

As we continue our journey to lent we need to continue to explore why does Jesus matter, and therefore why should we pay any attention to him? This is the issue before the people of Jesus day, and now, just as then there are people who get what Jesus is on about and what to be fully involved, there are people who get what Jesus is on about and don't want to be involved because it interferes with their lives, there are people who get what Jesus is on about and react against him because if he continues to influence them he will upset their comfortable lives, and there are people who simply don't get him.

Here in our Gospel story today we have a clear indication of who Jesus is, and why he matters, and we are invited to respond in some way to the revelation we have of who Jesus is. Now some may ask, what has healing got to do with the Beatitudes; well it has everything to do with them as we will see.

If I was to ask you what was the target audience for Luke's Gospel, one might well say, Theophilus. After all that was who Luke wrote the Gospel for.

However, it would seem from some seminal moments in the Gospel account that Jesus was targeting his message to a particular demographic. That demographic seems to be to the poor. It is Luke who gives us the Magnificat, “He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.” His opening words of the Beatitudes are to the poor. But who are the poor? It would seem from the Gospel perspective the poor are the ones who are disenfranchised from God. Yes there are the poor who are begging, but in the eyes of the religious leaders of the day they are the ones who have been abandoned by God. If they were really God’s people then they would be blessed by God. However, the nation as a whole was to always care for the poor, either in the payment of their daily wage, returning their cloak in the evening if they sold it during the day etc.

These people seem to be abandoned by God. But here in this passage there is a clear implication that these people are being re incorporated into the Kingdom of God.

Who are these people? These are people who are hungry to hear what God is doing for them, or what God thinks of them.

Here they see in Jesus someone who is in contact with God, someone even sent by God to them for some purpose. What, they are not sure about, but they do know that no one can do the things that he is doing if they were not from God, so they want to be in on it. Here is an opportunity for their lives to be touched by God in some personal way and for God to finally make a real difference in their lives.

What Jesus does for them in this Gospel passage is demonstrate the link between faith and works. He demonstrates his authority, which we know he has, because Luke records for us that power was coming out from him. There is this wonderful sense that here is Jesus and as he goes around the people the unclean spirits are departing and the people are being made whole. This is what Jesus is on about, making people whole, making them feel fully human, making them to be what they were created to be in the first place.

Part of the deal with being in league with Jesus is that we are engaged in a war. It is a war with whatever would oppose the purposes of God. This passage tells us that Jesus is able to win the war, and when we sign up with him we put ourselves on the winning side. This ability of Jesus to

exorcise demonic forces from people does not mean that he has defeated Satan at this point, for later in the Gospel we read of Satan entering Judas to betray Jesus. Even in the book of Acts post resurrection there is no sense that evil has been defeated. So why place ourselves in the hands of Jesus if Satan has not been defeated? Well he has. But the reality of the defeat has yet to be realized.

Jesus is able to defeat Satan in this Gospel passage. Then he looks up and sees the people and starts on the beatitudes. Blessed are the.....

Here he links what he is doing with the people with what is to happen. Blessed are you in the situation you find yourself in, there will come a time when it will be transformed. Take the poor for example. After the resurrection, was the position of poor eradicated? By no means!!! However, what Jesus is talking about is what the cross achieves and will be realized at the end time. Jesus is saying, blessed are you, there will come a time when your situation will be transformed into something more glorious. It doesn't seem possible at the moment, but these people being healed here would not have dreamt that their disease could be changed and transformed into something more glorious.

So the healing has an edge to it. It is not about healing for healings sake. It is healing to point the people to the reality that Jesus and Jesus alone has the power and authority to transform lives. Here he is transforming them in a temporal way, but there will come a time when he will transform it in an eternal way. The healing is the sign and seal to the promise of the beatitudes. If you see someone doing these remarkable healings you are more likely to be attentive to what they are saying to you about your life situation, and you are more likely to believe something improbable as the beatitudes when you have seen with your own eyes the impossible in the healings.

So what has that to do with us? Well, quite a lot really. We are not in too different a world to that of Jesus. Yes we can get around more quickly, communication is faster, and we wear better clothes, and when it gets really hot we usually have access to an air conditioner. However, there are still many people who are impoverished, even though they may not seem to be.

Jesus' call to the underprivileged is still pertinent today, because we still have under privileged people in our society, even here in Gordon. I have lost count of the number of people I have had to help here either clothing, feeding, or general assistance of people who have come to the rectory door. But it is not just my responsibility. It is all our responsibility to seek out injustice and to see that it is overturned.

The beatitudes are really nice, but what follows in Luke isn't, because you and I will normally fit into one of those categories where there are woes.

Being a Christian is about looking on our fellow human beings as being made in the image of God. And therefore we have to respond to them not with disdain, but with love, for that is how our heavenly father looks on each and every one of us, and especially the under privileged. It is not good enough for us to see the issue as someone else's problem. We do not have the resources to rectify the problem, but we are not asked to rectify it, we are asked to respond to it.

That means being compassionate, loving, and kind. Seeking to reach out to the underprivileged, and seeking to be Christ to the people we come in contact with. Where we work is a good starting place, and our homes should not be impenetrable fortresses, but places where people can access aid, while we ourselves are kept safe. On top of all that we are to confront the things that stop others from reaching their full potential and assisting them in being fully human. That was what was happening in the healings, but also we are to be witnesses to the risen Jesus who has the ability to transform the lives of people. This means that we too need to be transformed by the love of God in Christ Jesus. We can not ask or invite others to be transformed when we ourselves are not.

This means that we will have to decide how we are to respond to God. In the beginning I said that there were a number of responses to Jesus, ranging from indifference, to acceptance, and then to hostility. How we respond will depend on how much we are wanting to be changed by God himself. This will in turn determine how much we are willing to be changed which will determine how effective we will be for Jesus, and therefore how much of a difference Christ will be for us and for those we come in to contact with.

Finally, all of the will be important, because all that will then decide whether we sit on the Blessed side of the discussion in today's Gospel, or whether we find ourselves on the woe side. But ultimately the decision is ours, and we will find ourselves with less excuse than non Christians simply because we have had the example before us all the time in Jesus.