



28 January 2023

Epiphany 4 - Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12)

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Indigenous Elder Professor Uncle Tom Calma AO, public advocate and fighter for social change has been named the 2023 Senior Australian of the Year. He says
“Australians have only ever known a system where Indigenous peoples are treated as problems to be solved, not as partners and active participants in determining their destiny,”
“We must have enduring partnerships so that Indigenous communities can help inform policy and legal decisions that impact their lives and we can recognise the special place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia’s history.”¹

Blessed? It is a matter of perspective.

In her book, *Tender*, Melbourne writer, Julie Perrin tells:

One night a man went to visit his friend who was blind. When he arrived at her house all was in darkness inside and out. He wondered if he'd made a mistake, but he knocked at the front door to be sure. The knock echoed through the house and soon he heard footsteps. The woman who lived there opened the door, heard her friend's voice and warmly welcomed him. She had indeed been expecting him. 'Come in, come inside!' she exclaimed.

The woman who was blind walked back through her entrance hallway.

Her friend stepped forward to follow her but was bewildered in the gloom, stumbling on the hallway mat. The woman heard the stumble and stopped ahead of him. Turning towards him she cried, 'Oh, I am so sorry, I forgot you can see!'

It was a sincere apology and soon the house was ablaze with lights as she remembered to turn them on for her guest.²

I love the reversal in this story, the confidence of the woman who couldn't see and the stumbling of her sighted friend.

Perhaps sight and blindness are more about a point of view or perspective than opposites. 'Who is blessed?' I wonder.

Julie Perrin asks:

'What would it be if we recognised that our perceptions are often more related to where we place ourselves than our own fixed capacities of seeing?'

This leads me back to Jesus teaching we call the beatitudes. Maybe they too are a matter of perspective or point of view.

¹ <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/8062169/senior-australian-of-the-years-voice-myths-and-misinformation-warning/>

² Julie Perrin p22 *Tender, stories that lean into kindness*. Mediacom, 2019

On Tuesday I led an afternoon entitled, '*Contemplation, Creativity, Community*'. As part of the afternoon's activities, we tried *erasure poems*, where we took a text, mostly articles from the day's Canberra Times, but also the beatitudes, and deleted words, scrubbed out words, leaving the nuggets, the essence. I tried it and came up with a different perspective for me.

When I've read the beatitudes in the past I've been struck by the who, Who is blessed? mourners, hungry, meek, persecuted for truth.. that's where I've put my attention, and that's where much of today's reflection has gone, but if you sit with the text, no doubt you'll come up with something else, but here's my exploration. I was left with these words as essential this week:

Blessed
comforted
filled
mercy
see God
children
heaven
Blessed
Rejoice.

Its a bit like *lectio divina*.

My poem focusses on the blessings rather than the blessed, 10 words that's all.

Stefan, on the other hand, highlighted these words:

the poor in spirit,
those who mourn,
the meek,
those who hunger
the merciful
the pure in heart,
the peacemakers
those who are persecuted,
Rejoice and be glad.

He doesn't even mention blessed, but we both kept *rejoice*. I wonder what speaks to you?

Priest and songwriter Simon de Voil has left us with the words we heard sung by our musicians at the beginning of the service. He has a different but similar focus:

Anytime you hunger, ev'ry time in need.

Anytime there's trouble you're in holy company.

Anytime you're hated, ev'ry time you weep.

Anytime rejected you're in holy company.

He suggests that whenever I'm doing it tough, I am not alone, Jesus gets it, God gets it, I'm in *holy company*. That is encouraging.

John Coleman sings: *Ponder, how blessed we are to be mourning. Ponder, how blessed we are to be hungry,... To share Jesus journey, the cradle, the cross and the life..*

These are tough words really. We are blessed to share Jesus journey, blessed or, happy.. It's a matter of perspective.

I used to have a bishop who would ask, "are you happy, very happy?" My reply was, "I don't do happiness, but I am peaceful, content."

The beatitudes, sometimes translated as happy, sometimes blessed.. speak of people who are unexpectedly happy.. what Jesus says is shocking to many. The destitute, the sad, the meek, the merciful, and so on – these are blessed, happy.

How could that be? I really don't get it. When I am mourning, I am deeply sad, but that does not exclude moments of laughter and tenderness and warmth. When I am being given a hard time, I find it hard to be happy.

Blessed because I am enabled to feel closer to God? Because I am sharing Jesus journey? Maybe. But I wouldn't want anyone to go through it just for that. I think, in all that I see on the news this week of death and dying, tragic loss, I don't want anyone to go through that. Yet, we have a lived example of the teachings, in Jesus, who is the embodiment of meekness, a peacemaker, merciful, persecuted for righteousness' sake.

I was talking to someone recently who is in the middle of very tough times after floods, no housing, no job. Can I say to that person you are blessed? We talked for awhile and found some grace even in the middle of tough times. It didn't take away the grief, the mourning, the frustration with authorities and the weather! But he was able to find a place inside himself where he could expand, and find a modicum of peace, allowing him to deal with what he had to deal with.

Anglican Priest, and hymn writer, Elizabeth Smith often sets up a space at fetes and festivals to offer blessings, and people very seldom refuse. She offers a blessing for all occasions.

So, if I were to offer you a blessing, what sort of blessing would you like? Think of the shadow sides of yourself, think of the wounds that desire healing.

Think of the sprouts that are beginning to grow, the new years resolutions, possibly already, stumbling. For what would you like a blessing? What would you like to be strengthened, encouraged, shielded, acknowledged? Jesus says, "blessed are those who mourn.. who are meek.. Those who suffer in the cause of good."

Like Mary's Magnificat, Jesus, blessings, turn the world on its head, pull us up short, make us think again, look at our point of view.

So, when you think of yourself, what needs blessing? What needs to be acknowledged with gratitude?

When you think of our community, our world, what would we like to bless?

Jan Richardson ponders:

'It's challenging at times to reconcile the seeming paradox that giving ourselves to a God of love and mercy does not always protect us from heartache and suffering; in fact, it sometimes does just the opposite. Called to engage the world, we find ourselves drawn more deeply into the pain and despair present there—along with (thank God) the delight. In each

place Christ calls us to notice and to embody the presence and love of God: to be the living body of Christ, who spoke of his own self as food, as sustenance.

Richardson invites:

'may we see clearly who Christ is and embody his fierce and sustaining love in a desperately hungry world'.³

Bruce Prewer suggests that the beatitudes are about God's grace. You don't have to do something to earn this happiness. In truth, it cannot be earned, but just received as a gift from God. Pure gift. Grace.⁴

New Testament scholar Eduard Schweizer says:

There are no conditions to be met before someone can be called blessed.⁵

I conclude with:

"Beatitudes for the Weird" by Jacob Nordby ⁶

Blessed are the weird people

- poets, misfits, writers, mystics heretics, painters troubadours—
for they teach us to see the world through different eyes.

Blessed are those who embrace the intensity of life's pain and pleasure
for they shall be rewarded with uncommon ecstasy.

Blessed are you who see beauty in ugliness,
for you shall transform our vision of how the world might be.

Blessed are the bold and whimsical,
for their imagination shatters ancient boundaries of fear for us all.

Blessed are you who are mocked for unbridled expression
of love in all its forms,
because your kind of crazy is exactly that freedom
for which the world is unconsciously begging.

Blessed are those who have endured breaking by life,
for they are the resplendent cracks through which the light shines.

Blessed are you..

³ <https://paintedprayerbook.com/2009/01/24/hooked/>

⁴ Bruce Prewer: <http://www.bruceprewer.com/DocA/13EPIPH4.htm>

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Jacob Nordby: <https://thoughtsprayersandsongs.com/tag/blessedaretheweird/>