

Compassion and Justice. Epiphany 4 2026 All Souls' dtw

Micah 6.8 ...what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

The values of the Kingdom are upside down! The Beatitudes are a scandal in the face of this world's quest for power, influence, control. It is said that Mahatma Ghandi, a Hindu, read the Beatitudes nearly every night. He was seriously into liberation of the poor and oppressed and non-violence, and got into a lot of trouble about it, leading to his assassination. I would love to see world leaders today lining up at a summit and saying them out loud before beginning their negotiations. They could completely shake and utterly reshape world politics and the way nations deal with each other, for the edification of all humankind and the glory of our common Creator. The beautiful thing about the beatitudes is that they're not a religious doctrine, they're a prescription for authentic human living.

Jesus, whom Ghandi richly admired, did not stand detached from people as he delivered the good news of the reign of God to human hearts; in his very person he enfolded God's reign in mercy, compassion, humility and service. I have quoted the Quaker and profound Author, Richard Foster before from his book, *Money, Sex and Power*, who wrote, 'the spiritual authority of which Jesus spoke was an authority not found in a position or a title but in a towel'. With this towel Jesus wiped the feet of his disciples, in love. With this towel his disciples would acquire a new understanding of obedience and a very different way of leadership. In many of his parables, Jesus would hit this home in profound and often disturbing fashion. And today he begins his Sermon on the Mount with his Beatitudes – more 'upside down values' to live by. Or *Be-Attitudes!* (cf *attitude indicator in a plane cockpit - relative to the horizon – 'attitude is the way you lean'*)

Just look at those who are blessed in Jesus' world: the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those hungry and thirsty for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, the persecuted for what is right...Elsewhere, in Luke's equivalent, we also get the 'woes' from Jesus, woes over the rich and powerful, those so full of themselves they wouldn't recognize justice if they bumped into it, those who are laughing now, those on a self-satisfied ego trip. (Lk 6) Masters of work and rules are often quite judgmental and unforgiving people, because they are usually perfectionists and purists, and have high expectations of others. Jesus often came up against such people in positions of leadership and power in his day. He noted how they lorded themselves over people to make their authority felt. He also noted that room for kindness and mercy was highly restricted in their attitude to others. He was condemned for the kind of company he himself kept. He was simply staggered by the heavy burdens the ordinary person was meant to carry in the observance of all the law, while often missing out on an even break in life. Witness his scathing attack in Mt 23 where he says to the authorities, "You tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others. You blind

guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel!" I mentioned this text in relation to our last Diocesan Synod a few months ago, and a church in danger of losing its soul.

You see, I believe that one reason the 10 Commandments aren't recited regularly anymore in church is that, sadly, they can have the opposite effect upon the hearer from that which is intended. Jesus knew that too. He knew that we can get all smug and satisfied as we honour them with our lips and tick them off to our self-righteous content. But Jesus wants to say that it's no good feeling content just because we haven't sworn, or stolen or had a casual affair or murdered anyone lately. That is no big deal; that is our duty. But what about that foul temper or the person down the road who hasn't had a visit in months? - the single mother with 3 kids under 4 who is going round the twist next door or the family who have lost everything thanks to dad's affair - not with a woman, but with pokies. No rule or regulation will necessarily make us do anything about that. But maybe a higher law? The Law of Love? Consequently, our daily self-examination as Christians needs to go to quite a different level. Remember our General Confession includes "what we have failed to do". I personally, am much more worried about the serious sins of omission in my life, than about what I have committed as bad as they indeed are. How about you?

Even with the well-known parable of the so called "Good Samaritan", most people don't get the radical, indeed scandalous thrust of the love-in-action which is vividly displayed by the Samaritan in contrast to the religious and law-abiding Priest and Levite. Samaritans were enemies of Jews. This man was *loving his enemy*, not just going the extra mile. This man was truly a *neighbour* in the most amazing and vulnerable sense of the word. This man, even of a different religion and culture, displayed the upside-down values of the Kingdom of God. This man was living the Beatitudes in a most radical and self-emptying way. Jesus said "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." I don't know about you, but those words just sooth and envelope me as a human being. They also inspire in me compassion to comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable.

Ludulfus of Saxonia in the 14th century penned some beautiful words about the compassionate-servant-justice love of Jesus. He wrote:

Always and everywhere have Christ devoutly before the eyes of your mind, in His behaviour and in His ways; as He is with His disciples and when He is with sinners; when He speaks and when He preached; when He eats and when He serves others...How humbly He bore Himself among us, how tenderly among His disciples, how pitiful he was to the poor, to whom He made Himself like in all things; how patient under insult how gentle in answering, for He sought not to maintain His cause by keen and bitter words, but with gentle and humble answer to cure another's malice...How compassionate He was to the afflicted...how ready in serving all, according to His own words, "I am among you as one who serves"...how He shunned all display...how earnest in prayer, how sober in His watching, how patient in toil and in want...