

THE WAY FORWARD

Revelation 7. 9-17

1 John 3. 1-3

Matthew 5. 1-12

I speak to you in the name of  the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Throughout our world, in the Church and in our homes a common question is being asked. People want to know if the waters of life are navigable and, if so, how. People are looking for a way to deal with the challenges, the uncertainties and the difficulties of life. We want some assurance that the direction of our life will offer meaning and connect us to something larger than our individual stories. So how do we move forward? What are we to teach and tell our children and grandchildren? These are the age-old questions, asked by every generation.

More often than not, our attempts to navigate life do not make the news. Regardless of whether they are personal struggles or family matters, however, they are just as real, and of no less concern to God. Each of us could tell stories about the questions we face, the challenges we confront and the difficulties we must overcome. Sometimes we seem to succeed; and at other times we don't.

Most of us have been taught to navigate the waters of life through power, strength, accomplishment and acquisition. We seek power so that we can take what we want. We work to be rich so that we can have what we want. We compete to win so that we will be respected and admired. We want to be beautiful or handsome so that we will be liked and desired. Any of that sound familiar? Ever tried those ways of getting through life?

Those attitudes fill the headline news, magazine articles, tabloid pictures, television and our own lives. They find their origin in the idea that we are to be self-made men

and women, that we are to build up ourselves and make a life for ourselves. After all, we must look out for number one because if we don't, no one will. At least that is what many of us have been told. For too long that has been the myth with which we have lived. However, our Lord's life and teaching fly in the face of that myth. Jesus offers a different way of navigating life.

The waters of life, he says, are navigable. But power, strength, accomplishment and acquisition are not going to be of any help to us. The way forward is not the way we've always done it. It is not enough for us, as believers and followers of Christ, to simply make over a little piece of our world or life. It is not enough to just reform a political or economic system. Navigating life is not about overcoming circumstances or other people; it is about overcoming *ourselves*.

If we want to know what overcoming ourselves looks like, then look at the Beatitudes.

Blessed are the poor in spirit.

Blessed are those who mourn.

Blessed are the meek.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Blessed are the merciful.

Blessed are the pure in heart.

Blessed are the peacemakers.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness's sake.

That is how we navigate life. That is how we meet the challenges, the uncertainties and the difficulties of life. That is what we are to teach our children and grandchildren. A lifetime of living the Beatitudes day after day, year after year, is how we overcome ourselves.

The Beatitudes are not simply our Lord's helpful hints for happy living. They are not the church's version of 'Hints from Heloise'. They are descriptive of God's mind and of Jesus's heart. They are kingdom values and reveal what kingdom life is like. They shape and form our lives and longings to be like God's life and longings. Now *that* is a very different approach. Most of the time, we twist and distort God's life and longings to fit ours. And that is why the Beatitudes are so radical and often seem so out of reach.

As we hear Christ's words and consider the Beatitudes it is easy to look at ourselves and say, 'That is not me, that is not the world, that is not even the Church.' You are right, it's not. We tend to look at what we are not. God, however, focuses on what we can become, and who we are called to be.

The temptation is to think that the Beatitudes are rules or conditions for being blessed or receiving our heavenly reward. But they are not that at all. They are not about building up, accomplishing or acquiring. They are about letting go, surrendering and living with a vulnerable and open heart. That does not mean that we run away, back down, or isolate ourselves from the realities of our life and world. It means that we engage with them in a different way, our Lord's way. The Beatitudes teach us to trust God more than the external circumstances of our lives. They invite dependence on God rather than self-reliance.

In today's world, that sounds a lot like weakness and foolishness. That's what it sounds like in every age. But to those who are being saved it is the power of God. God chose what is foolish to shame the wise and what is weak to shame the strong. The Beatitudes are nothing less than the way of the cross. The fullest expression of a 'Beatitudinal life' is seen in Jesus's crucifixion. If we live the Beatitudes, they will take us to the cross.

In the trauma and setbacks of life, we discover that we cannot do life by ourselves. As we admit our need of God, we find purity of heart. The arrogance of self-sufficiency gives way to meekness. We realise that all that we are and have is from God, and we begin to know ourselves as poor in spirit. Our own misfortunes awaken and connect us to the pain of the world for which we cannot help but mourn. We think less about ourselves and become merciful to others. We have nowhere else to go; and so we turn our gaze back to God. The longer we gaze at God, the more we hunger and thirst for righteousness, for God's life, and then we become peacemakers reconciling ourselves to God and to our neighbour. This is the life for which Christ's disciples are willing to be persecuted, a life of righteousness, the life for which Christ died and rose again.

The Beatitudes are not so much about what we do and what our actions are; rather they are more about how we do, and our very way of being. They are less about actions and more about relationships. To live the Beatitudes is to live a life of reckless, exuberant, self-abandonment to God and to our neighbour. That's called love. The only reason we can do that is because we know and trust ourselves to have already been blessed by God. We live the Beatitudes *as a response to God blessing us*. That is the way of Jesus. That is not only the way forward *through* this life; it is the way *to* life. If we are to follow him, it must become our way.

Amen.