

Sunday 30 October St Andrew's 0930 service

Luke 6: 20-31 The Promise

Recently we've heard a lot of promises from people at they start new jobs:

A Chancellor promised if we cut taxes we will get growth.

King Charles III made a promise of 'lifelong service' in his first address as monarch.

We are surrounded with promises every day. [Show a cereal box with a free toy inside].

How many of you children have convinced your Mum or Dad to buy you a box of cereal like this?

You could have gone for the regular box of cereal, like this - but what made you want to persuade them to buy this one instead?

Three words: Free. Toy. Inside.

This cereal box has a promise. If you buy this cereal, you're going to get a prize.

This way of thinking is just as true for adults - everyone wants a prize or perhaps we would call it a blessing - money, fame, power, importance.

Today's reading is from Jesus's first sermon as he sets out on his new job. Often called the 'Beatitudes', he speaks of blessings and reward in heaven – and it's certainly not what people were expecting.

Most people he was speaking to were hoping for a military leader with political power to save them from Roman rule - those with position and power were "the blessed".

Can you imagine the reaction when they heard this message. "What is this? How can the poor, the hungry, those who are sad, those who are excluded – how can they be blessed?"

Do you know any ruthless people? I certainly do, and I've previously worked for some – because in our world today, as in Jesus's time, some ruthless people get promoted to top positions.

And the rich, the well fed, the privileged (which is of course most of us) get to the front of the queue.

When Jesus taught about the promise of blessings today and a reward in heaven, he turned all understanding of what it means to be blessed upside down.

Lots of our congregation are receiving the kinds of blessings Jesus was talking about. We're going to hear two examples, from Mike Powell and Doug Simkiss, who are reaching out to others in different ways:

Mike

Good morning. Last year I retired and as I approached retirement, I pondered on what that would look like for me. I felt guided towards giving some of my time to volunteering and two things popped up – an advertisement in our Weekly newsletter, for Volunteer Money Mentors, and Julia telling me that Birmingham City Mission were short of van drivers. These may not have been what was in my mind for volunteering, but I am reasonably numerate – sounded okay for a Money Mentor role - and I could drive a van! So, I signed up for both roles, waited until I retired and now spend Tuesdays as a driver for Birmingham City Mission, and Wednesdays as a Money Mentor for NewStarts in Frankley.

Money problems and debt is a difficult subject for most people to talk about. Sometimes a chance conversation can get people through our door at NewStarts, sometimes it is a County Court Judgement, or the threat of bailiffs! However people come to us, it is a big step to walk through our door and ask for help. As a Money mentor it is a great privilege when people let you into what is very private part of their lives, and it is also a great responsibility. I started about a year ago and am still very much on the steep part of my learning curve. It is hard but very rewarding work to see how people can change as they share their problems and slowly gain more control over their financial situation and perhaps their lives in general.

On Tuesdays, Julia and I both volunteer at the Birmingham City Mission Resource Centre in Bordesley, near to the centre of Birmingham. I get to meet a lot of interesting people and I would like to share one story. In late spring I had a Starter Pack to deliver in Kings Norton. The flat was very clean and tidy but only had a

mattress and a small cupboard. The lady was delighted to see us, offered us a cup of tea, and helped us carry things inside. We learnt that she had escaped from a difficult domestic situation in North Birmingham. She had moved as far as she could, into an area where she did not know anyone, and into a bare flat, as she had not been able to take much with her. Life can be very tough, but she seemed determined to make the best of her new situation and I really hoped her new life would work out well.

The clothes, furniture, and household goods that we collect at Birmingham City Mission are in great demand. Most of the items that I collect one week will have gone by the time I return a week later— great from both environmental and social perspectives. For me, it is lovely to be a part of two really positive services and know that people have benefited from the work that we do. I think that's what keeps me going back, week after week, come rain or shine!

Doug

Doug spoke about the Birmingham Poverty Truth Commission which he is part of through his work. The Council has brought together a group of people from a range of backgrounds to tell their stories to decision makers so they can make better decisions about how services are run. Doug has appreciated learning more about the challenges people face and hearing from them directly has helped him reflect on what needs to change for children living in poverty in the city.

Two great examples of getting alongside those who are poor – whom Jesus calls blessed. And both Mike and Doug have started to look at the world differently.

Jesus gives a new way of looking at the world. The Beatitudes are not a new set of rules but rather a new attitude – what is going on in our hearts and our motivation.

How can we put this into practice? We could start by making a list of all of the things we are grateful for.

Or we could think about a situation in which we could put someone else first.

Children, you could try to go a whole day without asking your parents for anything you want.

When we choose to “be” these “attitudes,” in faith we believe that God will bless us just as he promised.

Let’s be quiet for a moment, then I will pray.

Lord, make us poor in spirit, so we can receive the kingdom of heaven.

Lord, may we hunger after you and be satisfied.

Lord, when we weep, help us find laughter.

Bless me Lord, when we feel that people don’t like us, when we are excluded or insulted because of you.

Help us to learn to BE and live these attitudes so that we can all receive your promise.

Amen

Questions for home groups

If someone asked you, how would you describe the Beatitudes? What are they?

What is significant about this being Jesus’s first sermon?

What are some of the Beatitudes – in your own words?

How do we receive these blessings?

Can a person receive these blessings by putting themselves first? Why or why not?

Rewrite “happy” instead of “blessed” and discuss.

Do you take time to count your blessings?

Something to try: This week reflect on all that God has done for you and pay special attention to all the invisible blessings, or blessings in disguise, that you have received.