**The Revd Dr Jenny Wright, Chaplain to the Archbishop of York, reflects on Luke 6.17-26  for the Third Sunday before Lent, 16th February.**

‘Blessed are you who are poor. Blessed are you who are hungry now. Blessed are you who weep now.’ These are challenging words. The poor, the hungry, those who weep aren't blessed because they are poor, because they are hungry, because they do weep. This is not an excuse to keep people in poverty, to keep people mourning; this is the challenge of the Gospel at its most radical.

This is a countercultural Gospel which challenges us to look at our priorities. It asks us to sit again and consider what it means to love justice, to do merciful kindness, to walk humbly with our God. It is countercultural, not because it is calling all disciples to a life of monastic simplicity, but because it is asking us to put God first in our lives.

It is asking us to let go of our ideas and conceptions of status and power and authority. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the great German theologian, spoke of ‘costly discipleship’. He spoke of costly grace as opposed to cheap grace. Costly discipleship is about letting go of the self and allowing ourselves to be radically and completely changed by God. It is about courageously and actively doing God's will.

Costly discipleship is about allowing our lives to be changed so that we can change the world as Christ's hands and feet in this world. As disciples, we are asked to live not half-heartedly, but to embrace the radical truths of God's kingdom. And really, the kingdom of God is all about God, and we need to accept that this is God that we do not fully understand, that this is God who is beyond our attempts to fit God into our definition, our cultures, and our places and spaces.

This is a God that cannot fully be explained ever. Jesus goes on to speak about letting ourselves not get in the way of God's kingdom. Our agendas, our progress, our way of living needs to always be in the service of what God wants for this world, for all people, for God's Church. I want to challenge you to take some time this week to see what it is that separates us from God.

Who and what do we put on a pedestal, and who and what do we then exclude? Which voices don't we hear? Who isn't sitting at our table? Which people don't we see? Who do we walk past blindly, ignorantly, sometimes wilfully blindly and ignorantly? Because in this text, Jesus is calling his disciples to a life, where God is the God of those who have nothing but God.

We must not be so heavenly-minded that we are of no earthly use. But conversely, we must not be of such earthly use that we are no longer heavenly-minded. Yes, we need to focus on God. Focus on what comes first in our lives, and through challenging ourselves first, so offer a challenge to the world.

Let us pray. Loving God, help us to keep our eyes focused on you and your will for your people. Enable us to live courageously and to actively do your will. Help us to see others as you see them. May our hearts be ever more like yours. We ask this through Jesus Christ, your son, our Lord. Amen.