

6 November 2022 Luke 6:20-31 All Saints Pastor Fraser Pearce

An image for the sermon: the SANFL

Going out on to the oval: listening to the coach

We stand nearby and hear

Words spoken to the team by the coach to the chosen players

As they face the opposition.

Imagine a coach speaking to a team as they face

An unscrupulous opposition:

You're on the right track

When the opposition sledge you

When they try dirty tricks on you

If they single you out, you're doing something right.

But when they leave you alone,

When they're glad you're on the opposing team

And they welcome you

Then you know that something is wrong.

In today's Gospel Jesus is speaking to people

Who are already his disciples:

The twelve Apostles whom he has chosen,

And the great crowd of disciples who were with him.

He speaks to them in the presence of the crowds.

So: he is not telling them how to become disciples.

He is giving them straight talk about the realities of discipleship.

Listen: **Then he looked up at his disciples and said:**

**'Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.**

**'Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.**

**'Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.**

‘Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

Does Jesus, who in compassion feeds the hungry crowds
Want his disciples to be hungry?

Does Jesus, who in compassion raises a widow’s son to life,
Want his disciples to be full of sorrow?

Does he actively want them poor and hated?

Well, does a coach want his players sledged and hurt on the field?

No, but he is assuring them when these things happen

That they should not think that God has abandoned them

Or that they are failing as disciples.

On the contrary, as they suffer these things *for his sake*,

They should know that they are on the right track,

That the opposition and loss they experience

Is not something that should be unexpected in the life of discipleship;

It is part of living as God’s holy people, his saints.

To drive the point home he puts it in negative terms

**‘But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.**

**‘Woe to you who are full now,
for you will be hungry.**

**‘Woe to you who are laughing now,
for you will mourn and weep.**

**‘Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their
ancestors did to the false prophets.**

Remember, Jesus is speaking here not to the scribes or pharisees,

He is speaking to the twelve, to the great group of his disciples,

To us.

If we think the life of discipleship is about getting ahead in this world,

Then we are on the wrong track:

We should not be surprised when we encounter loss or difficulty

Or opposition as we live the life of faith, even in simple things.

Let's take a very simple example.

Let's say we are unfriended on social media

Because someone learns that we confess that Jesus is Lord,

Or that we uphold the teaching that Jesus passes on to us.

Should we be surprised by this, or upset by this?

No, these things will happen,

And in fact we can be glad that Jesus lets us have a small share

In the rejection that he himself faced:

We are on the same path that he walked.

This does not mean, of course, that we should become bitter

To other people if we suffer rejection or harm or loss from them

Because we bear Jesus' name. On that contrary,

Jesus goes on to give his disciples grace-filled teaching,

To give us teaching on living in a world where we will face opposition.

Listen to what Jesus says: **'But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.**

To understand this teaching I think we need to remember

That it is given to disciples, particularly in the face of opposition.

So if we want to see examples of what living it out looks like,

We do well to consider the saints who have gone before us

And who have demonstrated to us Jesus' teaching in action.

In fact, in the Augsburg Confession we confess: ***It is also taught among us that saints should be kept in remembrance so that our faith may be strengthened when we see what grace they received and how they were sustained by faith.***

So consider, for example, the first martyr of the church, St Stephen.

He was murdered not because he had done anything wrong,
But because he had faithfully confessed the Lordship of Christ.
In Acts we read these words: **While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.'** Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, **'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.'** When he had said this, he died. Acts 7:59-60

His life of discipleship, his life of faith,
Led directly to his unjust death.

But he did not conclude that he had been abandoned by God,
And he did not become full of bitterness toward his enemies.

Rather, he commended his spirit to the Lord Jesus,
And he prayed for those who persecuted him.

Let's be encouraged in our own life of faith by his example,
And the examples of all the saints of the church.

Jesus concludes today's reading with these words:

Do to others as you would have them do to you.

With these simple words Jesus gives us a holy way of thinking,
That is very much to do with this world and our lives here and now.

As we consider how we like others to treat us,

And as we put ourselves in their shoes,

And consider how we ought to treat them,

We share in the mindset of Christ.

Dear members of Bethlehem, we are disciples of Christ.

We share in the mindset of Christ in the gift of holy baptism

Where we have been joined in him.

So, let's receive his word as his chosen disciples,

Let's be encouraged by the good examples

Of our fathers and mothers in the faith,

And let us show God's love to others

As we treat them as we would like to be treated,

And, more than this, where we love each other

As we have been loved by God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In Jesus' name. Amen.