in the flesh. What laws will govern the community now? What is the good news for those trying to be faithful in a hostile world? Jesus does not leave his followers hanging. Jesus goes through a litany of statements regarding who are blessed.

There is urgency in Jesus' teaching. He uses the present tense in this series of sentences beginning with the word blessed, or happy in some translations. Blessing is God's gift, a sign of covenant relationship with God. Jesus teaches that the blessed ones are those who are humble of heart, who are gentle, who show mercy, who hunger and thirst for God's ways. Those who mourn will be comforted; those who make peace will be called God's children. Those persecuted in the cause of justice will find themselves part of God's transforming reality.

As Matthew spoke to the Early Church, in a time of despair (about 60 years after Jesus' death and resurrection), Matthew words also speak to us today in whatever challenges we are facing in life. There are times when life is changing. In those times we may be struggling with living our faith as God would want us to. We may be giving up on making the world a better place. We may be tired. We may be confused. We may need a shot in the arm that we are on the right track. This may be the time to concentrate on what it is all about. A good place to start is the Beatitudes.

In Jesus' coming, God's love is revealed and made manifest. This teaching is directed to the disciples, to the Twelve and the larger group of men and women who accompany Jesus. The Beatitudes describe the way of life for those who commit themselves to follow. For the community of the gospel of Matthew, this beautiful vision is what life should be like.

Our experience today is in many ways like that of the community of the Early Church. We may not be persecuted for our faith, but the ways of faith often seem foolish compared with the values of society. It becomes hard to stay focused, when the world can lead us in so many directions – many of those directions are not helpful. We are challenged in trying to live according to the standards Jesus expresses in the Sermon on the Mount.

Next month is Black History Month, and part of the month is honouring the Rev, Dr. Martin Luther King. There have been people throughout human history, whose visions of change have been passionately offered and responded to. One example is of Rev. King's dream of a nation where his children would be judged by the content of character, not by the colour of their skin. Another is Nelson Mandela's vision of a South Africa beyond the inhumanity of apartheid and an angry retaliation. In Australia and in Canada, apologies to our First Nations People for taking indigenous children forcibly from their parents - under a cultural assumption that this was for their good. We now work towards a vision of Right Relations and hope for a better world.

Jesus' teachings in the Beatitudes are countercultural in today's society. We want to be rich – not poor. We want to be fed – not hungry. We want to be happy – not grieving. We want to be free, not oppressed.

Yet Jesus says those who are blessed are those who are poor, hungry, grieving and oppressed to name a few. Definitely living through those experiences give you an appreciation of life, when you “feel” blessed. Would we know what a blessing is - if we have not experienced the harder times of life?

We see this vision of Jesus in Matthew as not just an idealized notion of a renewed world, but the courageous facing and naming of that which is often opposed by culture and society. So on one hand, how would this passage speak to the rich? And on the other hand, how would this passage speak to those the world would call meek and those who mourn?

Yet have not most of us lived both parts of this passage? Now that we do live our faith with riches and happiness, we do have a great opportunity to share our ministries with those Jesus is naming as those who will be blessed. Does these blessings come as they continue to live, to save, to make the world a better place? Many times it is when you are in a better place, that you realize your blessings.

Life is not static. Life is always changing. We believe our faith is not static, that our faith is always changing. Connecting to Jesus' teaching of his vision for our world, helps us to see God's reality and to experience the liberating love that God offers. To awaken to God's reality and love, we must be willing to see the world differently and see ourselves in a new light. We are not alone. God is always with us. Thanks be to God.

Reflection Hymn: VU 560 “O Master, Let Me Walk...”

- 1 O Master, let me walk with thee
in lowly paths of service free;
teach me thy secret, help me bear
the strain of toil, the fret of care.
- 2 Help me the slow of heart to move
with some clear, winning word of love;
teach me the wayward feet to stay,
and guide them in the homeward way.
- 3 Teach me thy patience; still with thee,
in closer, dearer company,
in work that keeps faith sure and strong,

in trust that triumphs over wrong,
4 in hope that sends a shining ray
far down the future's broadening way,
in peace that only thou canst give,
with thee, O Master, let me live.

Invitation to Share Our Gifts:

Eric: We see God in the ordinary places of our lives – sometimes without realizing it. We see God with us; when we hold a hand, offer a smile, feed a stranger. Let us give to God as an act of worship and gratitude.

Offertory: VU 541 “Praise God From Whom...”

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Offertory Prayer:

People: The poor struggle to put food on the table, the meek are bullied in the schoolyards, the mourners find no comfort in hollow words, and peacemakers are publicly ridiculed by those who should be emulating them. So, as we offer our gifts to you, Gracious God, we pray you would use them to bring blessings to all in this world. Amen.

Prayer Hymn: VU 378 “Spirit of God, ...”

Spirit of God, descend upon my heart;
wean it from earth, through all its pulses move;
stoop to my weakness, strength to me impart,
and make me love you as I ought to love.

Pastoral Prayer:

Closing Hymn: VU 223 “Eternal, Unchanging, We Sing”

Eternal, Unchanging, we sing to your praise:
your mercies are endless, and righteous your ways;
your servants proclaim the renown of your name
who rules over all and is ever the same.

Again we rejoice in the world you have made,
your mighty creation in beauty arrayed,
we thank you for life, and we praise you for joy,
for love and for hope that no power can destroy.

We praise you for Jesus, our Master and Lord,

the might of his Spirit, the truth of his word,
his comfort in sorrow, his patience in pain,
the faith sure and steadfast that Jesus shall reign.

Benediction:

Eric: Dare to believe that we are people on a mission of healing and grace. Know we never go alone, now and forever more.

Sending Out Hymn: VU 378 “Spirit of God, ...”

Have you not bid me love you, God and King;
all, all your own, soul, heart, and strength and mind?
I see your cross: there teach my heart to cling.
O let me seek you and O let me find!

Amen, Amen, Amen.

Postlude: – Christie Coatsworth

Prayers: - Please include these people in your prayers this week.

We have offered prayer for these people each Sunday morning just before the Zoom Service.
It was suggested to share these names with the total group – as “In the Spirit We Are One”.

Cancer:

**Chris
Paul
Sarah
Carol
Maureen
Susan
Cara
Margie
Marcus
Susan
Ingrid**

**Richard and Evelyn
Elaine
Wayne**

**Ed Sykes
Grace’s Family**

**Reg and Mary Jane
Dave
Bill
Jane
Donna
Martin and Family
Larry
Kerigan
Fran
John
Ken
Natalie
Johnathan**