3rd SUNDAY BEFORE LENT 13th FEBRUARY ALL SAINTS

LUKE 6. 17-26 (Rev. Margaret Woodgates)

I wonder if any of you take the Radio Times? If so you will have noticed the abundance of leaflets which accompany the magazine week by week? Last week for instance there was one about Doctors Without Boarders, with the byline ‘Saving lives in Afghanistan’, one from Shelter Box, to provide basic necessities for families who have lost their homes as a result of disaster, a shelter box providing blankets, water carriers, a family tent, a water purification unit and many other items to provide the basic necessities of every day living, Marie Curie Nurses, and the UN Refugee Agency asking for financial aid for the people of Afghanistan.

 Don’t worry, this is not a request for donations to any of these organizations. But looking at these pamphlets reminded me of today’s gospel reading from Luke. It’s very much about today’s issues in the world, and here in our country, poverty, hunger, food banks, lack of money, ill health you name it it’s there staring us in the face, day and night in all the papers and all TV channels.

 By way of background, lets go back to a few verses before this particular section begins. Previously Jesus had spent all night in prayer to his Father. As we go through Jesus’ ministry, praying to the Father was a very important

part of it. So very often we see much of his ministry and teaching preceded by prayer to God. It’s something to ponder about. I am sure that he must have prayed to his father about those things and people he came across . Those things and situations over which he felt there was nothing more he could do, as we see on the mount of Olives, ‘Father if it is possible take this cup away from me, yet not my will but yours be done.

 When he comes down from the mountain, he chooses his twelve disciples looks at them and the beatitudes follow. It almost feels as though he is teaching them the nature of what their work as his disciples will be like, this is how you will go about your work with me, how you will see, and understand what I preach and teach people, about how to live their lives following God’s word, and loving their enemies. And note how Luke states that Jesus ‘looks up at his disciples , as if to emphasize the importance of what he is saying.

 Blessed are the poor, those who are hungry, those who weep, for these people are in God’s hands and there is hope for them, Then it seems as though he is addressing the problems the disciples may come across when openly declaring their that they are disciples of Jesus, and trying to teach what Jesus has taught them.

Then he warns against wealth and physical comforts, having plenty of food to eat. Those whose lives will not, shall we say always be a bed of roses, for human life has its sorrows, and they will experience mourning and distress. And perhaps the last warning to the disciples is against what I would call flattery, or being praised when praise is not warranted, when praise is inappropriate or against the will of God.

 You will have guessed by now that I am no theologian. I wish I was. I spent many years as a Probation officer before I was called by God to ministry. But much of my ministry now draws on the nitty gritty of everyday life. Such a lot of what Jesus warns against in the Beatitudes, and what he promises as well, resonates with my own life experience, And I know that the promise of God’s salvation and love, must underpin my faith and ministry. Sometimes like all of us, and I expect, for the disciples as well when they encountered difficulties, there are always highs and lows in whatever God calls us to do, ordained or not.

And when I come up to Lent, and when I read Luke’s Beatitudes, I come to the conclusion that the world has not changed much, that we are human beings, with our flaws, the mistakes we make, and our sins.

 And being so near the beginning of Lent, I feel that not only I, but many of us who try to live out our faith, cannot just go with the flow, in Lent, leaping from Ash Wednesday to Easter day and not thinking about what comes in between.

So, In Lent perhaps we should put ourselves in Jesus’ footsteps and pray to God as a distinct Lent discipline.

So Praying to the Father as Jesus did. How can we do this?

Let me give you a few ideas.

Try to set aside some time, and space to pray as often, and when you can, without being disturbed. Let it be your prayer place, a chair, a table, a room. Relax, Prayer comes readily to us when we let it .All you need is a notebook, and a Bible.

What shall I pray about?

Pray from Scripture

Begin by quietly dedicating this prayer time to God, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy spirit. Make the sign of the cross if it is your practice, or use a lighted candle to help you.

Find a short passage from scripture, this could be a reading from the Sunday service, appropriate to Lent.

 Use you heart and mind, but don’t analyze the passage, pray in silence, don’t try to use Church like language.

Take the passage and read quietly though it. Once or twice. Think about it for a while , and If something speaks to you, talk silently to God about it, ask a question of Him, all the time having this silent time with Him, and listening to what He is saying to you. You may enhance your experience using your imagination to reflect on the passage before you, thinking about people, events, what is said. This also will lead you into prayer. Finally end with The Lord’s Prayer for this is

what Jesus taught us. Make some notes if you wish, about anything which you may wish to look at again.

May God’s blessing be upon your prayers during this coming time of Lent and Easter, and may you come closer to God. Amen.