

## Remembrance Sunday

David Fotheringham, 25 October 2020

High Street Uniting Church Frankston

**Bible readings:** Matthew 22: 24-40; Matthew 5: 1-9

*Guide us, O God, by your word and Holy Spirit, that in your light we may see light, in your truth find freedom, and in your will discover our peace; through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Last night we had the unique spectacle of a late October Grand Final, being played in Queensland, dodging around storms. I have to admit that since coming to Victoria I've only been to one AFL match, and that was a Grand Final, and one well worth seeing at that. Grand Final football is the height of what football can be. To win, a team has to hold together, be focused, and be strong. Give or take a rare, tied match one team emerges victorious and celebrating. Maybe they regard themselves as blessed.

Actually, depending on their attitudes, the members of the other team might also recognise themselves as blessed, in having been able to part in this kind of spectacle – and indeed, even in being able to run around on an oval more than 25km from their homes.

In Matthew's gospel, at the beginning of Matthew's gospel, Jesus is welcomed onto the field with all of the pedigree of an Ablett. His family tree is shown off: he's a descendant of the legendary King David, and indeed, his line can be traced all the way to Abraham. John the Baptist introduces him as the powerful one, who will baptise with the Holy Spirit and with fire with his winnowing fork in his hand. Much is expected of this Jesus, who would surely purify the land and restore the nation's might and power.

And then, just to emphasis all of that, one of the first things he does in Matthew's gospel is to go up the mountain, rather like Moses, and then do the Moses-like thing of interpreting God's law, God's call for our living. He begins to teach what God's kingdom is like. And this is how he begins: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

In this, as in all of the beatitudes, he overturns the idea that the immediate winners are the immediately blessed. We're all very familiar with this, because this passage is so familiar now, but it's still worth reflecting on. What Jesus gives, in this teaching, is a reflection which is both a promise and an observation.

It's first of all a promise. And it's a good one for us to remember on a day when we particularly take the time to remember those we love, who have died, because it contains the promise of the kingdom that lies ahead of us. Many elements of the beatitudes are about the promise that lies ahead, so that even the persecuted have the promise of vindication, for which they

can be glad even in the midst of being persecuted. The promise of God's kingdom ahead provides a hope that sustains us.

Within that promise, it's interesting to see the specifics that Jesus names: for the meek, what lies ahead includes inheriting the earth. People are determined to fight over the earth in so many places and ways; but God's promise helps to release us from that kind of fight; Jesus' own living reflects that. For those hungering and thirsting for justice, God promises that they'll be filled, addressing their longing and addressing their concern, which is vindicated. For those who are merciful, God promises to also provide mercy. Those who are peacemakers will be named children of God – which surely says a great deal about the priorities of God. And the pure in heart, those who see what is good, will see God.

In all of this there is that future promise, but it also leads to an observation about the ways we might realise blessing, now, whether we are Grand Final winners or not.

Jesus has various things to say to those who are strong in other parts of the gospel; but he names the poor in spirit, the meek and the mourning as those who are actually aligned with God's kingdom. God's kingdom is less about power and might, and more about vulnerability, openness, and humility. Those who are aware of their vulnerability, and aware that God joins them in that, and holds these promises, actually start to realise the blessing in the present. So the poor in spirit ARE blessed, now.

Opening our lives in vulnerability takes courage, but has the promise of blessing. Being open to God means being open to the God whom Jesus reflects; the God who cares for the poor in spirit. This is the God whom Jesus calls us to love with all our hearts; this is the God for whom showing love involves the ways that we care for those around us, because of God's love for them too.

Shortly, we're going to be spending some time praying for people who are mourning, and ourselves remembering people we love whom we have lost. Among those Jesus lists as being especially blessed by God are those who mourn. And his promise for those who mourn is that they will be comforted. That promise does lie ahead, a comforting that is a part of God's kingdom that for now is beyond fully understanding; but which can still give us comfort now. God recognises our mourning, God knows our weakness. We can bring that openly before God knowing that Jesus understands. This is the Jesus who wept at the tomb of Lazarus, and wept in the garden of Gethsemane; he is also the one who trusts God all the way, is vindicated, and opens the kingdom of heaven for us.

So as we prepare to bring our own mourning before God, as we remember with thanks the sharing of love, and as we prepare to pray for those around us as we share in this time together, I invite you to join in singing this song...