**Sermon for Sunday 17th February 2019**

**Life choices**

1 Cor 15:12-20

Luke 6: 17-26

Our story in Luke follows on from the account of Jesus choosing the twelve apostles from a bigger group of his disciples.

These twelve were to become the disparate group who followed him through his teaching, preaching and healing ministry, to his death, resurrection, and beyond, even if they sometimes made the wrong choices.

Especially one.

Judas’s choices meant that he left the group to play a big part in the death, and therefore the resurrection, of Jesus.

Our Corinthians reading is taken from the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians, although it was not the first letter that Paul wrote to the Corinthians (5:9 refers to a previous letter).

Paul is responding to a letter from the Corinthians (7:1 – concerning the matters about which you wrote).

He is writing in response to some discussions and potential misunderstandings that the church had about the resurrection of the dead.

Paul’s argument is that, if Jesus has been raised from the dead, then there is a resurrection for those who die.

He is saying that if they do not believe in the resurrection of the dead then they do not believe in the resurrection of Jesus.

Verse 20 clearly states that Jesus has been raised from the dead and this is central to our faith today. We affirm this each time we say (or sing) the creed.

And so we return to our disparate group of apostles, who were in at the beginning, before the resurrection had taken place.

The twelve who ALL played a role in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

The apostles were chosen by Jesus, but they had a choice too.

They chose to follow Jesus and learn more from Jesus.

So picture the scene in our Luke reading.

Jesus stands with the apostles, part way up a big hill, where he can be seen and where he can see those who have come to listen to him.

This is not a small crowd.

Luke tells us in verse 17 that that was a “large crowd of his disciples”.

These were people who had already chosen to follow Jesus, those who wanted to find out more about God’s way.

We are also told in verse 17 that that there were “a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon”.

This was in addition to the disciples and the apostles.

If you look at a map Judea is a big place, over 100 miles long and about 50 miles wide.

Tyre and Sidon were in the neighbouring province of Phoenicia and were at least another 50 miles away.

Here we have a very clear picture of the impact that Jesus was already making in his ministry.

In Biblical times to travel these distances was time consuming.

It required commitment.

People made choices.

We so often picture Jesus as talking in the temple or teaching the apostles, but here we have a picture of a large group of people who had chosen to come from far and wide to listen to what Jesus had to say.

So we have a group of apostles, disciples and a large crowd.

What brought them all to listen to Jesus?

Verse 18 tells us that they “had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases”.

It was not just one reason.

They wanted to hear what he had to say and they wanted to be healed.

We are told that “those troubled with unclean spirits were cured, and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all”.

If we have come to listen to what Jesus has to say to us this morning then we are in good company.

There were large crowds who chose to follow Jesus, not just here but, for example, in the feeding of the 5,000.

We have chosen to be part of a worldwide church.

One eminent church historian estimates that **one third** of the world’s population today has a faith, even if the exact theology of those faiths is different.

Luke goes on to give his account which is entitled “blessings and woes”, and which we are more familiar with calling the beatitudes.

The blessings and woes talk about a way of life that was at odds with the world then, and is still at odds with the world today.

It is about the blessings that are bestowed upon those who are seeking and choosing the way of salvation.

If we make that choice, we enter the kingdom of God, a life that is satisfying.

We also get our reward in heaven.

Luke contrasts this with those who think that their life is fine the way it is and see no need for a saviour.

The choices that they make will not find eternal peace and happiness.

It is the gospel of real life.

Jesus outlines attitudes and behaviours that did not sit comfortably with some groups of people, including some of the religious groups of the day.

It is true to say that they do not sit comfortably with some people today.

If life is treating you well, why do you need a saviour?

The kingdom of God is about behaviours and attitudes.

The Kingdom that Jesus talks about flows from Jesus’s image of God as the merciful Father who is full of grace.

The message was attractive and compelling because it was about real life.

I think that the message is still attractive and compelling today to those who choose to listen.

In listening to Jesus people recognised their place within the message and wanted to know more about the good news that he came to bring.

They chose to listen to Jesus.

Why?

Was it because they recognised that their lives were not perfect, that they wanted a better way to live?

Did they want to hear about God from someone who knew what real life was like?

A God who meets people where they are and knows about real life.

Jesus shows us a God of compassion, who heals us and understands us.

Jesus is always ready to help us when we need Him, but we need to make that choice.

Crowds of people chose to come and listen to Jesus message.

For some that choice was costly in terms of time, money and commitment.

And we know that the message did not end when Jesus died.

Christ has been raised from the dead.

This is the ultimate sign of grace.

John 3:16 reminds us that “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

God’s riches at Christ’s expense.

What brings us to church this morning?

How far did we have to travel?

Did we come so that we could meet with Jesus?

Are we hoping that Jesus can heal us?

Do we want to hear more about the good news of Jesus, however costly that may be?

Jesus chose his apostles.

Those apostles chose to follow Jesus.

Making the right choices can be challenging, it may need courage, and it may need commitment.

In my experience making the right choices brings the peace described in Philippians 4:7 which says:

And the peace of God, which TRANSCENDS all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

All of us have a history of choices that we have made.

Sometimes they were hard choices, sometimes they were the wrong choices.

Our readings today talk about choices, we have chosen to be here this morning, knowing that we will come face to face with Jesus, His grace, compassion and love.

We will all make choices this week, let us pray that we make the right choices, learn more about what it means to live in the Kingdom of God and find the peace which transcends all understanding.

Amen