

## **St John's All Age Worship 10<sup>th</sup> June 2018**

(Talk follows enactment of Luke 7:36-50, Jesus, Simon, sinful woman and Narrator pre-cast, other dinner guests are volunteers from congregation on the day.)

Talk

We're in week 2 of a series on the Beatitudes – the verses in Matthew 5 at the beginning of what has become known as the sermon on the mount.

Last week we heard how Jesus saw the crowds coming after him he moved away, up a hillside, taking his disciples with him, and he sat down to teach them. Anthony encouraged us take time over these next few weeks to really sit with Jesus, and with these words he spoke, and I think Anthony suggested that we might even get excited about them - as excited about Jesus as his son Josh was excited about his new bedroom carpet!

These next few weeks really matter to us as a parish, and as a congregation here at St John's. We are road testing a new Parish Vision Statement – “Becoming a Christlike Community” – and these words of Jesus will inform what that might mean for us. They will challenge us. Each week in the news sheet there will be three questions for us to ponder both individually and as a church.

Who are the people groups Jesus mentions, in his day and in OUR community today?

How would Jesus respond to them?

How does that challenge us as his church today?

And my prayer is that the sermons and talks we hear over the next few weeks won't just go in one ear and out of the other, but they will really challenge us, cause us to think deeply about how we live for Jesus, and ACT DIFFERENTLY as a result.

So are you up for that challenge?

PRAY

Matthew 5:3

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Who are the poor in spirit? What does it mean to be 'poor in spirit'? When we have used this passage for 'dwelling in the word', that's the question everyone has been asking. Who did Jesus have in mind?

We noticed last week that this passage echoes the verses in Isaiah 61, words of hope spoken to people who had been taken into exile, people whose land and homes had been devastated, people who had lost everything, people who were afflicted and oppressed, powerless and without hope – people who were desperate. Think of Syrian refugees. Think of people in Guatemala whose homes have been devastated by the volcano. Their physical poverty was intensified by a poverty of spirit.

But Isaiah said these people would be delivered from the chains that bound them:

“The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,  
because the LORD has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim freedom for the captives  
and release from darkness for the prisoners,  
<sup>2</sup> to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour  
and the day of vengeance of our God,  
to comfort all who mourn,  
<sup>3</sup> and provide for those who grieve in Zion—  
to bestow on them a crown of beauty  
instead of ashes,  
the oil of joy  
instead of mourning,  
and a garment of praise  
instead of a spirit of despair.  
They will be called oaks of righteousness,  
a planting of the LORD  
for the display of his splendour.”

God hadn't abandoned them. He was on their side.

And that's what Jesus is saying here.

The kingdom of heaven is for the poor in spirit. God is for them. His heart breaks for them.

And that's what Jesus demonstrates all through the gospels. Who were the poor in spirit in his day? Well, usually the ones who had been rejected by the religious authorities as being 'unclean' 'sinners' and 'unfit to be part of the worshipping community'. Lepers, people with disabilities, people who had collaborated with the Romans, like tax collectors. Women who bled. People with no status. People who had broken moral laws. Spiritual rejects.

Just like the woman in our story today.

A woman – low status for a start.

And a sinful, immoral woman. Pharisees saw someone like her as unclean, and if she were to touch them she would make them unclean. She was someone to avoid.

But not to Jesus. I think she must have encountered him before. I think she knew he accepted and loved her. I think she knew her own sin, yet he offered her love and forgiveness. Her actions in this story are her response to his unconditional love and mercy and grace. She has been forgiven much, and she knows it, and she is grateful. Her response is one of humility and adoration – worship even.

Simon on the other hand, doesn't think he needs forgiveness. He has a high status in his society. People look up to him. He thinks he IS righteous, clean, good. He shows Jesus no welcome, no grace, he doesn't meet even the normal standards of courtesy for his culture. He hasn't been shown mercy, because he doesn't think he needs it. So he shows no love to Jesus, or to God.

So coming back to our Beatitude:

Which of these two is poor in spirit?

The woman. She has no arrogance, no self-righteousness, no self-sufficiency. She knows both her sin and her Saviour.

Do we?

Do we know there is nothing we can do to earn God's love, or to earn a place in his kingdom? It's all grace. It all depends on him – his love, his welcome, his dying for us.

Someone once said the only thing we contribute to our own salvation is the sin from which we need to be saved.

I was once asked 'How does one become a Christian?'

And I responded, "On one's knees!"

So here are some questions for us in response to this:

**Who are the poor in spirit in our community?** In Caversham? (Write answers on post-it notes and children collect them and bring them to the front – we'll use them in our prayer time, so please make them legible if possible!)

**How do you think Jesus would respond to them?**

**How does that challenge us?** (As individuals? As His church?)

**Scenarios (discuss in twos/threes)**

a. A woman comes to St John's on a Sunday morning. She has been sleeping rough. She doesn't want to say very much about herself. She comes to the service and people welcome her. She has tea and refreshments after the service, and stays in the churchyard through the day. Later in the evening she knocks at vicarage door and says she has nowhere to stay and is clearly frightened. It's not raining, but a thunderstorm is forecast. All the charities that help homeless people are closed till Tuesday.

How should the church (not just the priest) respond?

b. A young single mum phones the church to enquire about getting her baby daughter christened. When the priest visits, she says she doesn't really have a strong belief on God as so many things have gone wrong in her life, but she wants the best for their baby and if anything happened to her and she hadn't had her done she would never forgive herself. She is very nervous about coming to church and worried about what she should wear, what it will cost, and what people will think of her.

How should the church (not just the priest) respond?

Get feedback

Pray.