

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Today's gospel reading is also known as the sermon on the plain. It has some similar parts to the Sermon on the Mount that is recorded in Matthew in the way that it gives us contrasting images of situations that we might think will make us anything but joyful but calls them blessings. It tells us that those who experience unpleasant things in our earthly lives will receive the opposite in Heaven. It says that the poor on earth will be blessed with the Kingdom of God, those who are hungry will be filled, those who are unhappy now, will later be laughing and those who are hated for their faith will be rewarded in Heaven. Unlike Matthew this passage also gives us the opposite scenarios and calls them woes. Those filled in this life will eventually be hungry, those rich will be poor, those laughing will be unhappy later and those with high opinions of themselves will be thought lesser of in Heaven. The words that used, namely poor, hungry, unhappy and hated can mean more than their simple face value meanings. A person who is poor or hungry need not be suffering financially or from lack of food. They could be lacking healthy relationships, a faith to depend on, self-esteem, courage, or hope in their future.

In 1943 Psychologist Abraham Maslow proposed a theory of human needs and motivation. It has five levels of need, starting with the most basic requirements for survival with things like food, water and shelter. This is then followed by levels of safety, love and belonging, esteem and self-actualisation, which includes things like morality and creativity. He says that as human beings we all strive to meet these needs on a daily and weekly basis and progress through the levels, and we can't move to the next level until the lower one is attained. These levels, however, are very much based on secular objectives. They don't consider faith and the part that it can play in a person's life. Maslow says that if human needs are met in earthly ways, then all will be well and good but, from both the sermon on the Plain in Luke and the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, we are told that there is more to it than this, and even if our earthly needs are met we are still acting in vain when considering our future in

Heaven. The opposite is also true. Luke tells us we can be lacking some of these needs and still have hope for the future through our faith in a loving God. As it says in Romans 12:12 where Paul is describing the marks of a true Christian, "Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering and persevere in prayer." And toward the end of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6 where Jesus is talking to the crowds about them worrying about their earthly needs, he says "strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." This is even in a hymn we sing which begins "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things will be given unto you etc". This tells us that our faith in God and hope through Jesus' death and resurrection are the most basic needs for us to focus on and all other things will stem from this.

Some of you may know that I have been fortunate to travel to both the Philippines and Indonesia on school mission and service trips and have had the pleasure of getting to know people in those countries that have far less material possessions than we do but are extremely full of faith and express it openly and warmly to others. The part that their faith has in their everyday lives is evident in the way they live and the way that they take part in conversations. They are very upfront about their beliefs and how they are thankful for the blessings they have received from God via Jesus. On a Sunday in rural Indonesia we saw many of the local people walking to and from church along the roads wearing their traditional clothing, and in the church we went to, about twice the size of St Andrew's, there were no empty seats, everyone was jammed in closely together in order to fit more in, and in between the verses of the hymns the priest would call out words of encouragement. We went to the 7.30am service which went for just over 2 hours and followed a similar structure to ours, but we were asked to leave quickly at the end so that the next service could start promptly. The faith of the people that we met was also very evident on many other occasions. The schools we have partnerships with all had prayers and singing every morning and the education staff acting as our guides would often relate how their faith has a large part in their lives. In the first reading from Jeremiah and also the psalm, faith-filled people are likened to plants growing near a water source, growing well and bearing fruit, even in adverse conditions. The people we met in Indonesia and the

Philippines were like these plants, being watered by their interactions with one another and then bearing fruit in their witness and encouragement to one another. Many people in this parish are also like these people, being hungry for spiritual growth and acknowledging that there can always be new growth, just like a plant is thirsty for water enabling it to grow and thrive. If you were ^{considered to be} a plant in the St Andrew's parish garden what do you see yourself as? Do you see yourself as a blooming flower or a loaded fruit tree, well fed and producing the goods? Or a succulent needing lots of watering? Are you a bulb plant like a daffodil that alternates between thriving and shrivelling? Are you, or could you be, a spiritual fertiliser that helps others grow, providing a boost or inspiration when it is needed most?

If we are hungry, thirsty or striving to grow in faith, then verses 20 and 21 from the gospel reading are particularly reassuring for us. "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." and "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled." Eventually we will all be a part of the Kingdom of God and will need to strive no more for fulfilment as it will be surrounding us.

There is a wonderful example of this for all of us in Ephesians when Paul is being held in jail and you can imagine that many of the needs in Maslow's hierarchy would not be being met in a jail 2000 years ago. Paul is able to not only put all of his trust in God but he also prays for the people of Ephesus to trust and strive to know God more fully. The following prayer from Ephesians, chapter 3, verses 16-21, is as relevant for us today as it was for the Ephesians when it was written.

Paul wrote

"I pray that from the Father's glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. ¹⁷ Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. ¹⁸ And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. ¹⁹ May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.

²⁰ Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. ²¹ Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen.”