

SERMON: Sunday – 13 February 2022 – Rev Alistair Cowper

Souls Fed and Healed

1 Corinthians 15:12-20

Luke 6:17-26

The context of Luke 6. Takes place on a Sabbath where two encounters reveal people's misunderstanding of the concept of the Sabbath and therefore their concept of God.

Shabbat (or Sabbath) intends to satisfy hunger and bring healing; and not for policing religious observance.

Jesus uses 2 illustrations to contradict the religious hypocrisy of the Pharisees, the then gate keepers of the Sabbath.

And I think Jesus contradicts the confident, certain, pious religious ones with a teaching that more or less says that to be in Christ means finding rest in God and that in so doing souls are fed and healed.

Surely this is what God had meant by enjoying Sabbath? Sabbath is for rest and joy and feeding and healing - all things rooted in the God who made and sustains all things through Love, love that comes through the touch and sight and sound of this man in their midst.

To observe Sabbath in this way, as Sabbath was intended, to be embraced and enjoyed in the Way of Christ, souls will never go hungry nor remain unhealed.

Sabbath is what Jesus lived, breathed and modelled (as described in verses 1-11) and as then described in Luke 6:12-16, after a night in prayer, chooses

12 followers to be sent out in the Way he'd modelled.

Their souls would be fed and healed and they would be among the first to live in such a complete way. All because their lives would be built on the Way of the One who was the first fully complete human, Jesus of Nazareth.

Notice these first followers are referred to as apostles (verse 13, apostolous) as opposed to disciples (verse 17, mathaetes). They are missionaries, envoys, delegates, commissioned by Jesus to preach the Gospel and re-present Christ to others. They were the first ambassadors for God in Christ, and we stand in that same inheritance.

(Paul, later described himself "an ambassador in chains" for Christ. The Greek is a presbys from which we get the word presbyterian - in other words a true presbyterian is an ambassador for Christ.)

And notice too, that even one of those first chosen apostles is described as a traitor who would betray Jesus and the Way. Judas wasn't chosen because he was going to be a traitor. But he was left with the choice to choose to betray Jesus when the opportunity came.

We might ask ourselves the question, how do we cope when the heat is on? When tempted to choose a different path than the one which we were made for? How do we react when we have the choice between getting just for us and doing the right thing for all?

In verses Luke 6:17-19 we see the ancient Hebrew concept of Sabbath embodied in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. He is the Christ revealed in flesh and Luke tells us that all were drawn to him.

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.

Again here, the concept of Sabbath - souls fed and healed - is found in Jesus the Christ - the Son of Man is Lord of the sabbath.

God is the God to be rested in, to be trusted, to be fed by and healed. Therein lies the aim of life, the 7th day, the end, the completion. In God alone my hope is found.

So what about the blessings and the woes of Luke 6:20-26?

Blessed are the poor, the hungry, those who weep, are hated, excluded, insulted, rejected; for they will inherit the kingdom of God, be satisfied, will laugh and have a heavenly reward to look forward to.

But woe to the rich, well fed, those who laugh and are spoken well of. For there will be no more for them. They don't have riches to look forward to in the life to come.

We don't have to look far in our world to see that there are many injustices. Last week in the news there was a story from Afghanistan, of a mother who'd had to sell 2 of her children because she couldn't afford to feed them. Not only that, she'd then sold one of her kidneys in order to feed her other children. And sadly this is now quite a common occurrence in that part of the world.

It's not enough to say to such people that you'll get your reward in heaven; that justice will come. And though that is true, we have the opportunity to help right wrongs in the here and now by praying and doing the little we can. And we know that great things can be done through tiny faith. Human beings have the capacity to love enemies and to do incredible things in the name of Love.

Until justice comes, there has to be hope or else our faith is useless.

Let me paraphrase what the apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:

Our hope in Christ is not for this life only. If the dead are not raised then Christ is not raised and our faith is useless (or is dead).

Our hope is in the death conquering resurrection into the life beyond which will be life with no tears, regrets, no death, no turmoil, no anxiety and no injustice.

Until that day comes, may we, in Christ, never tire of working for justice for all, especially the poor and hungry. And when our final day of Sabbath comes and we are laid down to rest may we hear the voice of our Lord, well

done, good and faithful servant, come now and rise in glory with all who have gone before.

A Reflection from the STB Team - Blessing and woe

Lord, your teaching may simplify the law but it does not diminish.

You make it plain

that what you ask of us

goes further, reaches deeper, demands more:

more love, more compassion, more grace.

You teach us

not just how to get by but how to contribute to the well-being
of all creation.

You show us

how to transform the world by being more.

So, on those days

when we are tempted

to give what comes easily,

or to simply follow others

in half-hearted gestures,

preserve us from being judgmental and compel us to action

that stems from the awareness that we are shot through

with your divine spirit,

moulded with infinite love.

Help us to dig deeper

so that, as you have blessed us, we may bless others;

as you have forgiven us,

we may forgive others;

as you have loved us,

we may love others.

And, when we encounter those who make all these things difficult, give us

your heart of compassion and your strength of mind

and root us in your power

so that we can do no other

but follow your law of love

until practice makes perfect

and grace abounds.