

Sunday 29 January 2023, Christ Church Rayleigh

Introduction

Listen to Heaven Shall Not Wait

Call to Worship (seated)

Children of God,
It's time to take off your shoes,
Step out of your comfort zone, and
Wade with trust into the stream of God's mercy.
Stand still for a moment, barefoot, on holy ground.
Let the healing waters wash your feet.
Take a deep breath as Love soaks into your soul.
Be silent and listen for God's word to us today.

Micah 6:6-8 extract

'With what shall I come before the LORD,
and bow myself before God on high?
He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

How shall we worship our God?
We have heard what the Lord requires of us.
Leave empty talk and pride behind.
We must walk the walk.
Prepare to step out in faith, even into troubled waters.
Only God knows where we might need to go.
Don't be afraid. Jesus will guide our steps along the way,
Teaching us to walk humbly, To love boldly,
To serve God with body, soul, mind, and strength.
Let us pray for the humility and courage
to follow where the Spirit leads.

Talk about T-shirts

We sing the Taize chant The kingdom of God, 3 times (see song sheet)
(any children going to Sunday Club leave at this point)

What are the Beatitudes? Who is Jesus talking to?

Bible Reading: Matthew 5:1-12

We Sing How blessed are vs 1-4 (Tune at R&S 552)

How blessed are those who know they're poor,
surviving on God's caring;
for God will surely shower them
with every heav'nly blessing!

How fortunate are those who mourn
for all of this world's failure;
for they, at last, will find in God
both comfort and consoler!

What joy awaits the meek who live
devoid of calculation;
a full inheritance is theirs –
a cause for celebration.

What great delight will come to those
who yearn for peace and fairness;
their hunger will be satisfied –
God shares their blessed awareness

Reflection on the Beatitudes

When we read the Sermon on the Mount it is unclear who Jesus is talking to. It says he saw the crowds, and he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down his disciples came to him and he taught them. So, it sounds like he is speaking only to the disciples, rather than the crowd. We usually think of the Sermon on the Mount being given to a big crowd. Does it matter, whether Jesus is talking to a large crowd or only to the disciples? That might be something you want to talk about later in your groups. I don't think it matters – either way, we are Jesus' disciples, so the message is for us.

The Beatitudes are less about who I am – whether I see myself in any of the categories of those who mourn, a peacemaker, someone who hungers for justice and so on - and more about how we see everyone else. They are about seeing others through the eyes of Christ.

When we reflect on the beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" We often think of those who are not Christian, who don't know or follow Jesus, but Christians can be poor in spirit too. Often, we think of our security and safety being found in wealth, but wealth is ultimately nothing. We are called to a material simplicity, an invitation to a more plain, less luxurious life. We (society) are often invited to de-clutter, get rid of stuff, make our lives more simple, but is that just skimming the surface, do we really think how about how we could live a more simple life, with less material wealth? Or how we could use the resources we have to help others more?

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth," reminds us not to have an air of superiority over others, but rather to look to others' weaknesses with tenderness and meekness. We can correct the faults of others, but with love and a constant sense of our own limits and capacity to be tempted to the same kinds of things as those whom we might judge.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted," We are encouraged not to run away from the pain and sorrow of others, but to bring relief instead of reacting out of fear. We can mourn with those who mourn so that they are not alone in their sorrow. And indeed, mourning will come to all of us at some point in our lives. As a society we tend to shy away from talking about death. We don't know what to say to people who are bereaved; often preferring to say nothing for fear of upsetting them. How could we do more to be alongside those who mourn?

To "hunger and thirst for righteousness" does not suggest that meekness requires we be silent or complicit in the face of injustice. Do we hunger and thirst for righteousness, even if this makes us uncomfortable or involves social or material risks?

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." This reminds us that peacemaking can mean more than praying for global peace or opposing war. Peace also has to begin with actively building friendships in our communities. Concretely, this means staying in relationship even with those who are a bit odd, troublesome or difficult, demanding, different, beaten down by life or simply uninterested. It is hard work.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." We are asked to challenge society and even to be a nuisance in struggling for justice. We are encouraged to speak up in the face of injustice, even when it means persecution. Are we willing as individuals, and the church, to stand up for matters of justice, such as working against racism or poverty? Do we accept that there may be a price for doing so?

We Sing How blessed are vs 5-9 (next page)

What kindness will be shown to those
who always show forgiveness;
for they, in turn, must then receive
God's mercy, love and goodness.

How blessed are all who seek their God
with unalloyed devotion;
for, face to face, their God they'll see
with joy beyond emotion.

How fortunate are those who work
to spread the gift of friendship;

they surely will be seen to share
the fullness of God's kinship.

What joy is theirs who suffer now
for bearing truth's great banner;
they will win through and justice find
with God, in God's own manor.

We too, like them, inherit
joy when for our God we suffer;
with prophets we'll be welcomed home
to live with God for ever!

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Activity – T-shirt design and discussion of questions on the beatitudes (see end)

We Sing – O Lord hear my prayer (see song sheet)

Prayers with Ukrainian Kyrie response (see song sheet)

God, bless those who are in poor spirit,
who feel empty inside and who dread the day. **Kyrie**

God, bless those who mourn and grieve,
who ache with loss for someone so much loved. **Kyrie**

God, bless the people who are meek,
who do not grasp or shout or demand to be first in the queue. **Kyrie**

God, bless the people who are hungry for justice
and who cannot wait for everyone to have their rights. **Kyrie**

God, bless all who are merciful,
who have learned to forgive even those who hurt them hard. **Kyrie**

God, bless all who are pure in heart,
in whom there is no vengefulness, but only love. **Kyrie**

God, bless the peacemakers,
the ones who, by their words and deeds, can change the world. **Kyrie**

God, bless the persecuted ones,
and keep them safe from those who would hurt them. **Kyrie**

God, so rich in blessings for your children,
we rejoice in your promises and in your boundless and transforming grace. **Amen.**

Prayer stations:

- Blessed are those who are persecuted & Holocaust Memorial Day
- Blessed are those who mourn
- Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness

We sing the Lord's Prayer

Prayers continue (with response)

Jesus went up the mountain, sat before the crowd,
and began to speak. We are the crowd. **May we listen, learn, and do.**

Richness and fullness in wealth, in knowledge, in spirit do not draw us to heaven. May we be filled with
an emptiness and poverty that draws us ever closer to you. May we bring an end to emptiness and
poverty that leaves any one isolated and without hope. Bless all with the kingdom of heaven.
We are the crowd. **May we listen, learn, and do.**

Clinging to existence we forget to live. Striving for long years we forsake years that are long. May we
release those to whose memories, we cling. May we acknowledge our sadness and loss. You are with
those who have died, be with all those who mourn, make us the instruments of your comfort.
We are the crowd. **May we listen, learn, and do.**

Longing for power, surety, and the status quo we create systems of privilege, false normality, and stagnation. May we cease to seek privilege and instead long for the dignity of all. May we cease to seek surety and instead long for growth. May we give up stagnation and embrace humility. Make us see the common humanity of all who live on this earth.

We are the crowd. **May we listen, learn, and do.**

Striving for a life of comfort we surround ourselves with false comforts; in trying to be right we ignore the pain of others. Make us aware of the troubles and concerns around us, take away our security so that we might share that discomfort, bring us to hunger and thirst for righteousness so that everyone may be filled in truth. We are the crowd. **May we listen, learn, and do.**

Anger fills us with a need for vengeance and harsh justice; we seek to lessen our pain by inflicting pain upon others. May we acknowledge our anger but not be held by it. May we seek justice for the wrongs done against us but not be defined by them. Give us the gift to be merciful with ourselves and merciful with others so that all may receive mercy.

We are the crowd. **May we listen, learn, and do.**

Refusing to look inward we carry emotional baggage, we leave parts of ourselves in shadow and darkness, we maintain ingrained habits and reactions. May we acknowledge our immaturity and a need to grow to more full and complete individuals. May we bring light into our inner darkness. Give us pure hearts oh God, so that we might see your face.

We are the crowd. **May we listen, learn, and do.**

Limited as we are it is impossible to know and understand you fully. May we strive to discern when we are being persecuted for witnessing your truth and when we are being critiqued to know you more fully. May we never claim persecution in order to avoid necessary change. Grant that any adversity we face may bring us only closer to the truth of your kingdom.

We are the crowd. **May we listen, learn, and do.**

Christians throughout the world seek to walk the path that Jesus set for us. May we never walk the easy path of complacency. May we ever seek to speak your truth. May we never stop on the account of social stigma. May we ever seek to die to the world and live in Christ Crucified. Grant that we will continue to walk the way of the prophets and saints of old.

We are the crowd. **May we listen, learn, and do.**

We sing – Heaven Shall Not Wait

Heaven shall not wait
for the poor to lose their patience,
the scorned to smile, the despised to find a
friend:
Jesus is Lord;
he has championed the unwanted;
in him injustice confronts its timely end.

Heaven shall not wait
for the rich to share their fortunes, t
he proud to fall, the élite to tend the least:
Jesus is Lord;
he has shown the master's privilege –
to kneel and wash servants' feet before they
feast.

Heaven shall not wait
for the dawn of great ideas,
thoughts of compassion divorced from cries of
pain:
Jesus is Lord;
he has married word and action;
his cross and company make his purpose plain.

Heaven shall not wait
for triumphant Hallelujahs,
when earth has passed and we reach another
shore:
Jesus is Lord
in our present imperfection;
his power and love are for now; and then for
evermore.

John L. Bell & Graham Maule

Please leave your offering on the way out.

Blessing

Go from this place to justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.
And may the blessing of God,
the love of Jesus Christ,
and the presence of the Holy Spirit
be among you and within you
as you seek to do God's will. Amen

Hymns used under the Christ Church CCLI licence 63352
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The Kingdom of God:

The . king - dom of God is jus - tice and peace and joy in the Ho - ly Spi - rit.

Come, Lord, and o - pen in us the gates of your_ king - dom. The

O Lord Hear My Prayer:

O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord, hear my prayer. When I call

an - swer me. O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord hear my prayer. Come and lis - ten to me. O

Ukrainian Kyrie:

Ky - ri - e e - lei - son. Ky - ri - e e - lei - son.

Ky - ri - e e - lei - - - - son.

Some Questions to discuss in groups or for further reflection at home:

They are framed as 'I' questions, but you could discuss them as the church/congregation.

- Do I spend my money to get a sense of security, status, or temporary pleasures instead of sharing money with others for their basic needs?
- Could greater material simplicity also mean greater freedom to serve God and love others?
- When I see others suffer, do I run away, or am I willing to put aside my own feelings of discomfort to be alongside others?
- Do I work for social justice or stand up for others who are being treated unjustly? When I do stand up for justice, do I keep in mind my own personal limits or safety?
- How can knowing I have received God's mercy inspire me to be more compassionate and merciful, and less judgmental, with others?
- Where do I include or exclude others?
- Where might I be inspired by the examples of 'saints' or even ordinary people I know, who are willing to suffer for the sake of righteousness?
- In what areas can I be more courageous in speaking and acting for justice, especially on behalf of those who are most vulnerable?