

Sermon

Fr David King

Sunday 16th February

(Ordinary 6 2025 – 3rd before Lent)

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

If there is a single central theme that has been running through our Lectionary since Christmas, it is light. Epiphany begins with the light of the star leading the Wise Men; and it ends in Luke's Gospel on the Sunday before Lent with the shining radiance of Jesus' garments at the Transfiguration. In between, this image of light haunts many of the readings and collects throughout the season. Luke's telling of the beatitudes, which we just heard, fits right in with this-as the purpose of the beatitudes is to shed some new light on an old subject. But in order to discover what's going on, we need to know what that old subject is. Without that, it is easy to misunderstand these powerful sayings.

For example, it is all too easy to imagine that the beatitudes are about us; that they are commands for how we should live, and what we should do. So we imagine that Jesus is telling us, or at least telling some of us, that we should 'go out there and get ourselves poor', or 'learn how to weep more', or 'get more persecuted'.

Anyway, if this is what he is up to, Jesus is pretty much wasting his time. After all, advice like that, whether given by Jesus or by anybody else, seldom does much more than make us frustrated and guilty. We might think that it would be sweet or something to be, say, more weepy for Jesus; but it is pretty unlikely we would set out to do it. Besides, does being poor, or weeping, or being persecuted count if you do it on purpose in order to get blessed? That hardly seems right.

The harder you try to make these odd sayings into marching orders, the less sense they make. What's more, nowhere in the beatitudes is there a command or directive-to us or to anybody. Nowhere does Jesus use the imperative, nowhere does he give any orders or

requirements. The entire section is in the indicative. Jesus is simply describing reality, he is not telling the disciples, or us, or anybody else, to do anything.

The Beatitudes are not about us; they are not a set of instructions on how we should live, or what we should do. But if they are not about us, what are they about? If they don't shine any light on how we are supposed to behave, what are they good for?

Well, another candidate for their meaning has been for the world. That is, the beatitudes have been presented as ways to help folks live well in the world; or at least as things to do that will make the world a better place. It has been suggested that if we would only be spiritually poor or hungry, or persecuted, that this will bring out the best in others and they will be the better because of it. So, sooner or later, people will realize how nice and valuable we are and give us what we want. Or, by and by the whole world will end up being a much better place for all involved; and everyone will somehow come out on top in the long run. So the beatitudes become a handy

tool, a cosmic way to win friends, influence people, and clean up the neighbourhood.

The problem with this, of course, is that it is just plain silly. You can only believe that the world respects and responds kindly to the sort of behaviour found in the beatitudes if you know absolutely nothing about the world. Things don't work like that. If you turn the other cheek you will probably end up with two sore cheeks. And being poor now, spiritually or, especially, physically, will probably insure that you won't go very far in the real world of business, politics, or industry. That's just the way it is, and that's the way it always has been, and Jesus was no fool. He knew that. Jesus was not trying to shine any light on how the world works. Besides, it really doesn't make any sense to crucify the Lord for giving sensible advice for getting ahead. Or even for giving silly advice about getting ahead. If there is a point here about the world, it is really that, as far as the world is concerned, the beatitudes don't make any sense at all.

There is nothing rational about living the beatitudes with the hope that it will result in a more successful or prosperous life.

Still, the beatitudes shine light, but they really don't shine any light about the way the world works. They are not about the world, just like they are not about telling us how to act. The beatitudes are about God, they are about who God is, and who God blesses, and what the kingdom of God is like. They tell us what matters to God, they tell us who is especially important to God, and they tell us what God pays attention to.

Now, Jesus gives us this surprising information about God hoping, no doubt, that such knowledge may have a valuable effect on us. But that is up to us. In the beatitudes, and the entire Sermon on the Mount, Jesus offers us his picture of God's values and God's priorities; and he offers them as an alternative to the vision of life we usually carry around with us. We can only act on what we can see; and Jesus is giving us the chance to see farther, and clearer, and deeper than ever before. The idea is that if we can see, really

see, whom God considers blessed, or happy, then we will at least know the road to blessedness, and perhaps be able to use that knowledge.

The beatitudes are a glimpse into the heart and mind of God.

Again, they don't tell us what our world is like. We already know that so well that we assume that anything of value will work really well in and with this world. Jesus is trying to shake us loose from that assumption, and give us a different vision of life, one that has its foundations, not in the world, but in the very nature of God.

Jesus tells us that the world's insignificant players, the losers, are blessed of the Father, and he tells us this so we can know a little better who the Father is. He tells us this to give us a bit more light so we can see a little better.

Now, what we do with this is up to us. Remember, we are not getting a bunch of moral laws here. We are being offered a new vision of our world and our lives. The point is not that we must obey a rule that says 'thou shalt be poor and persecuted'. The point is

that, by this light, we can look at the mind of God and discover all sort of new possibilities.

So we have some new light on God. And a question. The question is: if God is really like this; if God has the preferences and the priorities of the beatitudes, then what could that mean? How could our lives be different, how could you be different? That's the issue, and that is the question Jesus leaves us with. It's a good question, and worth considering in your life.