

Readings: 1 Samuel 16:6-12; Luke 6:20-31

The way we see people can get us into a lot of trouble. A bit like the man who walked into the produce section of his local Tesco's supermarket to buy a half a head of lettuce. The boy working there told him they only sold whole heads of lettuce. "Get the manager!" the man insisted. Walking to the back of the shop the boy said to the manager, "Some old fool wants to buy half a head of lettuce." As he finished the sentence, he turned around to see the man standing behind him, so he quickly added, "and this gentleman has kindly offered to buy the other half." The manager approved of the way the boy dealt with the customer, "I am so impressed with the way you got yourself out of that situation," he said when the man had gone. "I like a man who can think on his feet. Where are you from?" "New Zealand, sir," he answered. "Why did you leave New Zealand?" "Sir there's nothing there but ugly women and rugby players," "Is that right?" replied the manager. "My wife is from New Zealand." "Really," replied the boy, "and which team did she play for?"

There can be no doubt that Jesus sees people differently. Sometimes called the Sermon on the Plain, the Gospel reading today provides us with a list of those people Jesus sees as especially blessed by God: the poor, the hungry, those that weep, and those that other people exclude. The disciples and the large crowd that hear these words of Jesus would have had their heads spinning. You see the common belief in Jesus day was that those blessed by God were the rich, the satisfied and contented.

But Jesus kingdom is the upside-down kingdom in which the poor are blessed and the simple receive truth hidden from the wise.

Today we celebrate the saints and most especially St Luke. Many theories have been put forward about the background of Luke, but we only need open his Gospel to discover how he saw people. His Gospel speaks for itself. In telling the story of Jesus, he always puts the poor, the old, the disadvantaged and women at the very forefront of Jesus concerns. The stories he gives us which are unique to Luke are the Healing of the Ten Lepers, the Good Samaritan, and the Prodigal Son. All these stories have within them a concern to tell us about a God who has a privileged place in his heart for the underdog. Even in our reading today we see his concern for the vulnerable shining through. Matthew in his Gospel renders it "Blessed are the poor in spirit." for Luke it's just "Blessed are the poor." Direct and uncompromising.

But what of this community named after St Luke. What of this congregation that has worshipped here under the saint's name across three centuries? I count myself lucky to be a part of this St Luke's community. I know how caring this community is and can be. Just last week you rallied around to support Connie's family at her death. You became a blessing for those that mourn her by baking, cleaning, and opening your church to them in love. You lived the beatitude of Jesus, "Blessed are those that mourn." Thank you.

Our first reading shows how God looks not on the outward appearance of someone but on their heart.

Jesus too sees differently. He is not fooled by outward appearances.

In 2012 Joshua Bell undertook an experiment. Joshua is one of the world's best violinists. Two days before the experiment he had played to standing ovations and a packed house in Boston where the cheapest ticket was \$100. He took his 3.5million dollar violin and played for 45 minutes to those coming into the Washington railway station. Of the 7,000 people that passed him by only 7 stopped to listen, one a 3-year-old boy. Only one of the 7,000 recognized him. To everyone else he was just a poor street person begging for money. He received \$23 dollars in tips.

I wonder who we pass by. I wonder if we who call ourselves Christians are any better at seeing with God's eyes. Do we see the poor, the hungry, the excluded, the weeping in our world?

Today's Gospel is both a comfort and a challenge.

We can be comforted to know that when we are poor, or hungry or excluded that God is especially concerned for us but we can also be challenged to see with God's eyes the vulnerable, the poor, the hungry and the excluded in our midst.

When we begin to see with God's eyes of love remarkable things begin to happen.

An unremarkable boy grew up in an improvised township in apartheid South Africa. Every day he would walk to school with his mother and siblings. Growing up in the mostly black township the protocol had been established a thousand times over. When, on what passed for a footpath, a white person walked towards them they had to step onto the road, bow their heads in respect and let them pass. But this day was different. The man coming towards his mum and brothers and sisters was Trevor Huddleston, a white Anglican priest. Before he could force them off the footpath he stepped onto the dirty road, he raised his hat and greeted the boy's mum warmly. "Who's he?" the boy enquired of his mother after the white man had gone. "That's Father Trevor," she said, "He loves black people." "Why?" the boy asked. "He's a priest." his mother answered. The young boy had no idea what a priest was but if they treated his mother with respect, he vowed that day to become one. We know that boy today as Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

You see the saints we honour today are no different from you and me, but they have learnt to see with the eyes of God, the eyes of the heart. And that makes all the difference.

Let us pray:

*Loving Jesus, You had courage to proclaim the poor, the hungry, the bereaved and the excluded as especially blessed by God. Help us to see with your eyes the poor and vulnerable around us, that we might be a blessing to them, and grant us the comfort when we mourn, are poor or excluded of knowing your love, today and all our days.
Amen.*