

On the Plain

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church February 16th, 2025 – Luke 6:17-26)

Our reading today comes from Luke's gospel and Luke tells the story of Jesus in a particular way. As we will read much from Luke's gospel this year, I thought it might be timely to introduce you to Luke.¹

We don't really know who wrote the gospel of Luke. We do know that the gospel is dedicated to someone (as many writings are) but we aren't sure who they were. They are named as Theophilus – which is Greek for 'lover of God', perhaps that means all the believers that would follow down through the ages?

Luke writes a fairly simple story and gets some of his material from Mark (the first gospel written) and has some similar material to Matthew, indicating they have access to some of the same material.

This gospel was written in the 90's AD and Luke writes two volumes. The first volume is the Gospel According to Luke and it tells the story of Jesus. The second volume is the Book of Acts, and it tells the story of the early church.

Luke doesn't claim to be an eyewitness but uses eyewitnesses as his source. He writes so believers will know the truth about their faith, giving them a basis for their faith. He wants to reassure the people and help make them stronger in their faith.

He wants to demonstrate that Jesus is in continuity with the history of the people of God, that there is a connection with the past but there is also a new way coming.

He understands Jesus to be the Saviour, but in a broad sense – he talks about wholeness, healing, conversion, restoration and changed behaviour.

He tells miracle stories to reinforce this. His understanding of faith has an ethical focus, what people do is important, and he has an emphasis on how people use their wealth and having a concern for the poor (we can see this in Mary's song and Zechariah's song).

Important for Luke, is Jesus' statement in the temple, which we looked at a few weeks ago – that he has come to bring good news to the poor, freedom to the captives and proclaim God's favour.

Luke also clearly states that God's love and presence extends into foreign cultures. He doesn't have any complex theological doctrines in his work.

For Luke, being a believer means joining the church (the community of believers, who stand in continuity with the people of God throughout history), sharing with others, living a life of prayer and good deeds.

It is in this context that we find our reading today.

Luke has Jesus talking plainly on the plain, (not up a mountain which is where Matthew places Jesus). Luke only has 4 beatitudes or blessings whereas Matthew has 8. Luke also has a series of woes which Matthew doesn't.

¹ Much of this material comes from Bill Loader's website.

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This teaching is addressed to the disciples, to potential disciples, to all within earshot and to us the readers. There were crowds of people gathered from all over the place, and they were there to listening to Jesus' teaching and some had also come for healing - physical, mental and emotional.

Let's look at the blessings:

Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Matthew talks about the poor in Spirit, Luke simply says poor. He means those who are dispirited, overtaxed (in both senses of the word), lost, hopeless and financially poor.

Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Hungry for food and for justice.

Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Sadness will make way for joy.

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 how their ancestors treated the prophets. If you stand up for me (Jesus) and face a hard time, things will change, and you will know joy.

And the woes are simply the opposite to the blessings. The rich have already received much, those who are full will one day be hungry, if you laugh now, sadness is coming and be careful if people speak well of you.

So, what does this mean? Should one aim to be poor, hungry, sad. By no means! Jesus is reminding them that a new order has been established, that in him the hopes of the people are coming to fruition. This is a message for not just the future but for the here and now, and the listeners are not to be just recipients of this, they need to be part of the realisation of these hopes. Jesus is asking for changed behaviour in Luke. Right living is to see the world as God sees it, and to practice those things that God in Jesus does – compassion, generosity, justice. When the community practices these ethics, then the poor will be blessed, the hungry fed, the sad will find joy in the here and now.

As we look today at our ministry goals for the next year at our church meeting today, may our decisions be guided by the ethics that Luke articulates and Jesus calls us to, that way we will make a difference in the world. Amen.