

Along the track

Blessed

Perhaps the most familiar text in the Christian scriptures is the Sermon on the Mount. It is not really a mountain but a small hill that overlooks the Sea of Galilee. It is a particularly inviting and restful place even though it can be quite crowded.

Jesus loved Galilee. He spent a lot of time there. He told his disciples to meet him there after the resurrection. So it is not surprising that it was in this beautiful place overlooking the Sea of Galilee that Jesus chose to offer the beatitudes—eight statements beginning with the word *blessed*. Each beatitude declares that people not usually regarded as fortunate or belonging to the in-crowd are actually blessed, that they have found God's favour. Those pushed to the edge become the centre. Jesus declares that they have already been blessed.

The Beatitudes are signs of God's grace at work. They can change us and they invite us to change what is happening around us. The beatitudes tell us about God's grace, firstly that it is a gift, not something that is deserved or a reward, something to be 'amassed' as it were. But we have to be open to it and the challenges it contains, ready to accept the growth it offers. So, blessed are those who realise their need for support, their own limitations and weaknesses, those who recognise their dependence on God, their need of God's grace. Through that lens, they can come to see the goodness in others, the gifts others bring.

The second message is that God's grace is alive and active, sometimes even in the most surprising of places, and "it penetrates the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). Being merciful, being forgiving, being able to empathise with others, committing ourselves to the needs of others in fighting for justice in the face of opposition and even ridicule, being really honest with ourselves about our motives, why we really do things - these things do not come naturally. But with the help of grace, we can work at it. These expressions of humility, compassion, hunger and thirst for justice, peacemaking, purity of heart, non-violence, forgiveness and patience are expressions of God's grace at work.

Of course we are free to accept that grace or not. We are not puppets under God's command but there is maturity in being able to accept this grace that calls us to act in these ways, to say 'no' to the easy path and to take on the challenge of living in this way. The Beatitudes are not just rhetorical statements of ideals to strive for but rather the Beatitudes express the idea that the vision of God comes alive in our attitudes and the actions that flow from them. They open our imaginations so that we can see ways that we might live more fully and enable others to do the same. Christians are called to respond to the world we live in, to rejoice in its beauty and joy, in the gifts it offers but we are also called to build a better world, to bring the vision of God alive in the here and now. We become more fully alive in community with others, to make something beautiful and true together.

God is in the unexpected. Those Jesus called 'blessed' were not what one might expect. Too often we are not present to the beauty, love, wonder and grace that fill the people or ordinary moments of our lives.

A few weeks ago I was sitting in Lygon Street. The seat was close to a homeless person who was drawing in a notebook. His pictures were very good. I was waiting for someone who was very late so I watched for a while. He was talented, to say the least. We got talking. Nothing special, just a yarn about nothing. During this time, a person came past and gave him a pie. Ten minutes or so later, another one gave him a coffee. They obviously did this regularly. Were those people working to overcome the structural injustices that make homelessness such a reality in our cities and towns. I don't know, but they made a difference to this person. Blessed are.....

Regards
Jim Quillinan

Email: jquillinan@dcsi.net.au