

Do not be like them

Passage: Matthew 5:1-12

**Lectionary occasion:
any time.**

Dear Reader,
Thank you for choosing my service
I ask you please to leave the sermon and readings as
they are.
The hymns should be OK but all but the first one can be
changed if necessary.
The prayers will get dated - if you can do your own that
would be good.

God bless you.

Do not be like them

We come together in the Name of Jesus, who was truly God, yet who came to Earth to show us what it is to be truly human. Let's praise Him as we sing:

Hymn: 253 All praise to Thee (tune 814)

Prayer

O God, great & wonderful, to you alone belong glory & honour & power.

You made the whole universe, everything within it, all that lives & breathes.

In Jesus Christ, your Son, you have shown us what a human life should be like, & called us to follow in his way.

We come to worship & to praise you, acknowledging that without you we are only half alive, & thanking you for the meaning you give to our lives.

To you, our holy & loving God, be glory, honour & power, in our worship, in our lives, in your church & in the world, now & for ever. **Amen.**

Confession :

Lord, you have turned our values upside down, & we find it hard to take.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, you said:

but we like to think we are self-sufficient.

Blessed are the sorrowful, you said;

but we turn away from sharing the pain of others.

Blessed are the gentle, you said:

but we like to get our own way.

Blessed are those who hunger & thirst for righteousness, you said;

but we can't be bothered with things like justice.

Blessed are those who show mercy, you said;

but we believe in getting our revenge.

Blessed are the pure in heart, you said;

but we fill our lives with all kinds of distractions.

Blessed are the peacemakers, you said;

but we find peacemaking difficult & leave it to others.

Blessed are those who are persecuted in the cause of right, you said;

but we prefer not to get involved.

Forgive us, Lord, that we like to take comfort from our Christian faith, but too often ignore the challenges it brings us. By your power set us free from our failures & help your kingdom grow in our hearts & lives. **Amen.**

Hymn: 776 Make me a channel

Intercessions:

God of the poor in spirit, we pray for those who are so desperately poor, that it consumes their being, so that they are denied the ability to move, think or speak of anything but their hunger and thirst.

The kingdom of heaven will be theirs.

God of those who mourn, We pray for those who grieve for the loss of loved ones. For those who have lost, wives, sons, fathers mothers in the many wars, around the world, wars they did not start & do not want.

They will be comforted.

God of the meek, we pray for those who have no land on which to plant & provide, whose homes have been destroyed by war, & whose land has been ruined by chemicals. They will inherit the earth.

God of the just, we pray for all who struggle to obtain justice for the underprivileged & the oppressed, who challenge the status quo & work for those who cannot speak for themselves.

They will be more than satisfied.

God of the merciful, we give thanks for the many people who can show mercy & forgiveness, who break the cycle of tit for tat.

They will receive mercy.

God of the pure in heart, we give thanks for the many people who see the best in all situations, & people, & who are true to themselves,

They will see God.

God of the peacemakers, we pray for all who work for peace, not just an end to war & disharmony, who strive to create peace with justice, often in situations of extreme personal danger.

They will be called children of God.

God of the persecuted, we pray for all those who are victimised for their beliefs whatever their faith, for those who languish in jail or who are denied education or employment, who are estranged from family & friends because of the choices they have made to hold fast to their faith.

The kingdom of heaven will be theirs.

Matthew 5:1-12

1 Corinthians 1:18 - 31

Hymn: 748 Teach me O Lord, thy holy way

Sermon

In Acts 17 v 6 some Christians in Thessalonica are accused of **Turning the world upside down**. They were proclaiming the kingship of Jesus, & living in such a way that made them stand out & get noticed. No, I don't expect they'd dyed their hair purple or wore outrageous clothes & I'm pretty sure they didn't keep the neighbours awake all night with loud, drunken parties. It's more likely that the neighbours had the parties.

The behaviour of the Christians was different, it was radical, it set them apart from the behaviour of those around them.

And that is just as it should be when Christians take seriously the teaching of Jesus, especially as He spells it out in what we call The Sermon on the Mount, Matthew chapters 5-7.

Here we have a body of teaching for those who follow Jesus: it is not general teaching for every man & his wife, but for those who belong to the Kingdom of God, who have committed themselves to Him. In every single section of it Jesus is setting out a standard of behaviour for them & contrasting it with that of others. **It is said...but I say. When you fast, pray, give alms...don't be like the hypocrites, the Pharisees, the pagans.**

Perhaps the whole of Jesus' teaching here can be summed up in the words of Matthew 6 verse 8.

Do not be like them.

Is that the picture of the church in our land today? Could we be accused of turning the world upside down? It seems to me that it's more often a case of bending over backwards to be as much like the world as we can. Just look at the obvious examples of how the Meth Church has relaxed its position on gambling, alcohol and same sex marriage in recent years.

Human wisdom says; Let's be as like everyone else as possible.

Divine wisdom, from the mouth of Jesus says; Do not be like them.

Dare to be different.

But we must be very clear about HOW we are to be different, for the easiest of all traps to fall into here is the trap of pride, arrogance & self-righteousness.

This is where it is so very, very important to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.

This is why we need to hear Paul's message about the foolishness of the cross, how God showed his power **through Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews & foolishness to Gentiles**. I mean, would you ever have expected God Almighty, the

Creator of all things to work his plan of salvation through a CROSS - the place of criminal execution?? But then, way back in Isaiah, God had said; **My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.**

Jesus' life, his teaching & his death turn the values of the world upside down, or, rather turned the values of the world the right way up!

The world says power, beauty, riches & MY rights.

Jesus says weakness, humility, poverty & YOUR rights. It's the way of true humility & service both towards God & towards others, & in true humility there is of course no room for pride & arrogance.

Our 1st hymn echoed words from Philipians 2, & we sang;

**Let this mind be in us which was in thee,
Who wast a servant that we might be free,
Humbling thyself to death on Calvary.**

And that has to be our prayer, for we cannot behave in the way Jesus demands in our own strength, but only as we allow ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit at work within us. As he teaches us the true values of the kingdom, overturning all our preconceived ideas & leading us in Jesus' footsteps, changing us into his likeness, in our thoughts, words & actions.

I'd like to finish with a true story of someone who seems to sum up the kind of living that Jesus was describing in the beatitudes.

Jean-Marie was hopeless. Even his mother admitted it. He was clumsy, he was slow, he was always bottom of the class. His chances of ever doing anything useful in life seemed very slim.

But there was one thing which marked him out from all the other boys in his village. He was good; really good. He loved the little church, & its services; he went to church because he really wanted to go & had a real, loving relationship with Father God.

Now in many French families, it was common for one of the sons to become a priest.

Jean-Marie would have loved to do that, more than anything, but he found reading even the simplest services quite a challenge. However, the seemingly impossible happened & he was accepted for the priesthood, not because he was clever, but because he was so obviously in close & loving fellowship with his God.

But they could only send him to a tiny little village, where no-one else would go.

Under his care the church there flourished, & many people, young & old, were brought into a living relationship with God.

Some of the other priests around became jealous of his success & circulated a petition demanding his removal. By accident it was sent to him. He never dreamt of destroying the letter, but signed it & sent it on.

God chooses the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chooses the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chooses the lowly things of

this world & the despised things - & the things that are not - to nullify the things that are, so that no-one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God - that is, our righteousness, holiness & redemption.

Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

Hymn: 139 The Kingdom of God.

Ben: Go in the peace of God,
To receive each day as a gift from his hands
To live each day by the values of Jesus,
And to find his Spirit with you in all times & places.
And the blessing of God, Father, Son & Holy Spirit be with you always. **Amen.**