



Rev Helen Jacobi
Eyes of your heart
Year C All Saints
Ephesians 1:15-19
Luke 6:20-31
30 October 2022

“I do not cease to give thanks” – what a wonderful way to be; what a great attitude to have in life. Paul is writing to the church at Ephesus and there was plenty to bring Paul down, plenty for the church community to complain about. Paul says I do not cease to give thanks for you and I pray that you may know hope with “the eyes of your heart enlightened.”

What a great phrase – “with the eyes of your heart enlightened” – a sense of our hearts being awake and alive, and able to see as well as feel.

So we come today giving thanks, and seeing anew with our hearts.

We are here for many different reasons today.

Some of you are here because you have a loved one who has died in the last year, and their funeral was here.

Some of you are here to hear the choir sing.

Some of you are here because you are always here.

Some of you are here because you have wandered in by chance.

We can give thanks for each other.

We give thanks too for the people whose names we will read during the prayers, or whose names you will remember as we pray.

There are names on the list of people who died very recently, others long ago. Some old, some very young, some in between.

For some of us the grief is so recent and so fresh we can barely breathe.

For others the tears flow again, but more softly.

Each life, whether short or long is complete in itself.
In the midst of sadness and grief we can still be thankful.
That is partly what Jesus meant when he said “blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.”

Wherever you are in your grieving and loving and giving thanks, you can allow the words of the Rutter Requiem and the singers to speak for you. Whatever it is you want to say to your loved one, to God, or to yourself. Words of thanks, words of anger, words of love, words of regret, words of joy, words of sorrow; tears and smiles; goodbyes and hulloos. Do your own translation, let the music carry your prayer and your thoughts.

But then let me warn you the words of Jesus we just heard from the gospel reading might come crashing in and not seem quite resonant with your personal prayers and Paul’s lovely words of thanksgiving.

Jesus is like that – gets in the way of our own plans and thoughts.
I said before that in the midst of sadness and grief we can still be thankful and that is partly what Jesus meant when he said “blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.”

But the Beatitudes, as this list of blessing is called, are not really about us as individuals.

Jesus we are told went up a mountain to pray and then came down to “a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples (not just the 12) and a great multitude of people ... and he looked at the disciples and said.”

He spoke to his followers (not to everyone), on the ground, on the level. Blessed are you who are hungry, who weep; when people hate you.

These are not descriptions of individual struggles, but the life of the early followers of Jesus who were hungry for God, who were weeping at the state of their lives and communities, oppressed and hated by the Romans.

Jesus' words are a commentary on their community and way of life. And when Luke writes these words down the early church was definitely struggling and asking the question – what has changed? We are following Jesus but people are still hungry; we still weep for our world; the Romans are still ruling.

What has changed?

And don't even start with love your enemies – how are we supposed to do that?

One writer, Mark Lau Branson puts it like this

“The perspective being voiced here is not that poverty is good or that (weeping) is to be sought – but that a community that lives with these characteristics in vulnerability and receptivity to the presence of God's reign will find themselves embraced, reconciled, comforted, even re-created. ... Jesus wants them to have new eyes, different perspectives, an awareness of God's generative work among them.”¹

So it is about perspective and the way we see things.

Sam Wells calls it “a window into the heart of God that can be seen by those who experience adversity but is invisible to the comfortable.”²

Like the eyes of the heart that Paul writes about – if the eyes of our heart become more open, or more enlightened by our life experiences then we can see maybe even into the heart of God.

But then Jesus ramps it up with the “woes” or curses – woe to the rich, the full, the laughing, those who are praised.

Again not so much woe to the individuals but woe to the society who ignored the needs of others and carried on in their own self satisfied way.

¹ p 59 Memories, Hopes and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry, Missional Engagement and Congregational Change 2016

² p 25 A Future that's bigger than the past: Catalysing Kingdom Communities 2019

These words of Jesus are about life here and now and in every generation – life in all its complexities and paradoxes – life with all its questions and lack of answers.

Who are the blessed, and who are the lost?

Blessed are the hungry – those who literally are hungry and who will eat today at the City Mission.

Blessed are the hungry – who will be fed today from this table – we are hungry for our ritual bread and wine – which represents to us life with God, life in community.

Blessed are we who hunger for God in our lives – even if we are not sure who God is or how we might meet God.

Blessed are the hungry, who seek, who look, who want to know God and who want to feed the hunger of our world with love and service.

At this table all are welcome and all are fed.

In the same way the mysterious words of the Requiem are sung for us all and those for whom we pray.

The words weep for us and we are lifted up by their beauty.

Blessed are those who weep.

Woe to us though if we think we have life figured out; woe to us if we are self satisfied and sure we know everything; woe to us if we neglect the hungry at our door.

Instead we are invited to be here today – hearts and hands empty, hungry – ready to be filled with the beauty of music and the touch of God's grace.

Ready to give thanks, ready to have the eyes of our hearts enlightened.