

Scripture: Matthew 5: 1-12

Text: *And seeing the multitudes, Jesus went up into a mountain and when he was set his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them saying;*

(Matthew 5: 1, 2)

**IN THE NAME OF GOD, FATHER, SON AND HOLY SPIRIT, AMEN**

With its sublime series of statements about those that are blessed, there is surely no other passage in the Bible that has so captured the Christian imagination as the Sermon on the Mount.

Described by the late, great Wm Barclay who taught here for many years as a *summary of the Christian faith*<sup>1</sup> I like to think of the sermon as a series of images which let us glimpse something of the kingdom of God.

In this sermon Jesus is the *Makar*, the poet, the one whose evocative images about the lilies of the field, the birds that neither sow nor reap and the farmer scattering seed, are designed to stir our imagination and awaken us to God's presence and promise in our lives and the world?

The irony is that what are known as the Beatitudes fail to describe the world as we know it.

In the world as we know it, rather than being blessed, the poor in spirit are usually trampled over and ignored..... because in our world it is the forceful and those who shout the loudest that tend to prevail.

In the world as we know it, the meek achieve little, mourners often go uncomforted and many who long for justice carry that longing to the grave.

In the world as we know it, success matters, power matters, wealth matters and questions of justice, truth and peace are often forced to play second fiddle to political, military and economic muscle.

Elias Chacour, a Palestinian Christian and Archbishop of Galilee in the Melkite Greek Catholic Church, offers a very different way of reading the Beatitudes.

Listen to what he says about the Beatitudes;

*Knowing Aramaic, the language of Jesus, has greatly enriched my understanding of Jesus' teachings.*

*Because the Bible we know is a translation of a translation we sometimes get the wrong impression.*

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<sup>1</sup> William Barclay *The Daily Study Bible – Gospel of Matthew* The Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh, 1984, p84

*For example, we are used to hearing the Beatitudes expressed passively;*

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be satisfied.*

*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*

*Blessed is the English translation of the Greek word 'makarios'.*

*However when I look farther back to Jesus' Aramaic, I find the original word was 'ashrei'.*

*Ashrei does not have a passive quality to it.*

*Instead it means to set your-self on the right way for the right goal, to turn around, repent, to become straight or righteous.*

*When I understand Jesus' words in Aramaic, I translate like this:*

*Get up, go ahead, do something, move, you who are hungry and thirsty for justice, for you shall be satisfied.*

*Get up, go head, do something, move, you peacemakers, for you shall be called the children of God.*

*To me this reflects Jesus words and teachings much more accurately.*

From *makarios* to *ashrei*, from passive to active, far from just being a play on words, the distinction could not be more important.

Suddenly our reading of the Beatitudes is transformed from a warm, soft focus, feel-good introduction to Jesus' preaching and teaching to a radical call to action.

And it ties in with so much else of Jesus' teaching.

There was nothing passive about Christ's parable of the Good Samaritan.

In denying a disciple the option of walking past on the other side of someone's need, the parable is a call to action, an urgent demand to do whatever you can to help.

There was nothing passive about his parable of the wise and foolish builders but an urgent call to build our lives on the solid rock of Christ's teaching.

There was nothing passive about Jesus calling the fishermen but an urgent demand to leave their nets and follow him.

There was nothing passive about Jesus' journey to Jerusalem but an active and urgent commitment to his Father's will.

Sitting on a Galilean hillside, Jesus the Makar described a world in which broken relationships are restored, suffering redeemed and justice established.

Of course it was not a world the disciples knew..... but it was a world for which they yearned, a world and a way of living transformed by the presence and promise of God.

Salt of the earth, light of the world, loving your enemy and turning the other cheek, taking the plank out of your own eye before you take the speck from someone else's eye, storing up treasure for yourself in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy, worrying not about what you will eat or wear but seeking instead the kingdom of God; Jesus makes it clear the kingdom of God does not come by force but by gathering and calling to a radically new way of living.

Jesus never said it would be easy.

He warned of the trials and dangers of picking up our cross in order to follow him.

What he did promise however, is that whenever we get up, go ahead, act mercifully, forgive others and seek the justice and peace God requires, then not only will we be a blessing to others, we too will know ourselves to be blessed.

***Now unto him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end, Amen***