

Sermon Matthew

29. 1. 2023 The Beatitudes

Oh my people what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? What does God require of us? Joy addressed this question last week. Here it is again. Through Mica God explains how he has assisted his people and sent the prophets. Yet, they were ignored.

Then we have the Beatitudes. We know them so well, but what does it mean to be blessed as we face hardship? When we are blessed we are set aside for God's purpose. That is why I bless you in most of your email interactions with me. I set you aside for God's work. As we listen for God voice in today's scripture, we are told that in both our troubles and joys that God is with us and for us. Is that your reality? If it isn't what can we do to awaken this awareness?

I have had a lot of time to think during my break. Thinking is quite different to responding or reacting. Response can come out of our habitual positions and attitudes. Whereas thinking invites to let go and open space in both heart and head.

I read Fleming Rutledge's book *The Crucifixion*. It was hard work but worth the effort. It provided me with sense of surety and integration that no other theological reading ever has. It brought the Old and New testaments together where they had often seemed distant and it gave me a new underpinning for the way I understand Jesus' teaching. No small feat!

The meaning I found in today's readings emerge from my reading of Rutledge. I can simplify the thinking to a few sentences. God's purpose for the world was and is love, peace, and prosperity which are expressions of his abounding goodness. The Old Testament set out a method of living according to God's Holy Law. However, in countless ways people have rebelled against law that would bring prosperity through obedience. The prophets were sent to call people back to God's ways. The message of Mica is clear. Our task is as the

folk of old, we should do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God.

How is this going to happen? The answer is as a consequence of the actions of the Trinity. God the Father has set the agenda, Jesus the son was incarnate in the world and teaches the way of all goodness. The prophet Mica, reminds Israel and us, that God's future is always purposeful. Our task is to walk humbly with him.

Then we come to the beatitudes which we know well. We are told that we are blessed even when we face trials. We are set apart and told that specific behaviours will bring us to the Kingdom of God. But **how is this to transpire?** What will make it happen? The answer is that it will be by God's will. It is through the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, that God's will is made manifest in our world.

This Spirit of God existed before time began and its purpose for the world is on-going. That purpose was demonstrated in the ministry and teaching of Jesus and it was spoken through the prophets. Put simply, The Holy Trinity is the driving force of the universe. Its power and dominion stand against all of the petty evils of our world. All of the vice and corruption and lust for power and privilege that we see every minute of the day is pitted against the possibility of dignity, mercy and peace in living. That is God's design. So we live in place of tension. We have insight into what should be and we see ruin and destruction all about us. So how do we live walking humbly with God?

The holy Trinity's design and purpose in sending Jesus into the world was to stand against the forces of evil. Including the evil that resides in each of us. Jesus Crucifixion was the result of God's own action. God offered himself as a sacrifice to take the full force of evil into himself. Because of what God did to himself in the person of Jesus, death has no further dominion over us. We are delivered from the forces of darkness. We are as we hear in so much theological

language saved. But the question remains, how would God have us live?

I have shared profound and perhaps disturbing ideas here but I've become convicted of them. If we accept these propositions as good news, then the way that we see the trajectory of our lives; **the way that we live could change if we are brave.**

So we are called to both radical thinking and action. What does it mean to you to hear that all of God's purposes and desires are for goodness? I find it challenging. Especially when I look at the news of our community and beyond. I see evil everywhere. I see hardship caused by natural disasters. But if God's purpose is for good, how do we accept that people suffer? We need to look for the goodness that stands alongside evil. Perhaps in its most naked form that goodness comes as God's promise. In the words spoken by Jesus. I am with you always.

What of our own way of viewing the world and our role in the church? Will you hold fast to what you thought in 2022 or are you ready to look deeply for God's desire for goodness and mercy and righteousness? The whole debate over the Voice to Parliament is a great example. This year I am not going to listen to the various views of commentators on the political issue. I am going to listen to God's heart. What does God ask of me?

I am going to look evil and wickedness and a desire for power and privilege in the eye and refuse to buy into debate that denies people dignity. The voice will not eradicate all ills in our country, but it is a step towards healing. Because I have already heard so many conflicting opinions on the topic of the Voice, I asked Joy Sandefur who should I listen to. She had a simple answer the *Uluru Statement From The Heart*.

Of course, my first task is to look at my own shortcomings and my need to become merciful. More time for reading scripture and in prayer are my aims for this year.

What does God require of this church? I think it is to face the challenge of accepting God's truth.

AMEN

Reference

Rutledge, F. *The Crucifixion* William Eerdman's Publishing Michigan USA 2015