

**Hexham Trinity Methodist Church**  
**Sunday 8th November 2020**  
**Remembrance Sunday Reflection**

Reading: Matthew 5:1-12

Prayer

*Now when Jesus saw the crowds he went up the mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him and he began to teach. (Matthew 5:1).*

I wonder where Jesus would be teaching today if he was about to give the sermon on the mount? I wonder what platform he'd choose in the middle of lockdown? Would he be on Zoom or would that be too closed as you need the link to get in? Would he be on Facebook or Instagram with his settings set to public or maybe he'd opt for the television or radio so people who don't have broadband could listen?

It is of course a hypothetical question but it is one which came to mind as I was preparing for today. The reason it came to mind is because at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus goes to where he can be seen and heard. What he has to say is of huge significance and he wants people to hear it. He goes up the mountainside, it wouldn't be called the sermon on the mount otherwise, and the disciples follow him. He probably went away from the crowd to be with the disciples but the crowd could still see where he was, we know later on in the sermon that the crowd gathered around and Jesus teaches the crowd as well as the disciples.

Up the mountainside Jesus can be seen and heard, he can make sure that what he has to say isn't missed.

The sermon on the mount is of course much longer than the 12 verses we have heard today. Yet these opening verses, the beatitudes as they are called, set the scene for all that Jesus will say over the next few chapters. They are a significant introduction to what is to come and in many ways summarise all that Jesus says.

The beatitudes introduce us to the way of the Kingdom of God, into the way of Jesus. They tell us what the world that God desires is like, they tell us what the world can be like if we follow the teachings of Jesus, they tell us what the world will be when the risen Jesus returns. Through Jesus God's Kingdom is here but not yet complete and when Jesus returns will be complete.

This world that the beatitudes tell us about is a world where those who mourn are comforted, where the meek will inherit the earth, where those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled with many good things, where those who are merciful will be shown mercy, where we will

see God, where peacemakers will be children of God, where all people will rejoice because the rewards they seek are God's reward and no one else's.

These wonderful words paint for us a picture of the world as it could be, as it will be in the future. They tell us what the world can be in God's economy, in the way of Jesus Christ.

I want for a moment to invite you to hold onto that rich and beautiful picture which we get from the words of Jesus in the beatitudes. To hold onto it and to imagine it as a picture on one side of a card.

PAUSE

The beatitudes remind us of what can be and what will be but that image which we hold in our minds on one side of a card has to be contrasted with the reality of today and the reality of the past that Remembrance Sunday rightly marks.

Remembrance Sunday paints a very different picture on the other side of card. Remembrance Sunday paints a picture which reminds us of the horror of war, of the battles that were fought through the World Wars and in so many other conflicts around the world including those which continue today. Remembrance Sunday reminds us of those who gave their lives so that others, so that we, might live.

But this Remembrance Sunday feels different and whilst it is right that it is our focus. Today it would be wrong if onto that picture we didn't add the reality of the world that we are living in at the moment.

A world in which we are living with a global pandemic, a week in which we are asked to stay at home again to protect ourselves and protect others.

A world in which one of the biggest countries in the world has waited for days and in some ways is still waiting for the outcome of an election which has had seen some of the most bizarre behaviour by those involved with it, an election which whatever the final outcome leaves a country divided.

A world where bias and prejudice are sadly a part of everyday life, where racism, sexism and homophobia are too common.

A world where children are shot in schools and priests are shot outside their churches.

A world where those who seek safety risk doing so in small boats and dinghies because that is a better option than to stay where they are.

What a picture we paint of the world that we are a part of. What a sad picture it is. What pain it causes us, what sadness it brings to our hearts. As it should for it a picture which not only causes us to be sad but a picture which causes God to weep.

What a contrast we have in the two pictures on the two sides of our card. A contrast between what is and what can and will be. A contrast between what is through the hands of humans and what is possible by the power and love of God in Jesus.

Hold onto those pictures for a moment.

### *PAUSE*

In the Iona Community communion liturgy there is a phrase, which I love. It says *'Heaven is here, and earth, and the space is thin between them.'* One of the reasons I invited you to imagine those pictures on two sides of a card is because the space between the two sides of a card is thin. Just as the space between the reality of the world the possibility of God's kingdom is thin.

For whilst today we must acknowledge the reality of our world, in the past and in the present, it is right to mark the pain that conflict, prejudice, illness and so much else causes. As God's people, as followers of Jesus it is just as right to proclaim that that picture, that story is not the final story but that when we walk in the way of Jesus there is a different story to be told, a different way to be, a promise of a very different future. And what is so amazing is that here in the words of Jesus in the sermon on the mount we have described for us what that different way is and what it will be like. The way of comfort, mercy, peace, faithfulness.

We have two pictures, the world as we know it, with great sadness, which is contrasted with the possibility of what can be and will be from the wonderful words of the beatitudes.

Despite many challenges at the moment there is one challenge I haven't had to overcome this Remembrance Sunday. There are many years when Remembrance Sunday is wet and by this point in the service my paper order of service is rather damp. Not a problem here in the study on Zoom!

But do you know what happens when my order of service gets damp? Well if you hold it up you can see right through and from one side you can see the words on both sides of page, the words from one side seep through and merge with the words on the other side.

We have painted two pictures in our minds today on two sides of a card. But these images mustn't be kept on two sides of a card. For God's desire is that the card becomes damp, that the things keeping the pain of the world separate from the potential of the kingdom become see through. That the great love that we find in the kingdom of God, that Jesus describes in the beatitudes, merges with the pain and difficulty of the world, to transform the world into God's Kingdom.

If we let the paper become damp, if we let the way of God's kingdom merge into the sad way of the world then with Jesus the world will be transformed, for that is the promise that we have in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. When the two merge together the world will be blessed.

There are of course many many different ways in which the power of God's Kingdom merges into the darkness of the world. Many of these ways are already seen and could easily be added to our pictures. The work of soldiers and UN officials on peace keeping operations today, the work of Foodbank serving communities or cafe's providing food for families in half term, the prayers of God's faithful people, the work of charities like Love Welcomes in refugees camps.

But on this remembrance Sunday I'd like to suggest there are two ways in which all of us can be part of bringing God's kingdom to the world, of transforming the world, with Jesus, to be a better place .

Firstly it starts with asking for forgiveness, it's not easy to say but each of us contributes to that dark picture of the world. Each of us has a way to go to live up to God's will. Each of us needs to seek forgiveness for the ways in our lives that we don't follow the picture that Jesus gives us in the Beatitudes. We can only seek forgiveness from Jesus but when we follow him his love for us and his death and resurrection mean that his forgiveness is always available to us. We must begin by seeking forgiveness for the way we individually and corporately contribute to the darkness and brokenness of the world.

Secondly, we commit to the ways that Jesus speaks of her in the Beatitudes summarised well in the words of the prophet Micah who says: *'And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.'*

For if we are people who seek our own forgiveness from God and then commit humbly to the way of the Kingdom, the way of justice and mercy, then we will be people who bring together those two pictures on our card, we will be people walking with God who make the space between them thin, who merge the two together because we are the people who can see both sides of card, as you can when your service sheet gets damp at an outdoor service.

So today, let us remember with sadness and thanks all those who have given their lives so we might live. Let us hold before God the world as it is today, acknowledging that it is a dark place. Let us commit afresh to being people who follow the way of Jesus Christ, the way of the Kingdom. People who know what the Kingdom is like. Let us live like the Kingdom is near and in the power of the Holy Spirit do all that we can to bring the two together so that the great power of God's love and light in all its glory overcomes the darkness with the blazing light of God's love. Amen.