

## Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> January 2023

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God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.

God is ever present, around us and within us, we worship together in God.

Story            The Magic Paintbrush by Julia Donaldson

[Watch here](#)

Readings        Micah 6:1-8

Matthew 5:1-9 ([The Message](#))

### Reflection

All the doctrines of the church are as rituals in the light of this passage from Micah. Some churches seem to want to make it difficult for people to be Christians, demanding they sign up to a statement of belief that is often out of date, irrelevant and seemingly designed to exclude. Here we have the prophet Micah sharing his belief that God has done amazing things for his people and still all they do is offer ritualistic practices as in the days when God was not understood as a personal God. Verse 8 is perhaps Micah's most famous saying – God has told you what is good and what would delight him, do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God.

'Do justice' invites us to make justice the focus of our actions. Everything that we do should be just but more than that we should also challenge injustice, challenge systems and principles that oppress, discriminate and unfairly deny people opportunities.

'Love kindness' reminds us that it is not enough to be loving, we are to be passionate about love and encourage kindness as an expression of love in the world. We are to be kindness. What does it mean to be kind? The dictionary defines kind as friendly, generous, considerate; Jesus was friendly approaching those that society cast aside, inviting people to join him in table fellowship; Jesus encourage generosity, a sharing of what we have with others as he had shared; and the way of Jesus is all about being considerate, considering the needs of others, considering the decisions which are unfair and challenging injustice.

'Walk humbly' we are not to be pious, to think ourselves better than others, not to be arrogant or judgemental but simply live as one with all creation in an acknowledged partnership with God, the source of all being. This will mean wanting the best for others even when it means having less ourselves. Walking the way of Jesus, seeking out and caring for those who need help and bringing communities into interdependence where all are valued and all are recognised for what they offer to the Kingdom.

In our story Shen receives a gift of great significance, it could have made her wealthy but she hears the wisdom that comes with the gift and uses it for the benefit of the community to ensure that all have enough to eat. We see the opposite in the actions of the Emperor. We all have gifts and skills but how do we use them? If we are praised for using our gifts how do we respond. Paul, in the letter to the Corinthians says we are not to boast in the presence of God, although at times he demonstrates the opposite but he is human. If we recognise that our gifts and skills are part of the creative order which we understand as God then we will recognise that how we use them should be for the benefit of others and we should not make personal profit from those gifts. We can use gifts and skills to provide for our needs but not to amass personal wealth. We also need to recognise that all gifts are equal and different gifts should not create a hierarchy within society.

In our reading from Matthew we have one version of what are known as the Beatitudes or Blessings. Luke also gives us a similar summary of the teaching of Jesus but with a different emphasis.

Matthew undoubtedly had a purpose for including this passage and we should remember that there is nothing similar in Mark which was written earlier or John, a more reflective telling of the Jesus

story. The version we heard today from the Message has a different interpretation from other translations and gives a different slant of what this passage may mean.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. There have been many ways at looking at this and often it is seen as referring to non Christians or those on the edge but The Message is more general reminding us that being too independent often reduces our awareness of God. When we are struggling with something and feeling vulnerable then often in that moment we are more aware of God, as our independence reduces our relationship with God increases.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Can there be a blessing in loss? The message suggests that whilst loss is terrible, in that time of loss we can be more aware of the love of others, and the presence of God around us.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Meek is a strange word often understood as weak but the message brings out another side, contentment or maybe humility. In being content in your skin we recognise the treasures we have that cannot be bought.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Righteousness is another difficult word which often conjures up a picture of the do-gooder. However it can also be understood as right with God. When we are connected with God we always want to know more, to go deeper, we have an appetite for building our relationship with God.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Mercy is forgiveness but it is also about love and care and we are called to be lovers of kindness. When we care enough to get involved, when we care enough to share our lives then we find it is not one way, and in our loving we are loved.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Do any of us really feel pure in heart? Possibly not and yet I hope there are times when we sometimes catch a glimpse of the person inside, the one who really does seek to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God. The more we consciously relate to God the more glimpses we get and as the Message says when your inside world, your heart and mind, is put right then you see more of God in the outside world.

<sup>9</sup>“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. What does it mean to be a peacemaker? It is very different from someone who is a peace keeper, they are maintain a peace already achieved. However, sometimes peacekeeping becomes another word for compromise, it is almost interpreted as a sign of weakness. Peace-making is about showing people how to cooperate instead of competing or fighting and it can apply in so many situations. The message suggests there is a real blessing in giving of ourselves to make peace in a situation for at that moment we are more aware of our own identity and our sense of belonging within something much bigger.

If the ten words of wisdom, the ten commandments, are a road map for community living then the Beatitudes are a road map for growing in God. One way of looking at the Ten words of wisdom is as a check list for progress, we check and find there are things we no longer do that have caused others or ourselves hurt. Love is growing. The same can be done with the Beatitudes at a personal level. As we live the Jesus Way and follow the Micah code of life we find ourselves growing closer to God and we can see this in another expression of the Beatitudes, one which uses quantum theology to express them.

Closer to God are:

- Those who do not see themselves as special but as one with creation and creator.
- Those who have lost, for in sorrow we find ourselves loved.
- Those who are not afraid to serve, for in serving others we find ourselves.
- Those who seek to know God more deeply and recognise their need of God, for in such is the path to wholeness.
- Those who show kindness and love, for in that they find oneness.
- Those who seek to hurt no-one but only love, for that is the way of Jesus.

- Those whose actions challenge the separation of structures and build bridges, for that is the way of the kingdom.
- Those who find themselves despised by the unknowing because their words and actions threaten the power systems of separation, for they will know God's strength and love in their faithfulness.

Rejoice and be glad if you see yourself here for you are on the path to oneness and the true knowledge of God. You are walking the way of Jesus.