

The Sixth Sunday after Epiphany  
13-02-2022  
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Jeremiah 17:5-10    Judah will suffer because of her sin  
Cursed are they who trust in people,  
but blessed are they who trust in God.

Psalms 1                Lives two Roads

1 Corinthians 15:12-20    The Resurrection of the Dead

Luke 6:17-26            Jesus gives the Sermon on the Plain

### Introduction

As I was going through the scripture readings we have just heard, it seemed to me that they focused on the Wisdom of God. How God's wisdom is far superior to our earthly wisdom, and how God's wisdom is often at odds with what we might consider logical or right.

So, as we look further into the readings and how they might help us in our Christian journey, let us try to focus on God's Wisdom.

### God's Wisdom

Let us first look at the Gospel Reading from Luke.

The words of Jesus we have heard this morning are part of what is commonly known as the "Sermon on the Plain". It is similar to a portion of Matthew's Gospel, commonly called the Beatitudes. The word beatitude comes from the Latin for blessing, and that's exactly how Jesus delivers these instructions.

I've prepared a few of my thoughts on each of the beatitudes, and I'd like to go through them with you. And I thought I'd look at the beatitudes from Matthew's gospel as well. I think we need to look at the beatitudes in the light of the fact that these are the traits that Jesus expects of his followers.

Firstly "Blessed are you who are poor".

If I said to you right now, would you like to be poor? How would you answer? On first hearing it doesn't sound like an attribute that I would like. If someone said to me – "How would you like to be?", I can't see myself answering – "I think I'd like to be poor thanks." So what worldly value is Jesus addressing when he says "blessed are you who are poor"? I think it's our own pride and personal independence. He doesn't want us to be proud and full of ourselves, but rather full of Him. It's like the little arm bands you see in the Christian

shops with FROG written on them, where FROG stands for Fully Reliant On God.

Another from Matthew's Gospel is "Blessed are those who mourn."

Now this is a tough one because mourning is a natural part of our lives. The worldly value Jesus may be clashing with here is Happiness at any cost. There will be times in our lives when it is necessary for us to mourn, and it is good to know that we can be comforted.

Next - "Blessed are the meek" I worked in the construction industry for some time and there were a lot of people who were successful and a lot of tough people, but I can't recall too many meek people. Here what I think Jesus is countering is the abuse of power. Obviously, some people will have greater responsibilities than others and will be placed in positions of authority, but it is the way they use this power that is important to God.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." I suppose the worldly value Jesus is addressing here is selfishness. We live in a very materialistic world where it seems good to be ever pursuing our own personal desires. But will these ever really satisfy us? We will be satisfied if we hunger and thirst for God.

"Blessed are the merciful." We touch on this every time we say the Lord's Prayer - "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us". Where is our faith if we can't show mercy to others and forgive them. To show mercy is not necessarily to show weakness, but to show feeling in our actions. Not to forgive can often hurt us deeply, whilst it is still unknown to the person we are unhappy with.

"Blessed are the pure in heart." To be pure is to always be motivated by love. Sometimes we are motivated by trying to get a job done or to reach a certain goal. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but when we act in deceptive ways to get what we want we cease to be pure. Although we think we are moving towards God by achieving our goal, we may in fact be moving away from God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers" - At times we find it very difficult to be peacemakers. Well at least I know I do, especially when I know that I'm right and the other person is wrong. Being a peacemaker will often come at personal cost to us, however we are called to be peacemakers if we wish to become children of God.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness" This beatitude talks about commitment. Here in Australia it is often difficult for us to really relate to this. Although we may not necessarily be highly regarded by

some sections in the community, the police don't search out and throw us into jail just because we are Christians. Jesus died for us, and in the centuries since Christians have continued to be persecuted because of their faith. God expects us to be faithful to Him if we are challenged, just as He will be faithful to us.

As we've gone through each of the beatitudes, I couldn't help but continue to think of the two great commandments summarized by Love God, and Love each other. I was categorizing the beatitudes into which one of these they fitted with. Whilst some fit into each we need to remember that if we love God, loving each other will flow from this and we will be able to live in accordance with the beatitudes.

The Old Testament reading from Jeremiah and the Psalm today make very clear distinctions between God's ways and human ways.

In the letter from Paul's letter to the Corinthians, we hear of the centrality of the resurrection to our faith.

It is often very difficult for us to understand God's wisdom. Imagine for a minute that Jesus wasn't to come in the first century, but God was going to send his son now in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. If God was going to send someone influential, who could we think of right now that might have great influence in the World. Maybe a Xi Jinping or Joe Biden. In the first century God chose Jesus, a carpenter and he ended up convicted like a criminal and sentenced to death. We don't have the death penalty here in Australia, but how do you think we might react to someone who has just been given a sentence of life imprisonment. I wouldn't think their influence in the world would be that great.

But back to Jesus, his influence in the world has been great, so much so that more people in the world follow Jesus than any other religion. We have to trust in God's Wisdom, even if at times it is difficult for us to understand.

### Example of God's Wisdom

Quite a while ago I read a book by an American Evangelical – Tony Campolo. The title of his book fits our theme of the readings today, so I'd like to share a small story which introduces the book.

Tony is a well known speaker and writer in the US and so he was asked to give a motivational talk at the end of a conference for a company which sold life insurance. During the day all the sales reps had been given very impressive presentations on how to get people in, the latest psychology and methods of convincing people and how to close the deal. Tony was allotted

the last presentation of the day. He was supposed to psych up the sales teams and send them on their way.

His first words to eager participants were “everything you’ve heard today is wrong”. The sales director who organised the conference froze, other directors seemed to be in horror, but Tony went on. “People are not things to be manipulated with the right techniques. They are not dogs. We do not have the right to set them up to respond to the proper stimuli, in order to elicit the proper response.” And he went on to tell them “People are sacred. Each one of them is an infinitely precious person in whom the Eternal God has chosen to make his home. He went on to convince them that if they had a good product to sell, and they did, then they should market it honestly and try to help people. To summarise he convinced them that the manipulative high pressure approach was not the right way to go if they really wanted to help people and fell proud of themselves after a day’s work. And by the way, the title of the book is “Everything you’ve heard is wrong.”

To me this is a good example of trying to use God’s wisdom over the wisdom of the world.

### Conclusion

Today we’ve looked at God’s Wisdom. We’ve looked at how it should challenge us. I’d like to finish today with the final verse we heard in the reading from Jeremiah today. I hope it will help us think of how we might refer to God’s Wisdom in our lives.

“I the Lord test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings.”