

Living Out The Beatitudes by Patsy

I have chosen to base this week's reflection on the beatitudes which contain eight blessings recounted by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. They speak and remind us of what we need spiritually and how we can respond to the needs of others in order to support each other and to grow spiritually. In this reflection, we're going to take a deeper look at the beatitudes and consider how we can respond to them in our day to day lives.

Call to worship:

Whispering God, the noise of the world is loud.

Open our ears to your still, small, voice.

God of revelation, the darkness of the world threatens.

Open our eyes to the light of your presence.

God of abundance, we cling tightly to so many things.

Open our hands in generosity and joy.

God of all people, we feel the fear of those who are "other."

Open our arms to the stranger and the enemy.

God of mystery, we want so desperately to understand you.

Open our minds to the depths of your truth.

Creating God, we long to know your presence.

Open our hearts to receive your love

Amen

You may want to take some time now to familiarise yourself with the beatitudes- I have provided the passage from both the NIV and the Passion Translation:

Matthew 5:1-12 (NIV):

5 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him,² and he began to teach them. He said:

³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

⁵ Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

⁷ Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 5: 3-12 (The Passion Translation):

³ “What wealth is offered to you!^b when you feel your spiritual poverty!^c For there is no charge to enter the realm of heaven’s kingdom.

⁴ “What delight comes to you when you wait upon the Lord!^d For you will find what you long for.^e

⁵ “What blessing comes to you when gentleness!^f lives in you! For you will inherit the earth.^g

⁶ “How enriched you are when you crave righteousness!^h For you will be surrounded with fruitfulness.ⁱ

⁷ “How satisfied you are when you demonstrate tender mercy!^j For tender mercy will be demonstrated to you.

⁸ “What bliss you experience when your heart is pure!^k For then your eyes will open to see more and more of God.^l

⁹ “How blessed you are when you make peace! For then you will be recognized as a true child of God.^m

¹⁰ “How enriched you are when you bear the wounds of being persecuted!ⁿ for doing what is right!^o For that is when you experience the realm of heaven’s kingdom.

¹¹ “How ecstatic you can be when people insult!^p and persecute you and speak all kinds of cruel lies about you because of your love for me!^q ¹² So leap for joy—since your heavenly reward is great. For you are being rejected the same way the prophets were before you.

When taking a deeper look at this passage of scripture it is important to remember that it was not just aimed at the 12 disciples named in the Bible. This is because the disciples represent all of Jesus’ followers in general. The Sermon on the Mount begins by talking about what it means to live in God’s kingdom.

It is important to bear in mind that blessed in this sense is referring to a joy that we, as Christians, possess which remains untouchable and unaffected by external circumstances. The Greek work used is ‘Makarios’ which has no direct English translation but what we do know is that ‘Makarios’ is referring to an immense feeling of joy. This is a joy that lasts.

Therefore, this is written for all who have responded to Jesus’ message of the kingdom, and in whose lives the kingdom is at work. This passage is aimed at those and identifies with those people who stand before God empty-handed, those who have realised what they have, or more importantly what they don’t have and who are seeking a relationship with Christ.

I think that the beatitudes can be separated into two categories:

1. The Beatitudes Of Needs (what we need in order to be open to God's ways and plans):

- ◆ The poor in spirit
- ◆ Those who mourn
- ◆ The meek
- ◆ Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness

2. The Beatitudes Of Response (these refer to the ways in which we can respond to God's teaching and influence upon our lives):

- ◆ The merciful
- ◆ The pure in heart
- ◆ The peacemakers
- ◆ Those who are persecuted

The first beatitude outlines and reminds us why we need to come to God completely honestly, ***“blessed are those who are poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”***. This is not referring to those who are physically poor, which we are still called to help. Rather, this commandment is referring to those who are **spiritually poor**. It is aimed at those who come knowing that they have nothing, knowing that they need help and who are humbling themselves to learning more and deepening their relationship with Christ. I think that this is best summed up in The Passion Translation, ***“What wealth is offered to you when you feel your spiritual poverty! For there is no charge to enter the realm of heaven's kingdom”***. This instruction, I think, reminds us that when we come to God, we don't need to put up a front and pretend that we're someone that we're not because God takes us just as we are and uses us. However, I sometimes think that coming just as we are to God is almost harder especially if we have become so used to putting up a front. When we do come to God honestly and authentically is like being welcomed home!

Isaiah 61:1-3 (The Message)

The Spirit of GOD, the Master, is on me because GOD anointed me. He sent me to **preach good news to the poor**, heal the heartbroken, **Announce freedom to all captives, pardon all prisoners**. GOD sent me to announce the year of his grace—a celebration of God's destruction of our enemies—and **to comfort all who mourn**, To care for the needs of all who mourn in Zion, give them bouquets of roses instead of ashes, Messages of joy instead of news of doom, a praising heart instead of a languid spirit. **Rename them “Oaks of Righteousness” planted by GOD to display his glory.**

What is interesting to note is that the first four beatitudes were prefaced in Isaiah 61:1-3: Here we can see a direct and deliberate alignment in terms of the order and wording between the passage in Matthew and the passage in Isaiah. This not only highlights the importance of the beatitudes, but it also reminds us that Jesus is the fulfilment of Isaiah's promised messenger anointed by the Spirit.

The beatitudes remind us of the joy that we have which is not dependent upon circumstances. As a result, we are encouraged and instructed to share this joy with others by how we interact with them so that they too may realise the joy that comes to those who have a relationship with Christ.

As I was preparing this reflection, the words of the hymn 'Spirit of the Living God' kept going round in my head. I think this is very fitting for this subject because this hymn encourages us to completely surrender ourselves to God, to come just as we are and allow God to work in and through us. My prayer for you is that you will experience God's joy for you anew this week. You may find it helpful to listen to the song and focus on the words, I have provided the words and a YouTube link to it:

Song: Spirit of the Living God <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BagH-zTfnsQ>

Spirit Of The Living God,
Fall Afresh On Me.

Melt Me, Mould Me,
Fill Me, Use Me,

Spirit Of The Living God,
Fall Afresh On Me.

Spirit Of The Living God,
Fall Afresh On Me

Throughout this next week perhaps spend some time thinking about how you can intentionally live out these teachings and how you can show and share the joy that we have been given to those that you encounter.

Gracious God,

you have so richly blessed us with life, with love and joy, with hope in the midst of despair. Help us to be the salt of the earth.

Help us to be the light of the world, sharing with others that which we have received, boldly proclaiming the good news of your love, finding the seeds of your kingdom within us and letting your way grow in our lives and throughout the world.

Amen

Perhaps ask yourselves this question:

Can the world see our king in the light that we reflect?

May the peace of the Lord Jesus Christ go with you, wherever he may send you. May he guide you through the wilderness and protect you through the storm. May he bring you home rejoicing at the wonders he has shown you.

Amen