

Sermon

'The love of God binds us all'

Year C 2022, Epiphany 6, Luke 6:17-26¹



'Some Christmases will always be more memorable than others, more joyful, serene, with blessings, with love. That we will say, was the best Christmas *ever*. We unbox our traditions, year by year; each celebration must compete with all that went before; we set high standards, write long lists, we cannot fail, we cannot afford to falter, Christmas becomes a challenge we must rise to. It is our duty to furnish it, to make it shine, we must do well. We must do the best we can.'

So began last night's repeat of the 'Call to midwife' 2019 Christmas special, which screened on the ABC last night.

Christmas celebrates the coming of God himself into the world. To seek and to save a lost world. To reconcile a lost world, to himself. To bring it back, to himself. Christmas celebrates God's vision for the world. Of a world redeemed, restored, renewed, in the future kingdom of God himself. The season of Epiphany, proclaims the message of Christ, to the nations.

¹ Luke 6:17-26. 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. 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.

Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

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

"Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.

"Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

"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 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.

"But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.

"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.

"Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

For all who, like us, are blessed to have heard the message of Christmas, it is fellowship with Jesus Christ, which guarantees our participation in the future salvation. And yet all people have a chance to enter the future kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed. The love of God, revealed in Jesus Christ, is for all people. The message of Jesus, is for the world.

For the many who have never been reached by the proclamation of the gospel, it is one's individual conduct that counts for them. As Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats shows, for the person who has never known Jesus, but who has done those works of love that are consistent with his message, they too will participate in future salvation. Though they have never known Jesus Christ personally, by their works of love, they will enter the kingdom of God. While those who are only nominal Christians will miss out. For 'Many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will not, Jesus said.

The only advantage of being a Christian at the future judgment then is that, for the Christian, the measure of eternal life, the measure of judgment, is known. So that all who relate their lives in this world to Jesus Christ, who hand over the whole of their life in this world, for the sake of God and his kingdom, in baptism, and in faith, are assured of participation in the future salvation that Jesus proclaimed. In Jesus Christ, they have already received justification and pardon at the hands of the future Judge. This is true for every Christian, so long as they are not just nominal Christians. So long as their Christian commitment is real. So long as they are in actual fact dying to their sinful life in this world. So long as they are in a living relationship with Jesus Christ, who became human, and who died on the cross for our deliverance and for our reconciliation with God, and who is the standard of future judgment.

All to whom the Beatitudes apply will have a share in the future kingdom of God. This is true whether or not they have even heard of Jesus in this life.

The future kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed is not only for Christians, it is for all people. The future kingdom that is the eternal destiny, not only of Christians, but for all. The future judgment of the world, the future salvation of the world, at which Jesus Christ himself will be the standard of

God's relation to the world. So that, God sees and judges the world, not just the Christian world, from the standpoint of their relation, whether implicit or explicit, to the message of Jesus. Through the eyes of mercy, now revealed, in Jesus.

In the season of Epiphany, we are called to proclaim the good news of Jesus, to the nations. To proclaim that God's relation to the world, to all people, not just Christians, is different from what it was, before the Christ event. And that even those who are not confessing members of the Christian church, by their works of love, can have a share in the new life manifested in Jesus Christ is their hearts are open to the nearness of God and his kingdom that Jesus proclaimed.

The good news of the kingdom of God includes the transformation of our hearts already now. Without this we mortal creatures cannot have fellowship with God. By this transformation of our life in this world, mercy is shown to the merciful, sufferers are comforted, and those who in themselves are poor, who humble themselves, who seek the righteous will of God in this life, and who are inevitably persecuted on account of this, will inherit the kingdom of God. Whereas those who have wealth and plenty and are thus too self-satisfied to yearn any longer for the future of God will be left out. The future transformation of the world, then, contains within it, the compensation of God, for the sufferings and deficiencies of the present world. Therefore, the message of Jesus is in a special sense the gospel for the poor, for those who are blind and lame, for the disadvantaged and handicapped, and all those for whom the normal development of human life in this world is denied.

'Some Christmases will always be more memorable than others,' says the writer of *Call the Midwife* – not because they surpass all the others we've known, but because the light shines from a different source. We're worried, but made wiser; welcomed in and given something new. Christmas isn't a competition, but a prize itself: a gathering and a sharing of the things that matter most. It is of no consequence whether we're the biggest or the brightest; whether we're the strongest, or the bravest, or the most inclined to win. It is the smallest things that have the highest value: the glance that sees, the ear that hears, the thought made deed, and the links in the chain of love that bind us all.'