

10th November 2024 – REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY: Beatitudes, Matthew 5:1-10 ONLINE VERSION

Who is really blessed in this life? Think about our world, or our country, or the people you know, and ask yourself – WHO IS BLESSED?

Today we think about the Beatitudes, probably the greatest – and also the most debated – part of Jesus' teaching. And we only get a sense of how radical this teaching is if you take each of these statements and define the opposite of each. You get this:

Blessed are the: the self-sufficient, those who have no need of God / those who have no problems / the assertive / those who are quite alright as they are / those who know their rights and make sure they get them / the cynical, the ones who understand that greed and self-interest work / the competitive, the winners / those who keep their heads down, and let others carry the can.

According to the world, I think these are mostly the people who succeed in life, don't you?

Someone once said that we spend most of time trying to make church, or following Jesus, as attractive as possible, whereas Jesus spent most of his time doing the opposite. There's always been a strand of Christianity which was awkward, radical: for the freaks, the fanatics, and the misfits. But the disturbing thing about this extraordinary list of those who are blessed is that Jesus is suggesting that this is not unorthodox, non-conformist Christian faith, but basically the norm.

As he often does, Jesus turns everything upside-down – and this is the heart of it right here. This is the world as Jesus sees it.

For this next bit, I've tried to get to the heart of each of these sayings. Have a listen and see if you can relate to any of these; and if you do, give thanks – because Jesus calls you blessed.

Blessed are the poor in Spirit, the ones who haven't got it all together and who know they need something, they need God to fill the God shaped hole, who aren't afraid to be seen as weak because they understand their own frailty and fragility, the people who kneel by their beds when they get up asking for God's help and who kneel by their beds last thing at night thanking him that he gave it, who pray in the supermarket queue, who pray in the streets, at their desks and sat on their sofa, who ask for God's Spirit every day and for every thing, big or small...

... for yours is the kingdom of heaven, and all that you seek of God, He will give to you.

Blessed are the mourners, who see life through tear-stained faces, who haven't got compassion fatigue yet, who carry the world's problems around on their shoulders, and their friends' problems too, the ones that society thinks are too heavy, too intense, if only they would lighten up a bit...

... for you will be comforted, and God himself will wipe every tear from your eyes.

Blessed are the meek, the ones who always let someone else go first, who don't push into queues, who surrender their rights for the benefit of others; actually the secure ones, the emotionally healthy who don't need to be first, to shout loudest or push their way into people's faces, the ones whose strength is under control...

... for you will inherit the earth, when the first are last and the last are first.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the ones desperate for more of God, the odd-bods who'll do anything, go anywhere if only they would experience more of God's love, more of his truth, more of his transforming power in their lives, more of his blessing, more intimacy, more of his life poured into others, more of the kingdom at work...

... for you will be filled, just as you desire: Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Blessed are the merciful, the ones who don't exact their pound of flesh, who choose to remember that offenders are also victims, who choose release over resentment, who know that the one thing that's worse than forgiveness is unforgiveness, who love to see others go free, who understand that they are ragamuffins anyway...

... for you will be shown mercy from the God who is mercy, who sent Jesus because his desire to be merciful to you was so strong.

Blessed are the pure in heart, the ones who always try and see the best in people, who'd rather get their fingers burnt than never open their hands near a fire, who know what human nature is like, but still long for a better way, the ones with tender consciences, who exhaust themselves in the search for integrity, who hate gossip and get distressed by others' slander, who feel sick at casual blasphemy and love the church despite all its faults, who know the kingdom is ultimately filled with flawed saints trying to clean up their act...

... for you will see God, God the consuming fire, and dwell in the light and the warmth of His glory.

Blessed are the peacemakers, the middle-way people, the people of consensus and negotiated compromise, the unsporty, the pacifists and tree huggers, the ones who hate aggression and domination, who suffer themselves when they see violence inflicted on others.

... for you will be called children of God, the Prince of Peace.

Blessed are the persecuted, the ones who stand up for what they believe, the hardliners and fanatics, the prophets in the wilderness, the lone voices, the ones who are always open about what they believe even if it costs them friends, promotions or even their job; whose love of peace is never at the expense of their principles, the cross-carriers and self-deniers, those who will suffer anything for their faith and for the glory of God...

... for yours is the kingdom of heaven, the crazy, upside down kingdom of Jesus.

***Blessed are the losers in this world
For they are the winners in the kingdom of God***

PAUSE

And there's something special here for Remembrance Sunday. Wars are about winning and losing. That's why people go to war. But in the end, at some level, everybody *loses*. We all go to win, and we all end up losing in some way. That's why the world needs Jesus' message as much as ever. He looks at things the other way round. The peacemakers: they're the winners. They're the ones called children of God.

So, as we remember the effect of wars around the world today, and pray with hearts full of mixed emotions – gratitude, sorrow, anxiety – let's take these words to heart. **Jesus turns the world upside down.**

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

Blessed are the losers in this world, for they are the winners in the kingdom of God.

Amen.