

New Kilpatrick

Sermon

2nd February 2020

Matthew 5:1-12

Spirit... instead of sending us out... may you let us be... instead of pushing us into doing things... may you breathe into our speed with stillness... instead of challenging us with belief... may you challenge us with contemplation... So be it... Amen

I don't know how you celebrated Brexit Day... As the eleventh hour approached... and passed... I was reading a book... I started it when we were in Europe and I finished it when we were out of Europe... Nothing felt different...

Actually... that's not true at all... the ground shifted... truly... though that was nothing to do with leaving the EU... but entirely due to this book... The Boy... the Mole... the Fox and the Horse... whose author... Charlie Mackesy... just so happened to be on Saturday Live on Radio 4 yesterday morning...

It's a children's book... only it isn't... "What do you want to be when you grow up?" asked the mole... "Kind" said the boy... "What do you think success is?" asked the boy... "To love," said the mole...

"The fox never really speaks," whispered the boy... "No. And it's lovely he is with us," said the horse... "To be honest, I often feel I have nothing interesting to say," said the fox... "Being honest is always interesting," said the horse...

I'd quite happily read you the whole book this morning... It would do us... and our world... the power of good...

Which is perhaps where we meet Jesus' own lines of wisdom... we've come to know as the beatitudes...

But it is a worry... how many books... sermons... and whole manner of literature have been written to explain... and define the beatitudes...

I wonder if the beatitudes... are simply a starting point... It's where we begin... We get what they say... but know they are more than that... they are just doorways into our spiritual life... which takes a lifetime to explore...

Many scholars suggest... including my grampa... who was no scholar... just sensible... and a communist... that the sermon on the mount... and the beatitudes especially... are core for the world...

Each one is about relationship... not intelligence... each one is about emotional connection rather than belief... They are starting points... and we can't get them straight away... we know they are important... we know they have some fundamental foundational significance... but it takes a lifetime to work that out...

There is an awful pressure for quick answers in this world... We expect an immediate response... We look to experts for all the answers to Coronavirus... or what Brexit will be like now we've left...

But the beatitudes don't agree with that way of thinking... that way of instant solution isn't possible... It takes time... For they are less a way of thinking... and all about a way of being... a way of relating...

If ever we think we get them first try... its a sure sign we've completely misunderstood them... because they overturn the common culture... that gravitates towards power... and possessions and personal prestige...

So we have to begin again with the beatitudes... approach them as the starting line in our faith... inviting them to overturn all the common cultural stuff we hold to... and change the goals we aim for...

They are to be approached with an open heart... and a beginners mind...

When Jesus speaks... he begins with 'poor in spirit'...

Why not just poor... because is that not what the beatitudes are describing... a whole bundle of folk who are the least and the last... who have been shamed and hurt... grieved

and broken... and says to us... in that place... you are blessed... you are beside God... you are the focus of God's attention... and not the powerful who have everything...

As an aside... one of the dangers of our faith is counting our blessings... our success... our comforts... as if they were given specifically to us by God... when actually... the beatitudes say... you are looking in the wrong direction for blessing... God is with those on the wrong side of justice... the plaintive... the persecuted... the powerless...

Count your blessings if you want... but what the world counts as blessing is not God's... because Jesus speaks first... of the blessing for the poor in spirit... which simply means... an inner emptiness and humility... a beginner's mind... it means to live without a need for personal righteousness or reputation...

Poor in spirit means genuine powerlessness... those who aren't full of themselves in any way... Jesus is saying... "Blessed are you, you're the freest of all"... Poor in spirit is where we begin in our spiritual life...

You see... the higher up the system we are... or the more important we are... even working against the system... the more trapped we are inside that system... we need to protect the system in order to protect ourselves... The "poor in spirit"... don't have to play that game... they don't need to compete... they don't need to come out winners... because none of that makes sense... even as winning is the primary philosophy of the western economic system... as well as one of the reasons... for some... Friday was important...

We are only free... we only have independence... when we have nothing to protect... and nothing we need to prove or defend... Trapped people *have* to do what they do... Free people *want* to do what they do...

Jesus sets the scene... the poor in spirit... those with a beginners mind...

Thomas Merton... a contemporary Christian mystic... wrote... "At the centre of our being... is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusion... a point of pure truth... a point or spark which belongs entirely to God"...

The beatitudes say... As long as we're filled with ourselves... we can go no further... Our true search is to uncover that spark again...

So what we have here... is that invitation to begin... The beatitudes aren't things to achieve... or merits to accumulate... or posts to pass on the way to some greater achievement... These are starting points... that illustrate... where we will find blessing on the way through life... in the least we are... in the frailty of our humanity... in the vulnerability of life... in the poverty of our spirit...

The truth of the beatitudes... is a journey to take... and to take together... It is the starting point for our community here... to declare God regularly shows up in mercy and blessing... just where we least expect God to be... when we reach our weakest moments and places... God offers blessing... presence... giving of Gods-self... that we might have new life... begin again...

"When have you been at your strongest?"... asked the boy...

"When I have dared to show my weakness..."

Such is the blessing of the beatitudes... the starting point for our journeys... places to begin... and begin again and again... and for all our faith has become in the thousands of years it has been here... it has found nothing more than this truth... this blessing... that in the journeys we take... our weakest moments... we are met by promises of God...