

ALL SAINTS DAY 2020 (Year A) 1st November 2020

Matt 5:1-12; Rev 7:9-17

Preacher: Reverend Jane Quinton

Curate

‘I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count’..... No rule of 6 here then!

In fact, everybody’s singing as well, so definitely no covid here!

What a glorious message of hope and encouragement this reading from Revelation is as we live in our pandemic-affected world today.

We are presented with this wonderful picture of heaven – a place where there are no longer any tears, (physical, or the tier 1, 2 or 3 variety!); there is no more pain; and everyone here is united, together forming one enormous all-inclusive family, singing and worshipping the God of love.

And as we commemorate All Souls and All Saints today, and particularly remember those who we have loved and are no longer with us, this is a comforting reminder of that eternal place that God promises and invites all of us to share with Him.....

I'd like though to switch our attention to the gospel reading. Because although what we read in Revelation is a glimpse of what will be the final, full and definite form of heaven; as I have been preaching over the last few weeks now, when Jesus spoke about the kingdom of heaven, He wasn't merely referring to some other place in some other realm beyond our life here on earth, but of the establishing of God's order here and now.....

A way of 'being' that Jesus manifest in His life, and which He directs us to particularly in these familiar words in Matthew's gospel. Because these Beatitudes as they are referred to, are a way of *being* of having right attitudes that will bless, both us and others.

I wonder what you thought as you read or heard them read just now?

Because interestingly when Noelle and I together looked at these words of Jesus at the beginning of the week, we both drew different things from them!

As I read these words I immediately felt an enormous sense of Jesus's empathy..... it was like Jesus was talking straight into our situation now and saying:

'I know..... all that you're going throughI know what it's like.....I know and can feel your suffering.....but I want you to know that I am there

with you, and for you I want to encourage you that there is hope, and a promise of better things.....’

Noelle meanwhile read Jesus’s words and saw them as a challenge to us – a continuation of what she was preaching about last week. A call from Jesus for us to be radically different — to live an alternative life-style that *is* challenging, because it’s hard. But it is a lifestyle that Jesus Himself embodied a way of living and of *being* that promises to have positive and life-changing effects.

And so with both these thoughts in mind, I offer you today a ‘sermon sandwich’! With Jesus as the bread that holds it all together, I’m going to put a mixed filling inside – Noelle’s ham with my cheese if you like! Because actually I think that the image of a multi-filled sandwich in itself endorses what Jesus is saying here.

For as Jesus talks about being peacemakers, about being meek, and pure in heart, and hungering and thirsting for righteousness, to be willing and able to listen to and reflect on the views of others is a very important first step.

God wants to lead us into His truth, and this is a continual journey on which He will speak to us using a variety of different ways, and sources and people. The important

thing is to always be ready and open to see and hear, and receive.

And so firstly taking Jesus's words as the ham in our sandwich, they are a challenge!

When Jesus speaks about being *poor in spirit*, He is speaking about us reaching that point where we fully recognise our own helplessness.....recognise that we aren't superman or woman, we're not perfect, and we do make mistakes..... and when we realise that it is only God in whom we can fully put our trust. It is a place that calls for a dying to our self-seeking egos (*something of which Liz spoke about a few weeks ago*); and of accepting that God loves us unconditionally.

Though such a realisation may possibly bring us to tears, this is not what Jesus means when He talks about those who *mourn*. For in moving away from ourselves, from our self-seeking, self-serving egos, we are able to see a bigger world, one that is broken and hurting – and we see this suffering with eyes of compassion and concern and care, and with a heartfelt desire to help in its healing.

And so as Jesus goes on to speak of being *meek*, He is referring to a state of humilityreal humility, within which we submit all we are and have to God.....

Something which naturally leads to a *hunger and thirst for righteousness* – where the most important thing in our lives, the only thing that will satisfy us, is God..... His love and grace and mercy feeding and filling us.

Which brings us to the next beatitude.... because mercy and forgiveness is the free gift that God has given us through Jesus – it is a gift which releases us; and that we are to similarly extend to others..... even those we don't like or that have hurt us.

What a different world it would be if everyone showed mercy rather than judgement.....

And so to the last 2 beatitudes, the *pure in heart* and the *peacemakers*.

Because God's whole desire is to draw each one of us into a loving relationship with Him and with all that He has created. A relationship in which He will constantly be drawing us closer to Him, healing and transforming us, so that we grow to resemble Him more and more. Into a state of *being* where our thoughts and motives will be God-centred and pure because we will be seeing through His eyes of all-inclusive love and joy..... and consequently be seeking peace and reconciliation within all of His creation.

So yes.....as Noelle's ham gives us a lot to chew over....
Because such a lifestyle is a challenge!

Thank goodness then for the 'cheese' in our sandwich.
Because the challenge of the Beatitudes is not one that we
are expected or asked to do alone. God – Father, Son and
Holy Spirit – promises to be there to help us.

Jesus truly knows the frailties, vulnerabilities, weaknesses
and temptations of our humanity. And is there with us....
Through Covid, and whatever we are going through today
or will face in the future, Jesus says to every one of us:

*'I **do** understand..... and through your suffering I promise
to be with you and bring you through..... Lean on me and
take my hand..... I will never leave you.....*

I am here, and will bring good things out of bad stuff....

*You have been made for this relationship with me and my
creation, and nothing is impossible with my help*

*However hard it seems to do the right thing, stick with it, hang
on in there, be steadfast – it IS worth it! .*

*Because this is a way of life that changes, enhances and gives
life - to you, those around you, and to all of my creation.....*

*Because for all of us to be one, living in love and unity with
each other, is what I have created us all for'*

We have all been made in God's image..... what God desires is also deep inside of us – to love and be at one is what we were born for, and what we actually yearn for, as these words from one of Queen's last songs express:

This could be heaven for everyone

This world could be fed,

This world could be fun

This world could be free,

This world could be one

God has created an unbelievable banquet in that perfect heaven of the future, but while we wait for that He wants us to taste, and be part of creating that taste of heaven here and now.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit AMEN