

OUR LADY, STAR OF THE SEA, WEYMOUTH

HOMILY FOR THE 4th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A)

29TH JANUARY 2017

There's always so much we could talk about! And as so often, the readings are carefully selected to show links between old and New Testament and psalm. The prophet Zephaniah reminds us how we should be humble, seek integrity and humility – this is reflected by Jesus in the beatitudes. The psalm is full of promise how God is faithful and looks after those who are bowed down (as many of us may be), also reflected as God's reward for those in these situations in the beatitudes. And the letter to the Corinthians shows how the way God works is different to us, just as the way to live presented by Jesus is different to so much of human thinking.

So, let's consider how these beatitudes and how they are presented in Matthew's Gospel; known as the Sermon on the Mount. For those of an academic inclination you may wish to note that Luke presents them slightly differently, perhaps more directly as Jesus said them wherein he is speaking to the "common crowd". In Matthew's Gospel Matthew adapts Jesus words so they are more attuned to the new Christians for whom he was writing.

And the setting on the hill should remind us of Mount Sinai where Moses received the Ten Commandments. There's a parallel here as St Augustine suggests; just as the Old Testament Law was a guide for Israel, here Jesus gives his disciples, the crowds and us, a guide, a perfect code for the Christian life.

Each saying is like a proverb; it's cryptic with a deeper meaning. If you have joined one of the Scripture sharing groups, fantastic, you have hopefully pondered these. For most of you who haven't, we'll whip through them. But you know, truly, if we believe that Scripture is God's word, we should spend more than this brief time thinking about what God is saying to us. Yes we are busy, yes I've several times been criticised for suggesting we do more – but seriously, it's not much to propose we all reflect on this wonderful text....wherever we are at we surely must deepen our relationship with the person who made us and sustains us!

A quick point, blessed / happy means the inner joy and peace that comes from being right with God (i.e. not = happy!) And note the tenses Matthew uses. The first and last beatitudes say theirs IS the kingdom of heaven. It's a present tense promise. Here and now. Numbers 2-7 are future promises, they shall be comforted, shall possess the land, shall be satisfied, shall find mercy, shall see God, shall be called children of God. But look at the final phrase which is slightly different because it's blessed are YOU when people insult you, persecute you (just like the prophets).... It's no longer they, it's directly personal, you. You see the future tense promises are what happens, are going to happen, in the kingdom. And the present tense promises, v3 and 10, sandwiching the other future promises, show that the kingdom is both present and yet still future.

There's always more, however well you know Jesus. We have a foretaste of the kingdom; yet its fullness is in the future! It's future and present at same time...we are children of God....at the same

time we are yet to become children of God! The attitude to have and the promises given are for everyone, “they”; but let us not forget they are also directed specifically at you and me. We are, present tense, blessed when people speak against us and persecute us because we are Jesus’ followers. Be joyful, present tense; reward kept for us in God, future tense. Present and future together again.

Time is short so let’s briefly look at the individual beatitudes.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. Consider how Jesus humbled himself to become a man. Jesus’ life is the parable par excellence. So we are blessed if we humble ourselves before God; and indeed in our world this may be easier for the materially poor (remembering of course that being poor to the degree of suffering is not a good) than the rich, whose wealth distracts them from God.

Those who mourn will be comforted. Mourn for our sins and for others sins. It’s not the inward focus of self pity. (Joy is not the opposite of suffering; it’s the opposite of sadness). As I mourn my sins I begin to hunger for righteousness.

Blessed are the meek, they will inherit the earth. Meekness is not weakness; it doesn’t mean we let ourselves be trodden on. Meekness, humility, can only come if someone has internal strength. It doesn’t mean for example we accept poverty, but we can find peace within ourselves in such situations.

Those who hunger and thirst shall be satisfied. Of course this does not mean starvation is being blessed, it means those who recognise their need for God; those who desire and thirst God, know their reliance on him, they will be blessed since that thirst leads them to do his will.

The merciful shall receive mercy...Hebrew word is *hesed*, considered to mean unfaltering, steadfast love directed at someone, regardless of merit – which, of course, is how God directs his love at us. And when we experience mercy, we become able to be merciful. It means to have a forgiving heart.

The pure in heart shall see God. Consider, if our heart is pure, there is no coveting and God is our focus...God is pure...so if our hearts are pure undoubtedly we will see him; so what joy, we will see him!

Recall Henry Newman. “Heart speaks unto heart”. If you’ve ever been in love, you can just sit with someone, and your hearts truly rest comfortably in each other’s company; speaking to each other... It’s not a matter of intellect.

The peacemakers will be called children of God. We must seek peace firstly in our own hearts; then we can give this to others. When we do that we are truly God’s children. And as part of his family, he will lavish his gifts on us and treat us with the extravagant love a father gives his children....peace comes when there is no resistance to God

Righteousness IS the kingdom of God; hence that’s what those receive who have stood up for righteousness. And inevitably when we work for justice and peace we will upset leaders,

governments and those with worldly power, just as the prophets were of old. We are likely to experience some form of discrimination or persecution if we live out our Christian beliefs, but we can rejoice because our reward is great in heaven....

This Sermon on the Mount is one of the most beautiful and potentially powerful things we could study. I have done it no true justice. That job is yours. Consider; it's a little like a holy sandwich. Present tense promises, encompassing future tense realities; what is God trying to tell us through this paradox of the here and now but not yet, this mystery of present and future happening at the same time. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you "heart to heart". Re-read it, pray about it, and listen...

Rev Jonathan de Kretser