

'On earth as it is in heaven'

Churchdown Parish Weekend

Session 1 In the community of the blessed

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ²Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

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 receive 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 for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matt 5.1-12

Background

Jesus has begun his ministry.

Called his disciples

'Repent, the Kingdom of heaven is near' (4.17)

'When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them ... ' 5.1

'Jesus saw the crowds'

All that follows is because Jesus *notices*. And what he sees is a crowded world of multiple, overwhelming troubles, in need of healing and another way of living.

His response? Takes his disciples up a mountain and teaches them. First Alpha course.

He begins to gather, create and teach the new community – one within which people will find signs of the kingdom, of God's love, or healing and hope.

[Jesus the new Moses and the law fulfilled.

Matthew makes deliberate links. Jesus, came out of Egypt, been in the wilderness with the crowds. Up the mountain to teach. Will later feed them all in the wilderness with miraculous bread. Everything that went before was a sign – a foretelling. Now it is here. All is fulfilled.]

'He began to speak'

The strange blessings.

In the ancient world declaring someone 'blessed' was a way of congratulating them, for their place in life was clearly enviable and favoured.

The blessed - the happy - on this list are poor, hungry, powerless, marginalised, mourning and persecuted, but somehow able to make peace@

How Jesus teaches: Mashal/meshalim – riddles, proverbs, allegories, paradoxes, stories with unexpected twists. ‘mysterious speech’. Often intentionally confusing or deliberately obscure in nature - translated ‘parable’ but much more like the Greek *enigma* (riddle). ‘That seeing you do not see and hearing you do not hear’. Matt 13.13

A mashal is not a moral saying or instruction to follow.
It is a house to enter and explore and learn to live in.
A way of life in the hospitality of God

Sermon on the Mount has a lot of mashal in it.
Let it jolt us into listening harder, more deeply, to what Jesus is declaring here.
Let it provoke a debate.

For the first hearers something strange was going on.
It still is.
Let it be strange.
Let it disturb and unsettle.
What these sayings reveal are the signs of a world on the edge of transformation.
On the threshold of the Kingdom.

This strange, blessed new world

Life commonly experienced as God-forsaken is now being declared blessed.
God’s blessing is found where it is normally assumed to be painfully absent,
Blessing is poured into the darkest and loneliest corners of human experience.

The comfort and the calling.

Comfort - because we are invited into a kingdom where our deepest human frailty and pain may be a place that is seen and ‘blessed’ – honoured by Jesus.
Challenged because these blessings are pronounced upon those following the way of Christ, cost what it may.

Teaching for a new community
Teaching for a needy world
Teaching that brings earth close to heaven

1930’s German pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer watching the deepening darkness in his land. The need for a radically new vision of Christian community that could confront and resist evil and be a pointer to what life means in God’s kingdom of love. This ‘will surely come only from a life lived in accordance with the Sermon on the Mount. I think it is time to gather people together to do this...’

How then should we live?