

## Sixth Sunday after Epiphany

### Sixth Sunday after Epiphany – 17 February 2019

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## Introduction

The Season of Epiphany is unusually long this year – due to the lateness of Easter. It still has another two weeks to run before Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent. This is a good opportunity to spend more time in those lectionary readings that focus on Jesus' ministry and teaching. Luke's blessings and woes tie in well with Jeremiah's warning that God sees beyond the external things to look on our hearts and with Paul's struggle to convince the church at Corinth that resurrection matters – what we do in this age affects God's judgement in the future. As you approach these texts, it may be useful to ask: What, for you, is the Epiphany (your 'a-ha!' moment) in these teachings?

### [Luke 6:17-26](#)

Unlike the Beatitudes shared in Matthew 5, this version (possibly shared on a different occasion) also contains woes. As well as calling the poor, the hungry, those who mourn and the reviled *blessed*, Jesus proclaims woe to the rich, to the full, to those who laugh and to those who are popular.

This setting emphasises the context of better things to come for those who need consolation alongside the acknowledgment that the pleasures others experience now will not last forever. Investing in those things that are not lasting takes away from the energy that might be invested in the things of God.

### [Psalm 1](#)

This first Psalm in the 150 that are contained in the Canon has been suggested as a Psalm that unlocks the rest that follow: it distinguishes between the righteous and the wicked and sets out clear markers for each, a thread woven throughout the Psalms.

Contrasting the wicked and the righteous, the Psalmist exhorts that we follow the way of righteousness.

The Psalmist reminds us that we have choices to make in the path we follow – the way of the wicked or the way of the righteous.

Not only does the Psalmist identify those things we must not do – take the advice of the wicked or sit in the seat of the scoffers, the Psalmist also identifies the preferred actions of the righteous – delighting in the law of the Lord and meditating on God's law day and night.

Those whose choice is to wait on God and to seek to follow God's law and to spend time in God's word will remain with God while those who prosper in wickedness will be unable to withstand the judgement of God.

Psalm 1:1-3 is a great Call to Worship.

### **Jeremiah 17:5-10**

*Almighty God,  
to whom all hearts are open,  
all desires known,  
and from whom no secrets are hidden;  
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts  
by the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit,  
so that we may truly love You  
and worthily praise Your holy name;  
through our Saviour, Jesus Christ.  
Amen.*

This is the Collect for Purity offered in the Anglican Communion Book of Common Prayer. It echoes the words and sentiments of the Jeremiah passage, and is usually offered at the beginning of services of worship, a timely reminder that God sees beyond what is visible to others and judges on the fruits of our offerings.

### **1 Corinthians 15:12-20**

In 1 Corinthians, Paul is guiding the church community he founded in a mêlée of pastoral and ethical issues that have arisen in his absence. He attempts, remotely, to guide the Corinthians on how to live as new Christians in their particular context and culture, a perennial challenge affecting the church in every age.

In this passage, he turns to issues of doctrine and, in particular, resurrection. Influenced by historical beliefs and philosophies, there is some dispute over whether or not it is important to believe in bodily resurrection. Paul wants the Corinthian Christians to grasp how fundamental resurrection – that of Christ and later believers – is to the Christian faith.

## Sermon ideas

To Jesus' listeners, the Beatitudes made little sense.

For folk who believed that you reaped what you sowed, that blessing came to those whom God favoured, to hear Jesus seemingly randomly bless people was such a contrary notion.

The Beatitudes conflicted with every norm and tradition that folk knew, so radical were they. The Beatitudes are not a list of conditions. It's not a contract that Jesus is setting out. Not – you will be blessed if ...

To hear that those who were usually invisible were in God's sights; to hear that God blessed the lowly and the lonely – those whom others barely noticed; to hear themselves described as blessed, was as shocking then as it is now. That message was a huge surprise to those who heard Jesus say it and continues to surprise us today.

Today God's story continues and we find ourselves included in that story – not just included in fact – we help to write the next chapter. We are the people in God's sights today. Known and loved and blessed.

We don't look at Scripture to determine where God is in our story today, what we find is that we are included in God's story. Beloved and blessed. Writing the story alongside God.

Are we prepared, today, to live into our blessedness? To take up our mantle as God's people today, and, knowing ourselves beloved and blessed to see with God's eyes? Noticing those who are so often overlooked and seeing them as also beloved and blessed? Not looking for potential, but celebrating what is?

The Beatitudes are not a statement of intent, not even a statement of promise. The Beatitudes state what is – you and I, today, are blessed.

How might we live into that blessedness?

## Time with children

Paying it Forward:

Often, the only way folk might know we follow Jesus is by our attendance at church – sometimes that is the only outwardly visible sign to others that we know ourselves to be children of God. How can we be more obvious Christians, more intentional in the things we do every day to show our love?

We believe that we are loved and blessed by God – and there are lots of ways every day to share that love and those blessings. What are some of the ways you might share and bless others?

And – a challenge for adults – give everyone a blessing card (either [print your own](#) or order from [resourcingmission.org.uk/shop](http://resourcingmission.org.uk/shop)) and ask them to Pray it Forward – at some point during the week, find the opportunity to pass it on.

## Prayers

### Approach and confession

God of the Universe,

God of our lives,

You know us better than we know ourselves.

You see beyond the façade we present to the world – and You love us to the core.

Today, as we gather in Your marvellous presence  
may we know that we are welcomed with the open arms of love.  
May that knowledge inspire us to live more fully for You.

Forgive us when we fail to live into the wonderful potential that You lay before us,  
for the times when we begrudge others their joy and blessing,  
for the times we fail to notice – or ignore –  
those who suffer and whose suffering we might begin to address.  
Forgive us when our vision is narrow and our hope is restricted  
Especially when Your imagination knows no bounds  
and Your capacity to love is beyond measure.

Lord, forgive us  
and, as Your beloved, renew us to live into the freedom and the bounty You set before us,  
enable us to make a difference by sharing Your love and blessing in all that we do.

God, present here,  
transform the worship that we bring until it reflects Your glory and majesty,  
transforming our everyday lives to reflect our Creator in all that we do,  
here in this place and in the places You lead us for Your glory.

Amen

### **Intercession**

God of light and truth,  
as Your blessing rests upon us  
may our eyes be open to Your word that lives in us, written on our hearts,  
may our eyes be open to Your light and truth  
that guides us in every part of our daily walk with you,  
may our eyes be open to Your Light and truth  
that lead us to walk in ways we do not yet know with companions we may not choose.

May Your light and truth enable us to see Your unpredictable Spirit walking alongside us  
every step of the way, giving us courage to venture into unknown territory with You.

Spirit of God, we pray for peace.  
Not only the cessation of war, but that peace that is beyond our understanding.  
Peace that is forged when closed fists are opened in sharing,  
when closed hearts are opened in caring  
and when closed minds are opened to possibility for all to share  
in the rich resources of the earth and of all creation.  
God You have equipped Your church with all the gifts that are needed  
to build Your kingdom.

May we be willing to change the narrative from one of scarcity to one of abundance.  
May each of us seek to discern Your purpose for our lives  
and offer ourselves willingly in service.

May we harness the gifts and know the power of Your Spirit  
as she weaves her way in and around us,  
changing us and enabling us together to bring good news for every generation.

May we nurture one another in faith,  
learn from one another and work together with You, Creator, Redeemer, Spirit.

God You have blessed us with every good thing,  
may we be a blessing to others, here and everywhere, now and forever.

Amen

### **Reflection**

There is a symmetry in the gospel  
not all good news, despite the name  
But blessings offset with woes  
For blessings bring responsibility –  
they demand that we share our undeserved abundance  
And woes serve to remind us of that which is beyond.  
It's not all about today, nor all about us  
It's about taking all that God gives to build God's kingdom  
where wealth is shared and not hoarded  
where down trodden spirits are nurtured in love  
and creation itself is cherished  
and the Creator of the Universe is worshipped and honoured  
as the giver of all good things  
who looks on the heart  
and blesses those in whose hearts is found love.

## Musical suggestions

- CH4 96 – “You are before me God” – owning God’s knowledge of us inside and out
- CH4 442 – “Blessing and honour” – a hymn of thanks and praise
- CH4 182 – “Now thank we all our God” – a hymn of praise for God’s blessing through the ages
- CH4 544 – “When I needed a neighbour” – sharing with “the least of these”
- CH4 362 – “Heaven shall not wait” – God’s justice will not be thwarted
- CH4 416 – “Christ is alive” – proclaiming the resurrection
- CH4 427 – “Alleluia! Alleluia!” – As Christ is risen, so shall we be risen
- CH4 250 – “Sent by the Lord am I” – A sending hymn

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