

Sermon - Beatitudes

Based on: Micah 6.1–8; Matthew 5.1–12

Justice, kindness, humility

- Today's reading from the prophecy of Micah ends with an oft-quoted verse.
- Micah speaks the word of the Lord to his people, naming the reality that the faith relationship that the Israelites have with the Lord is damaged or broken.
- And Micah anticipates what the Israelites might want to do when they seek to have their relationship with the Lord restored.

*With what shall I come before the Lord,
and bow myself before God on high? (Micah 6.6)*

- Micah anticipates the possibility of making various kinds of costly sacrifices - even to the point of offering the firstborn son as a sacrifice, just as Abraham was prepared to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice.
- But, speaking in the name of the Lord, Micah dismisses all these thoughts, and describes the simple actions that would restore their faith relationship with the Lord:

*He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6.8)*

'Life that really is life'

- Jesus would have been very familiar with this passage from Micah.
- And having just gathered together his core group of disciples, he begins his Sermon on the Mount, as recounted by Matthew, with his list of Beatitudes.
- I suggest that while growing up and working through his own understanding of Scriptures, Jesus would have recognised the value of combining and expanding texts like the one from Micah.
- He might have well asked himself, and debated with others, 'What does it mean to do justice? To love kindness? To walk humbly with God?'
- So I'm going to work through these Beatitudes now, because we should really be as familiar with them as we are with the Ten Commandments or the Nicene Creed.
- I realise that working through all the Beatitudes in one go makes for a dense sermon - so I do encourage you to access the sermon on the website, or to pick up a copy after the service.
- Bear in mind that the Beatitudes are not about being happy, but about participating fully in the blessings that God offers all people.
- As is written in the first letter to Timothy:

They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life. (1 Timothy 6.18-19)

- The Beatitudes are a description of 'life that really is life.'
- For each Beatitude I'm going to read both the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible and the translation called The Message.

Living Openly

- The first pair of Beatitudes are about living our faith relationship with God openly.
- This does not mean being overtly religious towards others, but being open with ourselves that we are called to be in a dynamic faith relationship with God.

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Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (NRSV: Matthew 5.3)

You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule. (The Message: Matthew 5.3)

- Being poor in spirit means:
 - being open to God, rather than acting as God in our lives;
 - acknowledging our needs;
 - being interdependent with God rather than independent of God.
- The consequence of this is that we encounter the kingdom of God, now.
- Acknowledging our poverty of spirit opens the door to a greater awareness of, and a willingness to respond to, God's presence around us.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. (NRSV: Matthew 5.4)

You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you. (The Message: Matthew 5.4)

- Mourning is about:
 - grieving about the pain and injustice in the world, and feeling God's pain about how far things are from his purposes;
 - owning the fact that we ourselves are usually part of the problem;
 - refusing to run from pain - whether our own pain or the pain of others.
- The consequence of mourning in this way is that we become more dependent on the work of the Holy Spirit, who is our comforter and strengthens us: in the Spirit we find the energy to change things.

Living Purposefully

- The second pair of Beatitudes take the notion of living our faith relationship openly further.
- They are about living purposefully, with intent.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. (NRSV: Matthew 5.5)

You're blessed when you're content with just who you are—no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought. (The Message: Matthew 5.5)

- Meekness means:
 - receiving life as a gift from God rather than grasping at it;
 - devoting ourselves to God's desire and priorities in a focused and self-disciplined way;
 - being prepared to lay aside our status and own agenda in order to empower and enrich others.
- By yielding to God's call and purposes we are enabled to enter into all that God has planned for us.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. (NRSV: Matthew 5.6)

You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat. (The Message: Matthew 5.6)

- Hungering and thirsting for righteousness means:
 - aligning our lives with God's priorities and values;
 - longing passionately for the world to be made whole;
 - acting on behalf of others in gentle care and courageous confrontation of evil and injustice.
- The consequence is that we experience deep fulfilment as we seek God's kingdom; we are made for God and nothing less will really satisfy us.

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Living Lovingly

- The third pair of Beatitudes describe the 'how' of our open, intentional faith relationship with God.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. (NRSV: Matthew 5.7)

You're blessed when you care. At the moment of being 'care-full,' you find yourselves cared for.

(The Message: Matthew 5.7)

- Being merciful means:
 - giving to others the same reckless generosity we receive from God;
 - being willing to forgive others;
 - seeking the best for others, however costly to ourselves, without being either hostile or apathetic to their wrongdoing;
 - overcoming evil with good.
- By demonstrating mercy to others we are then open to receiving the mercy of both God and others.
- If we deal generously, we will receive generously.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. (NRSV: Matthew 5.8)

You're blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can

see God in the outside world. (The Message: Matthew 5.8)

- Being pure in heart means:
 - being sincere in our actions and motives;
 - being honest about ourselves and honest in our relationships with others;
 - seeing into the heart of things, beyond the immediate and obvious;
 - perceiving God's purposes and desire.
- For the pure in heart there is the promise of relationship with God - the ultimate relationship.

Living Differently

- The last pair of Beatitudes are about living differently to the secular culture, and having the courage to follow Jesus in this difference.
- We must put aside the pressure to conform to Australian culture, in order to follow the culture of Christ.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. (NRSV: Matthew 5.9)

You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's

when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family. (The Message: Matthew

5.9)

- Being a peacemaker means:
 - being constructive not destructive;
 - sharing in God's mission to bring wholeness to the world;
 - facing reality and seeking to resolve conflicts;
 - respecting all people, and the earth and its resources.
- By peacemaking we share in God's nature - when we are making peace we are most like God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (NRSV: Matthew 5.10)

You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom. (The Message: Matthew 5.10)

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- Being persecuted for righteousness' sake means:
 - being willing to stand out from the crowd even if this means being thought odd or subversive;
 - speaking or standing up for what is true and right;
 - being prepared to go against the flow.
- Being willing to be identified as a Christian and to pursue right-wiseness mark a person out as 'of the kingdom'.
- Jesus promises blessings for those who embrace this costly call.

- I suggested that these Beattitudes were the answer to the questions Jesus might have been prompted to ask from the Micah reading: 'What does it mean to do justice? To love kindness? To walk humbly with God?'
- I will end by praying the Beatitudes as a prayer for all of us.
- Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, who calls us to follow the teachings of your Son,
make us poor in spirit, so that we may receive the kingdom of heaven;
make us meek, so that we may inherit your world;
make us hunger and thirst for righteousness, so that we may be satisfied;
make us merciful, so that we might receive your mercy.
Father, make us pure of heart, so that we may see you;
help us to make peace, so that we may be called your children;
and when we are persecuted for acting right-wisely, show us your kingdom.
We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.