



Luke 6:17–19

17 He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon, 18 who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by impure spirits were cured, 19 and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming

from him and healing them all.

Reflection

In his first public sermon Jesus preached from Isaiah 61 beginning with the shocking words that today, after eight hundred years, Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled in him. Isaiah 61 says about Jesus,

18 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom
for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's
favour.

In today's passage Jesus prepares to give his most famous sermon, known from Matthew's Gospel as the Sermon on the Mount. Before Jesus stands a huge crowd. Jesus' popularity stems from his faithfulness to God's word in Isaiah 61. He has proclaimed the good news to the poor, he's healed the sick and he has freed many enslaved and oppressed by evil spirits. And the great crowd before him want more. They've come for one thing but are about to receive far more as Jesus prepares to deliver the most famous speech every uttered by man. They've come for physical healing and are given it, but then they will be given teaching that will heal their lives and those of others around them. It is the same for us when we come to Jesus. He forgives our sins, heals us, and eternal life is ours. But then he begins to teach us,

his word is applied to our lives, and we're not only healed of our sinful ways but we're now able to heal the lives of those around us. Here's today's passage from Luke 6:17–19,

17 He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon, 18 who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by impure spirits were cured, 19 and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all.

You may recall from last week that Jesus has spent the entire night in prayer. Luke is careful to present to us just how integral prayer is to the ministry of Jesus. At his baptism Jesus was in prayer (3:21), at the peak of his popularity Jesus withdraws for prayer (5:16), and last night before choosing his twelve disciples from amongst a great number of followers Jesus weighed the decision with his Father in prayer for the entire night. When Jesus is transfigured he prays, the night before he dies he prays, right throughout Jesus' earthly ministry he prayed.

For Luke Jesus prays on mountains and comes down onto level plains to teach. It is there that he can mix with and identify with the people. So for Luke, Matthew's 'Sermon on the Mount', is more a 'Ser-

mon on a Level Place' which doesn't quite have the same ring to it. Some say both Luke and Matthew here are using geography for theological purposes – for Matthew, mountains are places of revelation like in the Old Testament with Mount Sinai; whereas for Luke mountains are isolated places for prayer and communion with God. Literary devices like these were common in ancient writing so one or both writers could simply be making theological points at the expense of historical accuracy; or perhaps, more simply, Jesus may have descended part way down the mountain to a more level outcropping that could accommodate crowds who clearly could not fit at the top. Or that this is an earlier version that on another occasion would later form the basis of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. But whatever the case,

in today's passage it is the people whom Jesus addresses who are important, not the geographical setting. We read,

A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon, 18 who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by impure spirits were cured, 19 and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all.

In addition to the Twelve, a great number of Jews and Gentiles (that is, non-Jews) have come from all over Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem and even the predominantly

Gentile Tyre and Sidon, making this a very unlikely, interracial gathering. Because the gospel is for all people, and as we discussed on Friday, the founding charter of the Jewish nation was ultimately to be a blessing to all nations through their Messiah. And yet these people haven't come to hear the gospel, verse 18, they've come, to be healed of their diseases.

And Jesus does not disappoint. He's been anointed with the Holy Spirit at his baptism and he is filled with the Holy Spirit's power. Reading on,

Those troubled by impure spirits were cured, 19 and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing

them all.

Power was coming from him and healing them all. Can you imagine the shock, the astonishment, the tears of relief and joy, the happiness of friends and relatives carrying loved ones all the way across Palestine with the crazy hope that a Jewish prophet might be able to do something? Then their daughter is brought back from the brink of death; their father crippled from birth can now walk home with them; their best friend from childhood is in his right mind again having been freed from the grips of an evil spirit who'd caused him so much physical harm, throwing him again and again into the fire.

And so you can imagine how intently these people, healed and restored, listened to

Jesus when he began to preach. Let alone the fact that Jesus' words that day would go on to be recognised as the greatest speech ever given by a human being; a speech characterised by ethical teaching that would go on to define ethics theory. But more on Jesus' 'Sermon on the Level Place' over the coming weeks.

Think

As you reflect over this morning's passage for yourself however, I'd like you to think over your personal association with the poor, the mentally ill, refugees and foreigners, with all those who live on the fringes of our society that it seems Jesus had such compassion upon. They came to Jesus in their sickness and distress, our passage says that all the people tried to

touch him, and Jesus healed them. Jesus had compassion on them, he attended to their pressing physical needs, and then he gave them so much more. Jesus has just hand selected his twelve disciples and today their education begins. Jesus has compassion on the poor, the mentally ill, refugees and foreigners, the sick and in need, he attends to their pressing needs with great compassion and when he has their attention, while they're overwhelmed by his generosity and kindness, he gives them more than they could ever have imagined. He gives them the gospel, the means to be healed eternally, to be reconciled to their Father in heaven and to live forever with him.

Do you have similar compassion for the poor and marginalised, those desperate

members of our society who are really struggling and really in need of some tangible grace, some unexpected kindness? As Jesus' followers, Scripture is clear that he would have us follow him in this. How can you be more generous with your time and money when it comes to the poor? What relationships can you begin to build with the underprivileged that will lead to an opportunity to profoundly and compellingly share your faith just as Jesus is about to do in our passage today?

Pray

Pray this morning for a life that mirrors Jesus' compassion and dedication to caring for and sharing the gospel with those who live on the fringes of society. If this is something you find hard, ask God to change the

compass of your heart ever so slightly so that over time you might develop a heart that beats for the poor, the widows, the elderly, the disabled, and refugees as it is clear that Jesus' heart did. Pray also for financial generosity this morning and for the many Christian organisations around the world who've taken up Jesus' call and example and are following in his footsteps. Pray that they would touch many lives to his glory and that they would never lose the main game of sharing the good news of eternal life amidst the wonderful good works that they are doing in Jesus' name.