**ALL SAINTS Matthew 5. 1-10 Ascension 4.11.2018**

The type of behaviour, standards and values which Jesus advocates to live lives of holiness, are the very opposite espoused by the me-first society. In his upside-down image, Jesus shows us how to look upon such blessedly-happy people with new eyes. *The Beatitudes* are self-help blessings, they are the inner joy and peace that comes from being right with God. If you practise them often enough, you will be blessed, fortunate and lucky, and the Beatitudes will become the Be-happy- attitudes.

Jesus borrowed his regard for the powerless *poor in* *spirit* from Isaiah, who deplored how the lands and possessions were ripped from the Chosen People, being driven into exile as powerless people without hope. In Jesus’ day, these same people had little earthly power or possessions and even less hope. They had nothing in their hands or hearts to bargain with, or compel God to help, yet they fully depended on God. They bring their heart-breaking poverty, hoping for a Godly glance that might promise sustenance. They bring their brokenness, hoping for mending. They bring their illness, hoping for healing. There is no arrogance in them, no self-righteousness, no self-centredness, and they are utterly freed from any pretension. The world shouts “Blessed are those who live it up.” No, the poor in spirit find their riches by casting themselves wholly reliant on their trustful God as their only hope.

With *those who mourn*, again Jesus remembered the returning Old Testament exiles, who mourned the devastation of their Jerusalem, ruined by tyrannical powers. The suffering ones were innocent of anything that would bring about their misfortune. They mourned the sinful stubbornness of an earlier generation, who had brought about the destruction. Perhaps our parents mourned the misguided hopes of the pre-World War11 appeasers, who gave the enemy more time to arm. Today, we weep deluges of tears mourning our beautiful world that lies broken and bleeding, where yesterday’s men, now climate change deniers blow hard, who continue to deplete the ozone layer, who permit coral bleaching, and species extinction. “They will be comforted,” if we are deeply moved by their affliction, and open our hearts to their haunting grief, to share their burdens and sorrows with acts of understanding love, we will help bring the kingdom come when God will make all things right.

In the centuries before Jesus’ coming, *the gentle-meek* lost their lands to the wicked, thus, Jesus quoted Psalm 37 asking them to *“trust God and to do good, and you will inherit the land.”* Meekness is not spineless submission; it is a great strength, an active, effective, doing virtue. There are many vital tasks that only gentleness can accomplish. Jesus had every instinct, every passion, under self-control, which meant God’s control. But, he could also be quite brusque for the right reason, such as championing the oppressed against the Temple money changers, standing strongly with the little ones against the manipulative scheming of the Pharisees, forcefully lashing them with his tongue to uphold justice, those who held the view “Blessed are they who hunger for power, status and fame.” No, he promised the meek would inherit from God only what was right, a new earth and the new heaven.

At next Tuesday’s Cup, the giddy and frivolous big spenders inanely chattering in the Birdcage marquees, will have little understanding of the *hunger and thirst for righteousness* of the people of Yemen or the suffering Rohingya displaced from Myanmar. In the Christian Scriptures, the widow of Nain would have died without her dead son’s help, just as Elijah would have died without an angel of mercy bringing food in the Hebrew Scriptures. The world cries “Blessed are they who show no mercy and take no prisoners.” No! Jesus enlarged the numbers of those who hungered and thirsted to all, who sought goodness, personal holiness, and, who quested to live in right relationship. His promise was that their dreams would come true and their life be no longer left empty.

Another Beatitude is *“Blessed are the merciful.”* Mercy received usually depends on mercy given, but our jump-starting Jesus showed the way, the mercy cycle, by loving us when we were loveless, when we were incapable of forgiving. Now, we are sent into the world to keep mercy alive. But our great and powerful friends across the seas failed to do this in the aftermath of 9:11, and, so changed the world for the worse. Instead of seeking to understand and feel Muslim pain to relieve it, Western Leaders became vindictively vengeful. “We’re comin’ after you” drawled the leader, “We’ll smoke you out of your holes and get you running. We will visit infinite justice on you.” At the mention of one of Allah’s ninety-nine sacred names, “infinite,” Muslims, world-wide winced, as they wince now the possible removal of the Israeli embassy to the Arab-Jewish holy city, which they believe Mohammed gave to them. “Only Allah is infinite,” they despair, “Who does this great Satan think he is?” Had the White House never heard Mandela warn “An eye for an eye, and an eye for an eye, and the whole world goes blind.”

*“Blessed are the pure in heart.”* Once again, Jesus knew Psalm 24: *“Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, will stand in the Lord’s holy place.”* It seems Heaven offers nothing that a mercenary soul desires. The world concentrates its puny efforts for happiness on external appearance. You must have “Colgate’s Ring of Confidence,” “No crows’ feet with L’Oreal” gunk, “Let Berlei belittle your Beam,” and, for the lucky ones with hair, “Brylcream, a little dab’ll do ya.”

Jesus maintained a clean conscience was always better than clean fingernails. If the heart is clean, all that flows from it is clean, just like water bubbling and lilting and sparkling from an unpolluted spring. The pure heart’s every thought, word, and deed flows from a blessedly clean inside, from a heart, unadulterated, unalloyed, devoted completely to God. Jesus’ promise is, the pure in heart will see God, because they truly want to.

“*Blessed are the peacemakers*” are those who strive to get troublesome parties to listen and listen and listen again and then to talk to one another with understanding and respect, to “Jaw, Jaw, not War, War.” Peacemakers try to reconcile disruptive relationships with understanding in every sphere of life, to make this world a more just society in which to live. In seeking to avoid confrontation, the appeasers of WW11 merely whetted Hitler’s wolfish appetite. Martin Luther King, Junior, was no trouble-maker, but a peace maker, who sought integration by justifiable confrontation when the huge evil lay in segregation.

Finally, *“Blessed are the persecuted.”* Old Testament prophets were ridiculed, slandered and slain. Early Church Christians were flogged, stoned and killed as heretics, who angered the pagan gods. For eating the body of Jesus in Communion they became cannibals and for exchanging the kiss of peace, they were immoral. Our commitment to the cause of Jesus is bound to bring insult, because we belong to a kingdom that is not of this world.

Does this explain the surprising hatred of religion which has not abated with the present leakage of souls from church attendance? We true followers of the Lord’s upside-down beliefs must continue to make a constant stand for what is right, and must show a confident contentment, a fadeless radiant gladness, which our persecutors wish they had, but do not have.

On this festival of All Saints, we pray, *“A glorious band, the chosen few, on whom the Spirit came. All valiant saints, their hope they knew, and mocked the cross and flame. They met the tyrant’s brandished steel, the lion’s gory mane. O God, to us, may grace be given, to follow in their train.”* Amen.