

The Beatitudes - Abundant blessings : All Saints – Nov 6

Matthew 5:1-12

The beatitudes are such a well loved part of Matthew's gospel that there is a danger that we can almost take these amazing words of Jesus for granted.

You will notice from verses 1 and 2 that Jesus was not teaching strangers but his disciples. Jesus spoke to them of people in different circumstances of mind of heart, and of life.

In verse 11 we see where they were or soon would be. *Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.* The disciples may not have felt particularly blessed in all this, but Jesus tells them *Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.* The disciples received not just present reassurance, but the recognition that they were part of a long line of God's faithful people.

In between these verses we see a picture of those who are blessed right now in their current circumstances even though those circumstances might be difficult and even though the fruit of their faithfulness may be yet to come.

Those who are blessed have hearts and minds aligned to God. Jesus speaks of a number of circumstances of mind and heart that are often found together. For example, the pure in heart are more likely to be humble, meek, merciful and peaceful.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. *Poor in spirit* is an unusual term. When we are poor we are not confident of our capacity to supply our needs from our own resources. The poor in spirit are not spiritually proud or arrogant. They do not take pride in their spiritual practices, understandings or achievements. They are all too aware of their

own spiritual shortcomings. They place their whole hope and trust in God. And their trust is not misplaced. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted.

When grief is at its deepest, we may find it hard to find comfort. But we can be confident that comfort is ours, it will embrace us and we will find our way to the place of comfort. In following the good shepherd, we come to the place he would lead us to. Like the poor in spirit, we place our trust in God's love and our confidence in God's comfort.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. The meek are not doormats, lacking in strength, assertiveness, passion, or a desire for justice. They have a meekness towards God that shows itself in obedience and a desire to do God's will, and a meekness towards others that enables them to be slow to anger, to let go of malice and any desire to speak ill of others, or to hurt others through word or deed, regardless of the provocation. In their faithfulness to their Saviour, they can be seen, like Him, to love their enemies. They carry the grace of God in their hearts and in their relationships.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Pure hearts have been refined in the fire of God's love. Like the poor in spirit, the pure in heart bring their impurities, vulnerabilities and limitations to God. They do not live for outward show of their own righteousness, or to judge the impurities of others. They live to truly love God with all their heart. The pure in heart are continually refined. Like laser surgery, each impurity that arises is brought to God to be cleansed in the holy fire of the loving Spirit of God.

Some are blessed in their actions as well as the circumstances of their hearts and minds. These actions come from hearts aligned to God. They are the fruit of faithfulness.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. The righteous are in right relationship with God. They are humble and meek, with a great love for doing God's will. They are pure in heart - loving God, driven to keep God's commandments and to live in God's ways. They are also hungry for a righteous world – to bring God's kingdom into being, not through force but through the revelation of God's intention for the world. Many of the great social reformers of the ages were driven by their hunger and thirst for righteousness. So were many martyrs. *Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. The more we show mercy to others (loving kindness and forgiveness) the more we are able to receive and accept mercy from others and from God. When we are shown mercy, we may or may not choose to accept it. The more we do receive and accept mercy, the more able we are to be merciful to others.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. The peacemakers have peace in their hearts and minds, and they promote peace in the world in small interpersonal ways as well as in larger ways. You may remember Philippians 4.7, *the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* It is God's peace and blessing in which we rest our hearts, and it is God's peace we seek to spread in the world. You will have heard the frequent cry of the oppressed, *No peace without justice.* Lasting peace is not a thin veneer but a solid structure built on a strong foundation. Pope John Paul II entitled his 2002 World Peace Day address **NO PEACE WITHOUT JUSTICE : NO JUSTICE WITHOUT FORGIVENESS.** Violent conflicts are nurtured and incubated in injustice and also in unwillingness to forgive. The peace of the world rests on justice which is found in the righteousness of God, and on forgiveness which is found in the peace of God.

All the blessings of which Jesus spoke are linked together and grounded in God's love.

How would the world look without these blessings?

Imagine a world filled with the spiritually arrogant, with comfortless grief, reactive violence, wickedness, injustice, merciless dog-eat-dog relationships, impurity in hearts as well as in actions, and widespread acceptance of violence as the norm for problem solving.

Parts of the world see all too much of this. Even we may see glimpses of this in our imperfect world but we are called to live in other ways. The God who loves us blesses us abundantly. We all have a role to play in bringing God's love to the world, starting right now and right here in this place. We can live in the light of God's blessings, and carry the good news of those blessings to those around us.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Thanks be to God.