

Dear friends,

Today we look again at a very well-known passage from Matthew's gospel. Sometimes, because it is so well-known, there can be a temptation to skip over it but it is actually at the hub of our Christian faith and we should give it our proper attention. I hope that you are coping with this wet and windy weather we have been having – hopefully, we shall be able to lessen the number of layers of clothing before too long! As always I wish you every blessing, Margaret.

Call to worship:

Blessed are those who trust in the Lord.

We are blessed, Lord, because we believe and trust in you.

We come to you now to worship you, our Lord and our King, Amen.

The crowds and the disciples came together on the mountainside to hear Jesus. A huge gathering – people came in their thousands.

We come to you now in our own homes, Lord for we know that however many or few there are, each one of us is important to you.

Feed us, Lord, with your bread of life. Amen.

Would we have been ready to drop everything to go and listen to you on the mountainside?

There would have been such excitement in the air that we probably would.

As we prepare to meet with you now, Lord, we pray that you would fill us in the here and now with your excitement. Amen.

The words to 'All hail the power of Jesu's name!' written by Edward Perrponet [1726-1792] and adapted by John Rippon [1751-1836]

Singing the Faith 342

1 All hail the power of Jesu's name!

Let angels prostrate fall;
bring forth the royal diadem,
and crown him Lord of all.

2 You seed of Israel's chosen race,
you ransomed of the fall,
hail him who saves you by his grace,
and crown him Lord of all.

3 Hail him, the heir of David's line
whom David Lord did call,
the God incarnate, Man divine,
and crown him Lord of all.

4 Let every kindred, every tribe
on this terrestrial ball,
to him all majesty ascribe,
and crown him Lord of all.

5 O that with yonder sacred throng
we at his feet may fall,
join in the everlasting song,
and crown him Lord of all!

Prayer and Lord's Prayer

From Micah:6: 8 - 'The Lord has told you what goodness is. This is what he wants from you. Be fair to other people. Love kindness and loyalty and humbly obey your God' [taken from Holy Bible: ERV. Copyright 2006 by World Bible Translation Centre Inc]

Inspirational God, you show us the true meaning of fellowship and faithfulness. We rejoice at your presence with us and at your reassurance.

As Father, you require us to bring justice to your world – no more and no less.

As Son, you require us to learn from Jesus to love kindness – no more and no less.

As Holy Spirit, you require us to walk humbly with you – no more and no less. Amen.

God of justice, we are sorry for the times when we have fallen short of the hopes you have for us and the standards you require. Strengthen us and renew us.

When pursuing justice seems too demanding, inspire us afresh.

When kindness takes too much time and energy, touch and warm our hearts.

When humility is not our first approach, help us to walk more closely with you.

We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

God of nurture and new beginnings – your forgiveness surrounds us with hope; your grace enables us to aspire to your requirements; your acceptance empowers us to serve kindly; and your love requires only that we accept it with gratitude, joy and humility. Amen.

Eternal God, with love in our hearts we adore you. With the whole of the Church we worship you.

With all we are and all we have, we will nurture your gifts of kindness, justice and humility, and we follow, serve and live for you today and every day. Amen.

Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come and thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Matthew 5: 1-12: [taken from The New Testament – A new translation made by William Barclay. Copyright William Barclay 1968]

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the hill. He sat down to teach, and all his disciples came to listen to him. He opened his mind and his heart to them, and this was the substance of his teaching. 'O the bliss of those who realise the destitution of their own lives, for the blessings of the Kingdom of Heaven are theirs here and now.

O the bliss of those whose sorrow is sore, for they shall find courage and comfort.

O the bliss of those whose strength is in their gentleness, for they shall enter into possession of the earth.

O the bliss of those who hunger and thirst for all that sets them right with God for they shall be satisfied to the full.

O the bliss of those who treat others with mercy, for they shall be treated with mercy.

O the bliss of those who are pure in heart, for they shall see God.

O the bliss of those who make friends with each other, for they shall be ranked as the sons of God.

O the bliss of those who are persecuted for their loyalty to God's way of life, for the blessings of the Kingdom of Heaven are theirs here and now.

Yours is this bliss when men shall heap their insults on you, and persecute you, and tell every kind of wicked lie about you for my sake.

When that happens, rejoice and exult in it, for you will receive a rich reward in heaven, for it was thus that they persecuted the prophets who lived before you.

Comment:

What is the kingdom of God like? Who are its citizens?

Those who embody the values that Jesus outlines here – those who sense that they do not matter in this world - are the very people who matter in God's kingdom.

Jesus is describing the kind of people he can work with: 'If you struggle with life, you're exactly who I need in my team; if you are hungry for a better, fairer, more just, more equal world, there's a place for you in my company.'

We are summoned to be the change we want to see in the world around us, equipped by God's call to live as humble, meek, mourning peacemakers, hungering for justice, seeking God's kingdom in our communities.

As I said earlier, the Beatitudes are so familiar that we may be tempted to skim over them – but many are quite challenging, both to understand and them to implement.

Who are 'the meek' and what sort of earth will they inherit?

Is Jesus really commending those who let themselves be walked over, those who are exploited by others because that really doesn't sit well with the command to 'do justice' [Micah 6:8], nor with the sentiments within the Beatitudes themselves.

The poor in spirit are those with faith in the Father's grip – that as long as he is holding them, they are safe – they put all their trust in God. The meek ones don't have great ideas about their own importance. However – neither are they doormats, letting all and sundry walk over them – because they are actively engaged in God's will they are actively engaged in his work here on earth.

For all the blessing Jesus makes a point of singling out the kinds of people who seem to have no reason for hope in this world, however slight their hope in God. The blessings promise reversal of fortune to those who are suffering – and honour and reward for the virtuous and those who suffer for the sake of righteousness and of Jesus.

At the same time, the blessings are couched in the present tense rather than pointing to the future, thus re-emphasising Jesus' earlier message that the kingdom of heaven has come close and is now present in Jesus.

Matthew was writing for a church under persecution, and his hearers would have welcomed this reassurance.

Prayer:

Lord, there are many ways that we can be blessed by you. Thank you for the hope you give us to carry on, even when times are hard.

We pray for people in circumstances where hope is difficult:
for those who are persecuted for their faith, by word or deed.
Thank you that the kingdom of heaven belongs to them.

We pray for those who are ill in body, mind or spirit;
for those who mourn the loss of a loved one.
Thank you that you will bring comfort to them.

We pray for those who work tirelessly for you, wherever they are,
that they will be blessed with your presence.

Thank you that those who work for peace are your children.
Thank you, Lord, that we are your children. Amen.

Thank you, Lord, for all the blessings that we receive from you.
Forgive us for the times we let them slip by without even noticing.
Help us to tune into your wonderful love and care, growing closer to you with every passing day. Amen.

Lord, we place our trust in your grace,
we rely entirely on your mercy,
and we find our hope in your love.
We commit ourselves so to live, act and speak
that others may turn and give you thanks and praise.
Fill us with your Spirit,
that we may walk with you all of our days
and at the end rest in your presence
and give you all the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

You, Lord, are all we have – you give us all that we need: our future is in your hands.
Give us all we need to serve you to the end, and to do so no matter what the cost.
Give us all that we need that our love and joy may never fail.
Give us all we need so we may become channels of your peace, grace, forgiveness and reconciling love.
Open our hearts, Lord, to your love, that we may have the power to love, and to go on loving, those in need of hope, understanding and listening concern.
Help us to share their darkness, their pain and their hurt – to comprehend their brokenness, their despair – and their need just to be heard.
We make our commitment and offer our prayer in the name and for the sake of Christ our Lord. Amen.

And may the blessing of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – be with us and all whom we love and all for whom we pray, this day and for evermore. Amen.

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