

Sunday, 29th January , 2023

Walking humbly with God

Materials from Roots Bible Study

Begin with an opening prayer

Source of all wisdom,
source of all goodness,
we come into your presence today
to learn more of you and your ways.
May we choose justice,
love kindness,
and walk humbly with you, our God.
Amen.

Read Matthew 5.1-12

Bible notes

The eight-pointed Maltese cross is sometimes seen as representing the eight Beatitudes (vv.3-10). Many of these sayings contain a surprising reversal, such as the meek inheriting the earth. Reversals such as these are featured in the Magnificat (Luke 1.46-55, especially vv.52-53) and give a feel of God intervening at a moment in history. Not all the Beatitudes focus on the future, however – the poor in spirit and those who are persecuted for doing right already possess the kingdom of heaven. The word ‘blessed’ can also be misleading here. Such a technical religious word can make these statements sound as if some kind of suffering or struggle besets a believer, and then God ‘blesses’ them in order to recompense them for their difficulties. But the Greek word translated ‘blessed’ here means something closer to ‘O the happiness of...’ or even ‘Good for you!’ The ‘blessing’ – the ‘good fortune’ – is in the very situation that is difficult or demanding, rather than in some additional divine gift. There is a different Greek word for giving a blessing in this sense (see James 3.10; Hebrews 12.17).

What is Jesus saying in these startling statements at the beginning of this major sermon? I think we are being challenged to look at vulnerability, difficulties and challenges in a new way – not as signs that we are far from God or lacking in faith, but as if our pains can be the very birth pains of the kingdom of heaven. It is not being strong and knowing everything that marks us out as disciples but being open-hearted to those around us.

Reflection

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

‘Blessed are those who ...’, says Jesus to his disciples – and to us. How are we blessed? Does God bless us by a wave of his divine hand? ‘To bless’ is sometimes seen as a wish for something good, a favour, happiness for another. But blessing in the Beatitudes is something present, something ‘now’ – blessed are, not blessed will be. We are blessed as we live with each other, in and through all of life’s challenges, striving always to be a blessing to others. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the many hymns and songs in which we ‘bless the Lord’. The Lord already has all he needs! We live in blessing when our lives are pleasing to God..

A prayer of thanksgiving

God of peace, justice, mercy and love,
thank you that in you we inherit the earth.
Thank you that we are your children.
Thank you that as we mourn, we are comforted.
Thank you that as we seek for righteousness, we are filled.
Thank you that in you we receive your mercy.
Thank you that we can see you through our changed hearts.
Thank you that in your upside-down kingdom,
we find rest, peace, comfort and assurance of your presence.
Thank you, Lord, that in life’s darker times, we are never alone –
You are always by our side.

Amen.

A prayer to conclude

Lord, you bless us in so many ways.
You love us just as we are.
And you also want us to grow closer to you.
Show us how we can bless others
by putting them and you before ourselves.
May we walk humbly with you every day.

Amen.