

The Jesus we never knew x 11 (PP1) VPBC 12 March 2017

Matthew 5: 1 – 16 (READ)

The teachings of JESUS – from the mountain – for his Disciples. (This is not for the crowds but those who are following him and need to understand the implications of this). *John Stott* thinks it's the closest Jesus comes to declaring a Manifesto. Jesus sits down to teach the Disciples about being the People of God and seeing the Kingdom of Heaven coming on the Earth.

The Messiah's Manifesto (A public declaration of principles, policies, or intentions, especially that of a the new community of God's people. A creed is a **manifesto** of religious or spiritual beliefs).

Understanding the teachings of Jesus is one key way of understanding the person of Jesus. This week we looked at the further unpacking of the Messiah's description of his Kingdom: those Jesus declares are "blessed". *Blessed are the poor in Spirit (Matt 5:3) for they will see the Kingdom of heaven.* (PP2)

The – poor in Spirit is not essentially here in Matthew about the economically poor but means the inner attitude of knowing that we need God and also one another. Humbleness – a correct perception of our own strengths and weaknesses. An awareness of gifts of others but also that each of us is flawed.

It is belonging to the community of the poor in Spirit who begin to see the Kingdom of Heaven coming into being on the Earth. **In our dependence on God** we see the Kingdom of heaven NOW and also coming into being in the future. TODAY we see that ***those who mourn are comforted*** by God and others in the community. Those who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness will be satisfied.

"Blessed" – happy and to be envied – opposite of cursed. (Not a subjective shallow feeling. Blessed – what God says about happiness & not just what we feel)._

DO YOU THINK THAT YOU ARE "BLESSED"? – Makarios. Are we a blessed congregation of God's people?

Any discussion group about "happiness" should take into account what Jesus said on the subject ... and I would suggest when we say what we want for ourselves and our children is that we should "be happy and healthy" we what Jesus meant by that.

(PP3) When this word, *makarios* was used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (LXX), it took on another meaning. It referred to the results of right living or righteousness. If you lived right, you were blessed. Being blessed meant you received earthly, material things: a good wife, many children, abundant crops, riches, honor, wisdom, beauty, good health, etc. A blessed person had more things and better things than an ordinary person. To be blessed, you had to have big and beautiful things. (Corollary: if suffered or were poor must have sinned. This confused the people of Jesus' day and many still because often the evil do well and the righteous do not succeed and the good may experience bad things OT significant e.g. of Job a righteous

man who served God faithfully but experienced many awful things.). This is obviously not the full teaching of the OT and is far too simplistic a way of reading it – too binary (do right – prosper and if live badly – don't prosper. The Psalmist questioned why those who did evil seemed to prosper).

(PP4) Matthew (reflecting Jesus' prophetic statements) uses this word (makarios) in a totally different way. It is not the elite who are blessed. It is not the rich and powerful who are blessed. It is not the high and mighty who are blessed. It is not the people living in huge mansions or expensive penthouses who are blessed. Rather, Jesus pronounces God's blessings on the lowly: the poor, the hungry, the thirsty, the meek, the mourning. Throughout the history of this word, it had always been the other people who were considered blessed: the rich, the filled up, the powerful. Jesus turns it all upside-down. **The elite (blessed) in God's kingdom, the blessed ones in God's kingdom, are those who are the poor in spirit, those who live in dependence on God.** In P. Yancey's words it is the "unlucky who are lucky". ONLY THOSE WHO KNOW THEY ARE EMPTY CAN BE FILLED.

The Kingdom Community Jesus describes could be seen to be the outworking of what it might mean to ***"love one another as Jesus has loved us!"***. What do you think?... the beatitudes are not "entrance requirements" for outsiders, but a declaration about insiders. ...

**** Matthew's beatitudes are not practical advice for successful living, but prophetic declarations made on the conviction of the coming-and-already-present kingdom of God.***

**** There is, however, an ethical dimension to the beatitudes. The community that hears itself pronounced blessed by its Lord does not remain passive, but acts in accord with the coming kingdom. A "blessed community" must seek to become a blessing to the wider community and culture where it finds itself.***

**** The beatitudes do not merely describe something that already is, but bring into being the reality they declare. ... As eschatological blessings.***

**** Understood as a prophetic pronouncement, the truth claim of the beatitude is not independently true, but dependent on the speaker. **They are true on the basis of the authority of the one who speaks.** ... JESUS speaks and is claiming he is Messiah. In what we classically called "the Sermon on the Mount" and which was in fact probably many sermons Jesus begins to teach those who are following him and it is recognised that unlike the Scribes, the teachers of the Law he teaches with authority (7:29). But it is recognised that his teaching is to say the least challenging, so challenging that various schools of thought try to water it down or modify it. (By saying it's only for certain committed followers or for the future and not the now)***

The 8 pronouncements are thus **not** statements about general human virtues -- most appear exactly the opposite to common wisdom. Rather, they pronounce blessing on authentic disciples in the Christian community All the beatitudes **apply to one group of people- authentic Christians** or people of Kingdom community. They do not describe nine different kinds of good people who get to go to heaven, but are **8 declarations about the blessedness, contrary to all appearances, of the eschatological community**

living in anticipation of God's reign. Like all else in Matthew, they are oriented to life together in the community of discipleship, not to individualistic ethics. ... They are counter-cultural to our increasingly narcissistic and individualistic Western culture. Thank you to notes of Brian Stoffregen [pp. 176-178] which I have adapted the writings in italics. Faith Lutheran Church, 1000 D St., Marysville, CA 95901 e-mail: brian.stoffregen@gmail.com

(PP5) 8 qualities or attitudes of the group/ community of the Kingdom:

Meek and merciful

Poor in spirit and pure in heart

Mourning and hungry for righteousness

Peacemakers and persecuted because of Jesus.

This leads us into: Continuing our theme for this year and **we return to the way Jesus' declared what sort of Kingdom he is bringing in** by his presence – and his teaching. Nowhere is this spelt out more than in these chapters in Matthew's Gospel. (**chapters 5: 1 through to 7: 29**) **Jesus is about God's Kingdom on EARTH** (*as in heaven – Matthew calls it the Kingdom of Heaven*) – **Now as well as Future**. As we have seen Jesus' claim (Luke 4: 16-18) is that all the OT prophesies about the Messiah and the Messianic Kingdom are fulfilled in his person: it has begun with his incarnation and is being outwork; it can be realised now in his people (*) and is also yet to be realised.

Jesus introduces the idea of an alternative community that exists as a witness to him. (It is to be salt and light in the midst of darkness). These people are to live counter culturally. **“Do NOT BE LIKE THEM” – the Pagans**, says Jesus in *Matthew 6: 8*. Be different by prioritising the Kingdom of God and living righteously. Live more righteously than the scribes and Pharisees **of our present day and culture**. Demonstrate a foretaste of the Kingdom that will come in fully on my return.

The Jesus we never really knew challenged tradition, customs, prejudices and still does if they are contrary to God's perception of justice.

Previous interpretations. What is plain that Jesus is challenging the wisdom of 1st Century Palestine and the teachings that have gone before from many Scribes and rabbis, but also the teachings of the Greeks and the Romans. He is teaching something different to replace inaccurate teachings about God's rule. And so, we hear his constantly repeated challenge: **you have heard it said but now I say unto you**. But we also hear him declare that he has not come to destroy the teachings of the Law and the Prophets but to fulfil them.

The Kingdom of God is experienced by those who know that they are spiritually bankrupt. Today: are we spiritually bankrupt? Do we recognise we are poor in spirit? Those who think they are rich will be sent away empty (*Magnificat Luke 1*) . It was said of the **Laodicean Church**: *“You say, I am rich and well off; I have all I need. But you do*

not know how miserable and pitiful you are! You are poor, naked and blind! That was the Spirit of God's diagnosis of their true condition. (Rev 3: 17). That was the diagnosis of the church at Laodicea – not the surrounding society.

The people of the church are blessed IF we recognise our dependency upon God – we begin to see and experience the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

So too as we mourn we are comforted and as we hunger and thirst for God's righteousness we are filled and satisfied.

The “mourning” spoken of here is not simply that of the bereavement that we all know at various seasons when loved ones die but a grieving for our failings as a species: our destruction and failure to care for the planet and environment, the destruction of societies and communities through warfare, the abuse of the weak and the poor. We truly need to grieve and repent and lament over these failures and greed. Those who mourn says Jesus will know the comfort of God. (Grieve over the sins of others *Psalm 119: 136*). Jesus has indeed come to bind up the broken-hearted *Isaiah 61: 1*.

Those who **hunger and thirst** can know blessed happiness says Jesus. If the hunger and thirst is to see a genuine goodness and righteous things being done – to see God pleased and justice in our communities, then these who desire what God requires will be satisfied. (*Isaiah 58: the true fast to remove the chains of oppression & yoke injustice*)

Those who are just greedy for more, a greater prosperity and material wealth will gain nothing of true satisfaction. *What does it profit a person to gain the whole world but lose their soul! (Mark 8: 36)* What worries me is that the Church may have lost its real spiritual hunger to see what God desires in the world. We too have become anxious and troubled and eager for material prosperity rather than spiritual gain and simple living.

If our desire for God and his Kingdom is deep within us, then God will satisfy us deeply and we will be CONTENTED. *Godliness with contentment is a great gain (1 Tim 6: 19)* – to be highly valued. We will find it all together possible to hold on lightly to worldly possessions and wealth. Our children and families will see what we really value. **Jesus could just be giving us the key to live a BLESSED life – a deeply happy and full life – that others who don't have it may also want to have.** That is the true sense in which Jesus uses the word. (*Jeremiah 2: 13 – the cisterns we have dug for ourselves just don't hold water. Not fresh water like God gives*). **JESUS speaks of authentic blessedness not shallow satisfaction. Experienced in the believing community which lives in dependence on God.**