

DSW Methodist Circuit Written Service
for Sunday 29 January 2023 Revd Jane
Wilson

Welcome to this time of worship wherever you are. **Prayer of Approach**

Loving God, each week we come to worship you from different homes, and different families.

We all look different, we speak in different ways, and we like different things.

But we come to worship you, with people across the world, because we are united by the fact that we love you.

Bless this time of worship we pray,
and help us to remember that just as you long to bless us, so you also call us to be a blessing to each other, in Jesus' name. Amen.

HYMN [STF 368]

When morning gilds the skies,
My heart awaking cries:
'May Jesus Christ be praised!'
Alike at work and prayer
To Jesus I repair:
'May Jesus Christ be praised.'

Does sadness fill my mind?
A solace here I find:
'May Jesus Christ be praised!'
When evil thoughts molest,
With this I shield my breast:
'May Jesus Christ be praised!'

To God, the Word, on high
The hosts of angels cry:
'May Jesus Christ be praised!'
Let mortals, too, upraise,
their voice in hymns of praise:
'May Jesus Christ be praised!'

Let earth's wide circle round
In joyful notes resound:
'May Jesus Christ be praised!'
Let air, and sea, and sky,
From depth to height, reply:
'May Jesus Christ be praised!'

Be this while life is mine
My canticle divine:
'May Jesus Christ be praised!'
Be this the eternal song,
Through all the ages long:
'May Jesus Christ be praised!'

*German hymn, early form, in Katholische Gesangbuch, Wurzburg,
1828, TR by Edward Caswall (1814-1878)*

Prayers of Praise & Confession

Gracious God we bring our praise and adoration, joining with the hosts of heaven as we worship you, because you alone are worthy of all glory, honour and praise.

We praise you because you have created the world around us with its many opportunities and blessings.

We praise you for the knowledge that whether we're young or old, you've chosen us to be your children and you care for each one of us.

Lord Jesus, we praise you for your sacrifice for us on the cross to put us back into right relationship with you.

Holy Spirit we praise you for your life-giving presence, transforming lives and igniting our hearts with your flame of love;

To you, loving God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be all glory, honour and praise now and for ever.

Amen

Loving Lord you ask us to love you and each other in the way that you have loved us
But as we look back over these past days, we know we have fallen short of your hopes for us.....

So we come to say sorry and ask your forgiveness:

For the times when we have acted thoughtlessly and selfishly;

When we've judged others and refused to imagine what it is like to walk in their shoes;

For the times when we've made the easy choice instead of choosing to follow your ways of love and grace and trust and faith;

For the times when we've taken for granted the gifts you've given us, including those we love and who love us:

God of love, Forgive us.

When we're afraid of failing, or getting things wrong, make us strong in you.

When we want to give up because times are hard, help us to persevere in you.

When we make excuses because we think we're not good enough, help us to believe in ourselves, as you do.

When our minds are closed to new ideas, surprise us.

Help us to be honest with you and to receive your forgiveness, so that we can make a fresh start in our lives.

We ask in the precious name of Jesus our Lord & Saviour, **Amen.**

Bible Readings:

Psalm 34: 1-14 Good News Translation (GNT)

I will always thank the Lord;
I will never stop praising him.
I will praise him for what he has done;
may all who are oppressed listen and be glad!
Proclaim with me the Lord's greatness;
let us praise his name together!

I prayed to the Lord, and he answered me;
he freed me from all my fears.
The oppressed look to him and are glad;
they will never be disappointed.
The helpless call to him, and he answers;
he saves them from all their troubles.
His angel guards those who honor the Lord
and rescues them from danger.

Find out for yourself how good the Lord is.
Happy are those who find safety with him.
Honour the Lord, all his people;
those who obey him have all they need.
Even lions go hungry for lack of food,
but those who obey the Lord lack nothing
good.

Come, my young friends, and listen to me,
and I will teach you to honour the Lord.
Would you like to enjoy life?
Do you want long life and happiness?
Then keep from speaking evil
and from telling lies.
Turn away from evil and do good;
strive for peace with all your heart.

The Lord watches over the righteous
and listens to their cries;
but he opposes those who do evil,
so that when they die, they are soon forgotten.
The righteous call to the Lord, and he listens;
he rescues them from all their troubles.
The Lord is near to those who are discouraged;
he saves those who have lost all hope.

Good people suffer many troubles,
but the Lord saves them from them all;
the Lord preserves them completely;
not one of their bones is broken.
Evil will kill the wicked;
those who hate the righteous will be punished.

The Lord will save his people;
those who go to him for protection will be
spared.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 5:1-12 Contemporary English Version (CEV)

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on the
side of a mountain and sat down.
Jesus' disciples gathered around him, and he
taught them:
God blesses those people who depend only on
him.
They belong to the kingdom of heaven!
God blesses those people who grieve.
They will find comfort!
God blesses those people who are humble.
The earth will belong to them!
God blesses those people who want to obey him
more than to eat or drink.
They will be given what they want!
God blesses those people who are merciful.
They will be treated with mercy!
God blesses those people whose hearts are pure.
They will see him!
God blesses those people who make peace.
They will be called his children!
God blesses those people who are treated badly
for doing right.
They belong to the kingdom of heaven.

God will bless you when people insult you,
mistreat you, and tell all kinds of evil lies about
you because of me. Be happy and excited! You
will have a great reward in heaven. People did
these same things to the prophets who lived long
ago.

Reflection

Today's gospel reading is part of the Sermon on
the Mount, the Beatitudes - or, as some people
call them the "Be - attitudes", because they are
about how to "be".

And in this section, Jesus is preaching a very
radical gospel. Because in Jesus' time, many
people believed that the sign that you were
blessed by God was that you were rich and
prosperous and had status and authority - and
probably lots of children & servants too.
Traditionally it was believed that the rich, the
fortunate, the elite, were the "blessed" ones,
because they'd been given wealth, power and
worldly success.

Even today there are those who still preach the
so-called "prosperity gospel" and who argue that
if you're a good Christian, you will be blessed
with wealth & status.

And yet here, Jesus seems to be arguing against that world view and saying, actually, that's not who's going to be blessed in God's kingdom.

Because God's blessings are not just for the rich and powerful, they're for everyone, and especially those who are without hope. God's blessings are for the hopeless ones, the sad, the tired, the humble, the ones who strive for peace with all their hearts as the psalmist encourages us to.

In fact 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.

These blessings promise a total 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. And according to some scholars, the blessings are couched in the present tense, rather than pointing to the future, perhaps to re-emphasise that the kingdom of heaven has come close and is now present in Jesus.

You could say that the Sermon on the Mount is about as radical as it gets, because in a sense it's a challenge to everyone who hears it not to go along with the world's understanding of success, but instead to look beyond that, to the eternal dimension, to God's way of looking at things and God's kingdom values.

So it offers a completely counter-cultural narrative, an invitation to follow a different path, to 'think outside the box', if you like.

It's been said that the words of the Beatitudes are not so much about 'doing' something, as about 'letting go' of something.

So, for example, being 'poor in spirit' invites us to let go of the need to be 'somebody'.

And 'those who mourn' or are grieving are invited to lay down the burden of their pain.

And, in turn, we're invited to let go of our need to be right, of our need to follow our own agenda, of our determination to put our own comfort & wellbeing before anything else, even following God;

We're invited to let go of our need for revenge and retaliation, instead of seeking reconciliation.

We're invited to let go of our need to be in control, or to focus on our own plans rather than the plans God has for us.

Because it's not about us, it's about God in Jesus.

In this passage we're being called to let go of our own self-importance, our reliance on ourselves and our own strength, and instead to put our trust in God, to rely on the grace of God to provide all we need. Grace that will also enable us to turn our focus away from ourselves, and towards the needs and concerns of others.

It's not so much about how we live rightly by going through the motions of being righteous, like the Pharisees did in Jesus' day, which perhaps in today's language translates to being more concerned about protecting our own rights than anyone else's, it's more about how we live rightly by reference to our world and the other people we share it with.

There's a lot of talk about blessings and being blessed in this passage (depending on the translation you use).

Several years ago while training for ministry at the Queens Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education in Birmingham, I received an email from one of my tutors which they signed off in a way I hadn't come across before. So instead of signing off with "Best wishes" or "Kind regards", they signed off with "Blessings" and then their name. I was very struck by that way of signing off – which to me seemed like a way of saying "I'm wishing/sending blessings to you" - that I've often used it often myself as a way of signing off.

In his book "Benedictus: A Book of Blessings" John O'Donohue writes about the way in which we have lost the art of blessing each other – of giving and receiving blessings from each other.

Jesus talks in this passage about the way in which God blesses those who find themselves in a difficult place and he often taught his followers that they should love one another in the same way as he loves us.

In recent years the so called "Random Acts of Kindness" movement has gained popularity, where people are encouraged to think about how they can do a "random" act of kindness that will make a difference to someone else's life, often a stranger, and sometimes such acts are done anonymously. So for example, paying for a coffee for the person behind you in the queue, or paying a compliment to the person who serves you in

the shop, smiling at someone in the lift, leaving a Thank You note for the postman/woman or refuse collectors, or making sure everyone in a group conversation feels included.

Perhaps as disciples of Jesus the relevant question for us might be: How can I be a blessing to someone today?

How can what I do, or what I say, or how I behave, or how I spend my money, or how I spend my time – be a blessing to someone else today ?

Our calling as followers of Jesus is not only to be blessed by God, but also to BE a blessing to others.

So I wonder how would it be if we decided every day to make it our aim to be a blessing to someone else?

To think, whenever we encounter someone – how can I bless you today? What difference can I make to someone's life – or to our world - that will make it a better place?

It could be as simple as smile, or a “hello how are you doing today?” It may be making a cake or a meal for someone. It may be inviting someone to come to church on Sunday, or to another activity.

It may be choosing to turn the other cheek, or to forgive someone who has hurt you.

It may be thanking God for 3 things every day – and then sharing that with someone else, or sharing why you go to church, or telling them God loves them or asking if you can pray for them.

The blessings God gives us are not just for us, they are for sharing with others too.

So let's shake off the things that stop us from blessing others – worries about what others may think or possessiveness about what we have – and ask God to help us become people who flow freely with his love and blessings for the benefit of others.

Let's pray:

Lord Jesus thank you for coming to us in human form to show us how much God loves us and longs to bless each one of us.

Please show us the things that stand in the way of our being people of joy, and channels of your blessings to others.

Save us from our unwillingness to be as generous with the things you've entrusted to us as you are with your love and blessings;

Forgive our begrudging lack of forgiveness compared with the wideness of your grace;

Open our eyes to your blessings in all situations and help us to be people who speak & bring blessings to those we meet, whoever they are, and wherever we encounter them.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

HYMN [STF 477]

*Teach me to dance to the beat of Your heart,
Teach me to move in the power of Your Spirit,
Teach me to walk in the light of Your presence,
Teach me to dance to the beat of Your heart.
Teach me to love with Your heart of compassion,
Teach me to trust in the word of Your promise,
Teach me to hope in the day of Your coming,
Teach me to dance to the beat of Your heart.*

You wrote the rhythm of life,
Created heaven and earth;
In You is joy without measure.
So, like a child in Your sight,
I dance to see Your delight,
For I was made for Your pleasure,
Pleasure.

Let all my movements express
A heart that loves to say 'yes',
A will that leaps to obey You.
Let all my energy blaze
To see the joy in Your face;
Let my whole being praise You,
Praise You.

Graham Kendrick & Steve Thompson © 1993 Make Way Music.

Prayers of Intercession based on the words of the Beatitudes

Loving Living Lord, You say: “Blessed are the poor in spirit”: so we pray for the poor, the powerless, the weak; those who are in material need and those who know their need of God... May the kingdom of heaven be theirs.

You say “Blessed are the sorrowful”: so we pray for the bereaved, the guilt-laden, the depressed; for those whose lives are tainted by violence and neglect....

May they will find comfort, consolation and healing in you.

You say “Blessed are the gentle”: so we pray for those caring lovingly for others; those whose acts of self-giving go unsung. ...

May they have the earth for their possession.

You say “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst to see right & justice prevail”: so we pray for those who work for justice and equality; those who speak out to the powerful on behalf of the powerless...

May their desire for your kingdom values be fully satisfied.

You say “Blessed are those who show mercy”: so we pray for those with responsibility for the lives of others; those who have power and influence, those who seek to act with compassion, understanding and grace to do your will...

May they all show and be shown mercy.

You say “Blessed are those whose hearts are pure”: so we pray for all Christians on their earthly pilgrimage, seeking God amidst the distractions and temptations of daily life...

May they and we see God.

You say “Blessed are the peacemakers”: so we pray for those who seek to heal conflicts in and between nations, communities, families; and those struggling to forgive great wrongs...

May they be called God’s children.

You say “Blessed are those who are persecuted because they do right”: so we pray for those who, at great cost, stand up for goodness, truth and freedom; those who witness to your way in a cynical and uncaring world...

May they inherit the kingdom of heaven.

You say “Blessed are those who are insulted, mistreated, slandered and vilified because they follow me”; so we pray for all who suffer for your name’s sake...

May they know the joy of their reward in heaven.

We bring our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ, who lived & died for us and who lives in us, in the name of Love, as we say the prayer he gave us:

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your Name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

Hymn [STF 713]

Show me how to stand for justice :
how to work for what is right,
how to challenge false assumptions,
how to walk within the light.
May I learn to share more freely
in a world so full of greed,
showing your immense compassion
by the life I choose to lead.

Teach my heart to treasure mercy,
whether given or received —
for my need has not diminished
since the day I first believed :
let me seek no satisfaction
boasting of what I have done,
but rejoice that I am pardoned
and accepted in your Son.

Gladly I embrace a lifestyle
modelled on your living word,
in humility submitting
to the truth which I have heard.
Make me conscious of your presence
every day in all I do :
by your Spirit's gracious prompting
may I learn to walk with you.

*Martin Leckebusch (b. 1962) © 1999, Kevin Mayhew Ltd, Buxhall,
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Blessing

Let us go out into God’s world,
seeking to serve with faithfulness,
seeking to be pure in heart and mind,
and to be true to God’s purposes.

May we go out into God’s world,
as we are, and as we would be,
knowing that we are loved for ourselves,
and for our desire to serve our Lord Jesus,

And may The blessing of God,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
remain with each of us always. **Amen.**

*Revd Jane Wilson
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