

*A sermon preached by The Reverend Canon Dr. David J. Anderson on All Saints Sunday, Sunday, November 6, 2022. (Readings for the Day: Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18; Psalm 149; Ephesian 1:11-23; Luke 6:20-31)*

I speak to you in the name of The Most Holy and Blessed Trinity. Amen.

Today's Gospel begins with Jesus looking. What does he see? The passage has begun with Luke telling us that Jesus was looking at his disciples, however, from what Jesus says we can surmise that Jesus sees much more.

Who were the people gathered around Jesus in this moment?

When Jesus looked he saw this mix of people. He saw men and women, children, young and old, Jew and Gentile. He saw not only a diversity of identities, but also people with a variety of needs. Each of these people wanted or needed different things from Jesus and they would certainly have come with different ideas about they specifically were seeking from him.

I am aware that as we gather here today, we have a similar mix of people. We have come, many of us, for different reasons. Some of you have been attending this church for decades. St Jude's is your home parish and you couldn't imagine your life without it. Some of you have come more recently. Perhaps it was the architecture that drew you here. Perhaps it was the particular brand of Anglican piety, or the liturgical tradition. For others it is the sense of community that you have found here that keeps you coming. Perhaps there are a few here today who were dragged here by someone else, and you are not sure why you are here at all. *I know that a number of people are here today because they have accompanied Naomi and her parents and family as they are here for her baptism.* Some may find our traditions of liturgy quite foreign. Some will be curious. Some may be bored!

With Jesus on that day there was such a crowd. Luke has told us that in the crowd there were people from Judea, Jerusalem, and from the coast of Tyre and Sidon (Luke 6.17). While they were all interested in what Jesus had to say, for most of them, their primary reason for being there was quite pragmatic. They wanted Jesus to heal them. The two verses prior to where our reading for this morning began tells us:

They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them. (Luke 6.18-19)

We don't know how many people were in that crowd, but we do know that Jesus healed them all. He met the physical, spiritual, and psychological needs that the people felt most acutely and restored them to their communities.

In that crowd, however, there was a second group that had come not only with healing on their minds. These were the wider circle of Jesus' *disciples*. These were the people, many of whom had been following Jesus for some time, who wanted mostly wanted to hear what Jesus had to say; they understood their need to learn from him. Jesus was their rabbi, their teacher. They were his disciples, his students, his learners.

There was also a third group in the crowd was that small inner circle of the newly appointed *apostles*. These were the people who had been hand-selected by Jesus. These are the twelve of his closest followers that we hear about mostly as the Gospels describe his followers. While all of the apostles are disciples, not all disciples are apostles. Jesus chose these few to become special emissaries who would continue to do the work that he began during his earthly ministry.

Luke tells us that Jesus looked upon all these people gathered together and began to teach them. As Jesus began what is now known as his *Sermon on the Plain*, each group would have been listening with different purposes in mind and likely with different levels of engagement. Each would have been listening with their own interests and filters. The *crowd* was likely listening for anything that they might need in order to be healed. The *disciples* were likely listening much closer, seeking to understand Jesus' words with a view to how they might apply his teaching to their own lives. The *apostles* were likely listening even more closely, also paying attention to Jesus' actions and the way that he taught, knowing that they will be expected to also teach and proclaim the kingdom of God.

In every Christian community there are likewise a diversity of people who are present for different reasons. There is the crowd, and there are the disciples, and there are apostles. We can ask ourselves which group it is that we want to belong to. Do we want simply to be part of the crowd? Do we come to worship and participate in the community of faith primarily to get out of it what we want or need at any given time without a real commitment to allowing the Way of Jesus change any aspect of our lives?

Or is our goal to be a disciple? Are we willing to learn from Jesus and examine carefully how we can live our lives more fully according to his teaching and in keeping with his example of love?

Or are we seeking to go all in with Jesus? Might we seek not only to learn what we can and grow in our faith, but might we also seek to be formed more fully

into the likeness of Christ, to share his divine life of love. Might we seek to participate in the very things that did?

Each of the different groups listened to Jesus's sermon. The focus of his sermon was consistent with the declaration that he had made in the synagogue of his hometown of Nazareth in which he read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and proclaimed he was sent by God to bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free.

The news that Jesus announced in the sermon was for any who chose to participate in the kingdom of God according to Jesus' teaching and for those who responded to the call to apostleship. Jesus talks about poverty, hunger, sadness, and marginalization. These states are, of course, not in themselves states of *blessedness*. These are not elements of human flourishing. Quite the opposite. Yet, Jesus does announce blessedness to those who find themselves in these adverse conditions. The blessedness is in the promise of a future beyond these conditions in which with the fullness of God's kingdom will be realized, when God's reign is among us in all its fullness.

The "woes" that we read about in our passage today are similar. Jesus is not rejecting outright the realities of wealth, adequate or abundant food resources, the ability to enjoy the benefits of a good reputation. Rather, what Jesus is saying here is that those who are fortunate enough to enjoy these conditions will be expected to live differently. Those who might be considered *rich* are expected to share their food with the hungry. If you are blessed enough to be *happy*, you should understand that your state of psychological and spiritual wellbeing gives you a place of strength from which you might be able to attend to the emotional needs of those who find themselves in sorrow. If you are blessed to enjoy a *good reputation*, you should be expected to leverage that reputation on behalf of those who find themselves in challenging circumstances.

Jesus is challenging his hearers to think and live differently. His promises for the future have not yet come to their fulfilment. We and our neighbours, near and far, continue to suffer under the status quo, where poverty, hunger, and sorrow are all too real for many. Still, Jesus calls us to a different way of living—a way that participates in the promises of God in a way that moves us towards the fulfilment of that promise.

Today, on this All Saints Day we remember that great cloud of witness who have gone before us and who have walked in the way of Jesus. Along with those saints of ancient day we remember also our own dear departed whose life we remember and whose example we seek to follow. We remember that with all the

saints we take up our place in that long parade of the followers of Jesus across time and place who have pointed to God's reign, walked in the Way of Jesus, and shared in the divine life of love.

Today, on this special day as we baptize Naomi, we welcome her to take up her place in this long parade of the faithful, and we recommit ourselves to equipping the children in our care and the families connected with our parish, for the work of their care and nurture in the Christian faith. As we renew our own baptismal covenants today, let us be conscious of renewing our own promises to allow our lives be shaped and formed so we too might participate in the divine life of love.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.