**Final Baldock Sermon 13 Feb 2022**

1 Corinthians 15:12-20

**The Resurrection of the Dead**

**12**Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? **13**If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; **14**and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. **15**We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ—whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. **16**For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. **17**If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. **18**Then those also who have died[a] in Christ have perished. **19**If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. **20**But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.

Luke 6:17-26

**Jesus Teaches and Heals**

**17**He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. **18**They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. **19**And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

**Blessings and Woes**

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

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

**21**“Blessed are you who are hungry now,
    for you will be filled.
“Blessed are you who weep now,
    for you will laugh.

**22**“Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you[a] on account of the Son of Man. **23**Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

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

**25**“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.

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

434 words

May I speak in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen

I love the musical, the Sound of Music, one song in particular seems apt for today, the words go... I won’t sing them!

So long, farewell, Auh Wiedersehen goodbye,

I hate to leave and tell you all goodbye

Most of you will know by now that Alan and I are leaving Baldock soon to start a new life in North Wales.

We have chosen North Wales, not because we know anyone there but because it’s by the sea and also backed by the Snowdonia Mountain range.

It is beautiful and the town we are moving too is known as the place where the mountains meet the sea.

We are moving to Barmouth, the only place I know that has three names! Barmouth, Abermaw and Y Bermo.

They also speak mainly Welsh there which will be a challenge.

The Parish Church is huge and stands out on the hillside, interestingly it was commissioned and paid for by the Lea Perrins family, they of Worcester sauce fame.

The services are similar to our services here except that they are the Church of Wales, and the service sheets and news sheets are prepared in both English and Welsh.

I have lived in Baldock for almost 30 years, it’s a long time to be in one place and I have always felt at home here.

I will miss walking down the street and recognising familiar faces, although Barmouth is only the size of Clothall Common, so I am sure I will soon get to know faces there too.

So today is my last day as a Reader in St Albans diocese, we will not be leaving quite yet so you will still see me in the congregation and around and about, but this will be the last time I will be upfront and wearing my robes in St Mary’s .

But enough about me, what is todays gospel all about?

Today we hear Jesus giving Luke’s opposite version of what we often call the Beatitudes, or the sermon on the mount.

The sermon on the mount is relayed by Matthew in his gospel, in chapter 5 and we read Jesus went up a mountain and sat down to preach. Here in chapter 6 of Luke’s Gospel, – early on in his ministry – we read that Jesus stood in a level plain, and, while standing there he preached what is known as the sermon on a plain – in it, Jesus gives four blessings followed by four woes.

We read that Jesus stood amongst a great crowd, I can imagine the hustle and bustle, the pushing to get close to him, for we read ‘They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured.And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them’.

So, in this February Sunday morning in Baldock, let us just pause and imagine for a moment that we are there.

AD30, Israel, it’s a hot, dusty day, hardly a cloud in the sky, the sun scorching the ground, lizards basking on rocks along the roadside, heat haze all around, we are trying to anticipate where Jesus will be.

Earlier in the chapter we have heard that he had wandered through fields of grain and visited a synagogue where he healed a man with a withered hand. Also, He has just appointed his 12 disciples, and now his reputation is going before him,

People are saying to each other, “Jesus of Nazareth, son of the widow Mary, older brother of James is doing amazing things. Come and see, touch his cloak, he can heal you, honest, try it I did, it worked for me!”

Expecting him to stand on a stage, suddenly here he is in the midst of the people, God here amongst us, his disciples trying to keep people away but failing, every touch felt as power to heal leaves him, but the power source is not empty. As power leaves him, more appears. He raises his eyes to heaven, “thank you Father”.

Jesus realising that he is in this place, here, now, for a reason, speaks. The crowd hush and stand still ‘ shhh the master is speaking…listen….’

And Jesus speaks’ Blessed are you who are poor, who are hungry, who are sad’

 “That’s me, he is talking about me, in the midst of this crowd, he knows ME!”

And then he speaks again in his strong voice, his piercing eyes scanning the crowd, ‘woe to you that are rich, you who don’t think about others, you who boast’

“that’s me, that’s me, he is talking about me, in the midst of this crowd, he knows ME!”

His simple words remind everyone of their vulnerability, either in what they feel or what they do.

And that is the beauty of the Christian faith and Jesus’s words. They are relevant to everyone, from the hardship of the Roman occupation in His time, to coming out of the pandemic in ours, nothing has really changed, no one has power over their own destiny, we like to think we do, but in reality, we don’t.

And sometimes, things get on top of us, or we are not as caring as we should be.

Time and time again in the gospels Jesus reminds us that we are never alone, never abandoned and it’s never too late to come to him and receive the gift of the promise of heaven and eternal life.

When Jesus encountered the Samaritan woman at the well in John chapter 4, he told her that the well water would only sustain her for a day, but his Living water would sustain her for eternity.

We read ‘Jesus said, “Everyone who drinks of this (well) water will be thirsty again,but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.”

As those who have gone before us have, we too, will have to ride out the challenges and storms during our time on earth.

Some of these, like for some, the pandemic, or illness, death of a loved one, family crisis or the loss of a job, won’t be easy.

But because Jesus died on the Cross for every one of us, for you and for me, we have all been given the ultimate insurance policy of a wonderful existence of eternal life in Heaven, with the angels around the throne, should we choose to accept it.

Jesus gives us hope and light at the end of the tunnel.

If you already believe in Him, come to the communion table, and renew your faith by eating and drinking with Him.

If you are unsure of what you believe, ask Him to show you, speak to a Christian friend, Andrew, Katrina, Emma, or me but whatever you do, remember, and take comfort in the words of the medieval theologian, Julian of Norwich who wrote in the 14th Century ‘ all shall be well, all shall be well, all manner of things shall be well’.

And take comfort in Him. Amen.

So, this is it, the end of my last 8am/ 9:30/ 11am sermon, goodness knows how many I have done over the years!

I thank you all for your support and encouragement, you will forever be in my heart, and I pray that the congregation here at St Mary’s/ St Margaret of Antioch will grow in faith, and size, in the years to come.

God bless you all

Amen

1318 words