



Sixth Sunday after Epiphany Sunday, February 17th, 2019

The Culture of God: Called to Counter-Cultural Mission



Conformity and conformism, is not something for which Jesus of Nazareth was known. One of the most extraordinary things, is that despite centuries of Christian power and dominance in the west, where the church has become synonymous with 'the establishment', the dissenting nature of the Gospel has never been able to be entirely eliminated. Still, as one reads the New Testament, we sense, we know, that the Gospel is dynamite, that the Jesus, of whom we read, has the power to confound, relativize and destabilize our conventional cultural constructs: the way we see ourselves, others and the world.

These last weeks during Epiphany, we have been focusing upon the sequential readings from the Gospel of Luke, where this energy for the culture of God that confounds and disturbs stands front and centre. Beginning with Luke's insight of "Jesus of the Jubilee", we have heard of the reaction of the crowd who attempt to assassinate Jesus, the call to discipleship to Peter and others, the call to them to 'sign up' to Jubilee; and then today, Jesus' interpretation of Jubilee, through his Sermon on the Plain.

GATHERING

Welcome

In the name of God
 In the name of the Son
 In the name of the Holy Spirit

The Lord be with
And also with you

Let's Sing: Sing of the Lord's Goodness (TiS 183, The Lord's Goodness, Ernest Sands)

Introduction

Opening Prayers:

As last week, we use the Japanese haiku structure for poems: the first and third lines have five syllables and the middle line has seven. The poem seldom if ever rhymes, which actually helps to not be carried away with a 'sing-song' type of rhythm, which can detract from the meaning. Here we focus on today's Gospel passage from Luke: Jesus' Sermon on the Plain.

The place was level,
 a good site for straight talking.
 Useful metaphor.

They sensed his power
 to bring freedom and healing,
 not to mention hope.

He pronounced blessings
 surprising, unexpected,
 to those without hope.

The poor are promised
 entry into God's kingdom:
 what more could they ask?

Those who are hungry
will be filled, the ones who weep
will have cause to laugh.

Are all these blessings
to be made real in this life?
And why shouldn't they?

Along with blessings,
a series of woes are dealt
to those who have, now.

More flammable words
of gospel revolution
to upend the world.

Words to discomfort
the rich and the powerful,
but they don't listen.

Here too, a blessing
for those who would follow him:
you will be reviled.

(Ken Rookes 2019)

The Peace

The Young People leave for SMG

LET'S HEAR THE WORD

Some Clues about the Way the Gospel Destabilizes the Way We See Ourselves and the World

To follow Jesus, means to follow what Jesus represents – not Jesus in the abstract. And to follow what Jesus represents – Jubilee – requires

Peter to deal with those demons, those obstacles, those attachments, that disorder within himself, that is incompatible with the call.

Last Week's Sermon

For the New Testament, to believe in and to follow Christ confounds, relativizes and destabilizes conventional cultural structures and conventional forms of identity. One of the perplexing things about Christian faith over the centuries, is that it has frequently become a force for the opposite, building a tradition which has become at times an 'iron cage' within which people often live quite comfortably.

Gil Bailie

Jesus uses this word "Blessed" in a totally different way to that of Roman society around him and even to that of the Hebrew world. It is not the elite who are blessed. It is not the rich and powerful who are blessed. It is not the high and mighty who are blessed. It is not the people living in huge mansions or expensive penthouses who are blessed. Rather, Jesus pronounces God's blessings on the lowly: the poor, the hungry, the crying, and the hated. Throughout the history of this word, "blessed", it had always been the other people who were considered blessed: the rich, the filled up, the laughing. Jesus turns it all upside-down. The elite in God's kingdom, the blessed ones in God's kingdom, are those who are at the bottom of the heap of humanity.

Brian Stoffregen

Psalm 1

Elwyn Hoskins

This psalm plays a role in the whole of the Book of Psalms that defies its brevity. Along with Psalm 2, it provides a gateway into the whole book. These two psalms set up the themes of righteousness versus wickedness, and of Israel's king, supported by Yahweh, against their common enemies. These themes return again and again in the book. Moreover, Psalm 1 suggests that the one who is to pray the prayers to follow is naturally one who meditates on the *torah* or 'teaching' of Yahweh constantly. The psalm is built around two contrasting images, that of a tree planted by streams of water and that of chaff in the process of winnowing the grain. The former is an image of the righteous, the latter of the wicked. The former person is 'happy' or 'blessed', the latter is perishing. Of course, any observant reader will recognise that what is described here does not coincide with experience. Unjust people do not simply perish. In fact, they frequently prosper, while the just, often suffer and are victimized. This is in modern theology what we refer to as theodicy, which poses the eternal question: "if God is just why is there injustice and suffering". This Psalm then, when it speaks of the just prospering and the unjust, not so, is really looking forward to a new order of things, a new age: what we often refer to as the kingdom.

¹Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers;

²but their delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law they meditate day and night.

³They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper.

⁴The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;

⁶for the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

1 Corinthians 15:12-20 (Good News Translation)

The point of this passage is often lost on people. Many consider this to be one of those abstract arguments for which Paul is infamous – dense and incomprehensible. This is to misunderstand him. For Paul doctrine, such as the resurrection of Christ, is crucial, not for reasons of intellectual correctness, but for fundamental ethical reasons. The Corinthians were not anything but arrogant. Many of them subscribed to the resurrection of Jesus, but not of his body...only his soul. In asserting this, they reflected what is called a *docetic* understanding of Christianity: the idea that Jesus' body was not raised, just his non-material 'spiritual component. Moreover, they saw human resurrection in the a similar way. This denial of bodily resurrection of both Christ and believers, reflected a distaste and contempt for the body, and most importantly for things physical, including community, society and the world. For these people, relationships meant nothing as they 'whiled' away their time on earth waiting for the real life to come in heaven – a disembodied reality. This contempt for the physical, the social, as well as the political of course, led to a parallel contempt for ethical behaviour. In essence, Paul tells these people: if Christ has not been raised - in a bodily way, if the dead are not raised in a bodily way, then we are lost. For Paul, and for Jewish belief, *we are our bodies*. Physical reality matters, social relations matter and Christian ethics is central.

¹² Now, since our message is that Christ has been raised from death, how can some of you say that the dead will not be raised to life? ¹³ If that is true, it means that Christ was not raised; ¹⁴ and if Christ has not been raised from death, then we have nothing to preach and you have nothing to believe. ¹⁵ More than that, we are shown to be lying about God, because we said that he raised Christ from death—but if it is true

that the dead are not raised to life, then he did not raise Christ. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is a delusion and you are still lost in your sins. ¹⁸ It would also mean that the believers in Christ who have died are lost. ¹⁹ If our hope in Christ is good for this life only and no more,^[a] then we deserve more pity than anyone else in all the world.

²⁰ But the truth is that Christ has been raised from death, as the guarantee that those who sleep in death will also be raised.

The word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Luke 6:17-26 (Good News Translation)

Marian Kingham

These past weeks, we have heard sequential readings about mission to and engagement with the world. Jesus, began with his manifesto in the synagogue, declaring Jubilee - freedom and equality for people: "setting free the oppressed". We then heard the town pushback against him and the attempt at his assassination. Last week, we heard of the calling to Peter and other disciples to "launch out into the deep", to "follow Jesus", but not any Jesus, rather the Jesus of Jubilee. In other words, Peter was being required to take the manifesto of Jesus, seriously, to sign on the dotted line, meaning, a severing of his old loyalties and attachments, which included his upper middle-class status and comforts which skewed the way he saw things, and his undeniable Jewish religious racism: something which Paul in Galatians, attacks in Peter's narrow view of the world. Today, Jubilee is again promoted in this statement of Jesus, referred to as "The Sermon on the Plain". It is similar to Matthew's Sermon on the Mount, but is also quite different. The Sermon on the Plain is more radical as it promises Jubilee to the poor, but woe to the rich. In Luke's Gospel, the Sermon on the Plain reflects not just Jubilee but also, if we stretch back all the way to Advent, Mary's Magnificat, which looks toward a new world altogether for the Hebrew "*anawim*" the poor of the land.

¹⁷ When Jesus had come down from the hill with the apostles, he stood on a level place with a large number of his disciples. A large crowd of people was there from all over Judea and from Jerusalem and from the coast cities of Tyre and Sidon; ¹⁸ they had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those who were troubled by evil spirits also came and were healed. ¹⁹ All the people tried to touch him, for power was going out from him and healing them all.

²⁰ Jesus looked at his disciples and said,

“Happy are you poor;
the Kingdom of God is yours!

²¹ “Happy are you who are hungry now;
you will be filled!

“Happy are you who weep now;
you will laugh!

²² “Happy are you when people hate you, reject you, insult you, and say that you are evil, all because of the Son of Man! ²³ Be glad when that happens and dance for joy, because a great reward is kept for you in heaven. For their ancestors did the very same things to the prophets.

²⁴ “But how terrible for you who are rich now;
you have had your easy life!

²⁵ “How terrible for you who are full now;
you will go hungry!

“How terrible for you who laugh now;
you will mourn and weep!

²⁶ “How terrible when all people speak well of you; their ancestors said the very same things about the false prophets.

The Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you Lord Christ

Hymn: City of God (As One Voice 57, Dan Schutte)

Awake from your slumber, arise from your sleep
A new day is dawning for all those who weep
The people in darkness have seen a great light
The Lord of our longing, has conquered the night

*Let us build the city of God
May our tears be turned into dancing
For the Lord, our light and our love
Has turned the night into day*

We are sons of the morning, we are daughters of day
The one who has loved us, has brightened our way
The Lord of all kindness has called us to be
a light for all people to set their hearts free.

*Let us build the city of God
 May our tears be turned into dancing
 For the Lord, our light and our love
 Has turned the night into day*

God is light, in him there is no darkness
 Let us walk in his light, his children one and all

O comfort my people, make gentle your words,
 Proclaim to my city, the day of her birth

*Let us build the city of God
 May our tears be turned into dancing
 For the Lord, our light and our love
 Has turned the night into day
 For the Lord, our light and our love
 Has turned the night into day*

A Film Clip – The Sounds of Violence

This is a gripping clip of original footage of the bombardment of the Presidential Palace (“La Moneda”), during the military coup, September 11th, 1973 – often referred to today as the “first September 11th”. What is most astounding about this footage is not so much the visuals, but the sheer noise of violence: something of which we seldom think. In retrospect, this period of Chilean history, and the coup itself, was perhaps one of the most transparent examples of social and political conflict between the ‘haves and the have-nots’.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DnhbZ55i4Q8>

Some thoughts...

Let’s Give

Doxology

***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.***

Prayer of Dedication

Prayers of the People

Ross Lorenz

The one who prays offers the following words at the end of each series of petitions, "May our prayers feed our actions". The people respond, "May our actions confirm our words".

Hymn: You have come down to the Lakeshore (from the Spanish "Tu has venido a la orilla" - Cesáreo Gabaraín, New Century Hymnal 173)

1. You have come down to the lakeshore
seeking neither the wise nor the wealthy
but only asking for me to follow.

*Jesus, you have looked into my eyes;
kindly smiling, you've called out my name.
On the sand I have abandoned my small boat;
now with you I will seek other seas.*

2. You know full well my possessions
neither treasure nor weapons for conquest
just these my fishnets and will for working.

Refrain

3. You need my hands, my exhaustion
working love for the rest of the weary
a love that's willing to go on loving

Refrain

4. Tu has venido a la orilla
no has buscado ni a sabios, ni a ricos,
tan solo quieres que yo te siga.

Refrain in Spanish

*Jesus, me has mirado a los ojos
sonriendo, has dicho mi nombre,
en la arena he dejado mi barca;
junto a ti buscare otro mar.*

Blessing

“Happy are you poor;
the Kingdom of God is yours!
“Happy are you who are hungry now;
you will be filled!
“Happy are you who weep now;
you will laugh!

It is only by listening to what we say about God,
and to how what is said, ties in with what we do,
that Christian faith carries credibility

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord
In the name of Christ
Amen

**We sing: You shall go out with joy (TiS 755, Trees of the Field,
Steffi Geiser Rubin) *We sing twice***

Closing Postlude

Pianist:

Rosemary Osborne