

# Trinity 4 - Beatitudes 4

## 24/06/18 11:15 St Margaret Mapledurham

So we turn to week 4 of our sermon series on the Beatitudes. We have thought about how the phrase "Blessed" might mean being filled with God's joy. We have thought of the poor in spirit and the mourning being blessed by God. Now we turn to: "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth".

After writing a pamphlet called "Cower Power," a Christian humorist named J. Upton Dickson, joked that he was thinking about founding a society called the "Dependent Order of Really Meek and Timid Souls" (or DOORMATS for short). The society would adopt a yellow caution light as their logo and their motto would be, "The meek shall inherit the earth...if that's okay with everybody else." Of course, the society never got off the ground.... apparently someone objected!

How often we interpret meekness to mean weakness or timidity. Therefore this is a beatitude that sounds backward to our ears because meekness is not a virtue to be cultivated. Nor would we think the meek would be entitled to anything, much less the whole earth. No, in today's world it would seem we live by a different kind of code, one that says something like, "happy are those that push their way to the top, for they can get what they want." We live in a culture which admires assertiveness, wants to acquire power and prestige, and will do so no matter what the cost and who gets hurt in the process.

So I want us to think again about what meekness might be, and what Jesus is saying about how those who are meek will be filled with God's joy (blessed).

If meekness is not to be translated as weakness, or lack of spine, confidence or any other negative attribute, what is it? We can turn to our first reading from Psalm 37 to find some clues. "Do not fret", "Do not be envious", "Trust in the Lord", "Do good", "Commit your ways to the Lord", "Be still before the Lord", "Wait patiently before the Lord". Those are some of the Psalmist's words. He ends these descriptions saying "the meek shall inherit the land". So perhaps meekness involves the qualities of patience, lack of pride, focus on ourselves not others, and trusting in God. "Blessed are those without pride, those who know their need of others and of God" might be a good translation of this saying of Jesus.

Now most of us will perhaps realise that we struggle with that list of qualities the Psalmist describes. We are people who fret, or envy, or aren't always good, or who find it difficult to trust. So Jesus is trying to provide his disciples with some encouragement to discover these qualities. To be followers of his they need to be people who wait on God, who are patient for God, and who most of all hand their burdens over to God in trust.

But secondly, I want us to think about the promise of Jesus to the meek. "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth". That is a strange saying "inherit the earth". In the Greek it probably says "inherit the land". And therein might lay a clue to what Jesus is describing. For whenever we read in the bible about "the land" we must always consider that it is the "promised land" that is being described. In our Old Testament we read of the promise of God to always favour his people Israel, and to provide them with a land of their own. That understanding of God's promise has fuelled the Jewish people for Millennia, and lies at the heart of the Palestinian/Israel conflict today. Whose land is it?

But that present day conflict allows us a way into what Jesus is talking about. For inheritance of the land, it seems according to Jesus, only comes to the meek, and not the powerful or aggressive. It is to those who willingly put others first, or who trustfully wait, or who are patient (even to the point of breaking), who will inherit what God promises. In a world when pursuing my own agenda to gain my own reward seems the creed of our time, how counter cultural Jesus' words seem.

But finally, Jesus might be being even more challenging to his first disciples and to us. For the history of Judaism was that every Jew was entitled to their patch of land - it was their living and security. Jewish law said that no family could hold this land in perpetuity - every 50 years there was Jubilee when all land was handed back and reassigned. But the problem was that Judaism didn't follow this law, and land ended up in the hands of the rich and powerful, including the religious authorities. Every generation in history it seems has seen the land focussed in the control and ownership of the few. In our day, the number of the mega-rich is growing, whilst the gap between rich and poor widens. Jesus is saying that those who are the landless, oppressed can believe trust in what God has promised, for theirs will be the land in the reign of God.

Jesus is saying in this beatitude, "Filled with God's joy are those who trust in God to fulfil their needs, for they will receive what God has always promised them".