

Christ Church West Wimbledon

Flis Banks

Sermon 30 October 2022 : All Saints Day

Ephesians 1:11-End & Luke 6:20-31

(Matthew Chs 5,6,&7)

The Sermon on the Plain

You know, some people get very concerned about the differences that exist between the Gospels, feeling that this may undermine their reliability. But really I think that such differences are not anything that need worry us. The Gospels were written down by four very different people, at different times and in a form initially intended for different audiences. That does not take away from their essential truth, and the consistency of their core message.

It was Farhad who first pointed out to me that minor differences in the Gospel accounts support rather than undermine their reliability. So, taking the example of the police taking statements from a number of witnesses. These statements will differ according to where the witness was located, the point at which their attention turned to the event in question, the acuity of their eyesight or memory and a considerable number of other factors. And the thing that would most cause the police to suspect the accounts given by the witnesses would not be if they did not differ in detail. Rather if all the statements given were word perfect in their agreement as to what had happened, that would be a clear indicator of collusion, not of truth.

So taking today's Gospel reading, Luke gives us a Sermon on the Plain, in contrast to Matthew's considerably longer, and more widely quoted, Sermon on the Mount. Matthew gives us nine Beatitudes (the statements starting "blessed are") while Luke gives us only four. And Matthew's follow up teachings extend over three chapters or so, while Luke's cover only one.

The differences without doubt will have been influenced by the audience that they were seeking to reach. Matthew was predominantly writing for people

with a Jewish heritage, who would have been used to hearing readings from the Hebrew Bible, our Old Testament, with its long lists of Laws and Obligations, not to mention its genealogies. In contrast Luke was predominantly writing for people of Gentile descent, mostly Greek speakers with their very different cultural heritage. Luke's lists are shorter, and a higher proportion of Jesus' message is communicated in the way in which the stories – the parables, the miracles and Jesus' other encounters with people – are told, with more detail and more human interest.

Both Matthew's and Luke's accounts of the giving of the beatitudes and the following teaching start soon after Jesus had chosen the closest of His disciples – the twelve – and after a huge crowd of people had gathered to hear Jesus and to be healed of their afflictions. Both speak of Jesus turning to, or speaking to, His disciples, but in the circumstances we surely have to interpret this as meaning that Jesus spoke to include not just the twelve, but also the very, very much wider circle of disciples crying out for His teaching and following Him in multitudes. That is, Jesus spoke to the wider circle of Disciples, who, like us, seek to follow Jesus as closely as we are able. In other words, the whole of the congregation listening to Jesus – the people that St Paul, in his letters described as “all the saints” which makes this a particularly suitable reading for this Sunday, which is All Saints Day.

We cannot, of course come close to Him in the flesh, in this world, as His twelve closest followers were so privileged to achieve. But spiritually and in the longer term it is our hope and expectation that we will indeed meet Him in person, in God's own Kingdom, in Heaven.

Dear God help us to listen to Your voice, in any way we can. Through the Bible, in all its variety, through Your Spirit in our hearts, and in due course, face to face in Your Kingdom in Heaven.

Amen.