

## Hinde Street Methodist Church

2 February 2020 10.00am

Rev Peter Cornick

### Matthew 5:1-12 New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised (NRSVA)

#### The Beatitudes

<sup>1</sup> When Jesus<sup>[a]</sup> saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. <sup>2</sup> Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

<sup>3</sup> 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>4</sup> 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

<sup>5</sup> 'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

<sup>6</sup> 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

<sup>7</sup> 'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

<sup>8</sup> 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

<sup>9</sup> 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

<sup>10</sup> 'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>11</sup> 'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely<sup>[b]</sup> on my account. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The beatitudes often seem like a shopping list of virtues. A list of virtues taught by Jesus on a mountainside. Do all these, and you will know

what it is to live the Christian life. But perhaps this is not really what Jesus has in mind.

The beatitudes come in two parts. The first; the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek and those who hunger and thirst after righteousness or justice.

All these conditions, describe people in the most desperate of situations. People who have lost everything. The poor in spirit, refers to those who have been dispossessed – up-rooted and excluded. One thinks of refugees, on the move due to war or famine – those forcefully removed from their homes. The mournful are those who find themselves in grief. We are all familiar with mourning in some form or another. But for some, the mourning might be for a whole community; family. Those whose lives have been ripped apart and have not had time for a respectful parting; a loved one lost through violence or the oppression of the state. To be meek, might appear to be a virtue – someone who shows humility – but it can also mean, the person who is walked over, subdued and whose feelings are ignored. Might the meek be those who are trafficked and kept as slaves. In the talk in this church a few weeks ago on human trafficking, it was shocking to see pictures of people being traded on Oxford Street – on our doorstep. And as for those who hunger and thirst after justice, the sense here, is that they can get no justice – they are denied. What about the woman in jail in Iran who appears to be being used as a political pawn – there is no justice.

These desperate situations are not ones we would wish to land up in. They are not virtues we should go away and try to find this week, in order to find God.

But they are situations people in the world find themselves in. Jesus says, God's blessing is for these people. God's blessing is to receive God's honour; to be lifted up by God.

These are not qualities to aspire to. But conditions people in the world find themselves in. To be blessed says Jesus, is the gift, of those whose position is desperate.

The second group of beatitudes are the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers and the persecuted. These are equally, not positions to aspire to, not a shopping list of virtues to cultivate to find God. But again, they are positions people find themselves in as a response to situations presented to them.

Jesus is indicating that those who bring about blessing by mercy, purity and peacemaking – even those who are persecuted for doing so – will be blessed by God too.

These beatitudes are those of acting in the light of God. They make blessing real for those who are desperate.

So, Jesus is not wishing us to be in a position of desperation – but recognises there are those who are. And to bring about blessing – God's honour and peace, calls us, to be people who make God's blessing known.