

High St Uniting Church

All the Saints

Matthew 5:1 – 16



When the Good News for Modern Man Bible was released 50 years ago, the translation of the Beatitudes, Jesus opening words for the Sermon on the Mount, caused some controversy. "Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor." And the complaints came in; "We may be blessed, but we aren't happy!" The translators were trying to get away from the idea that these counter-intuitive blessings from Jesus were a job description for the church to proclaim people as saints. They didn't head this passage as The Beatitudes, they called it "True

Happiness". And maybe it's exactly those sort of language changes that are required to bring the Gospel to new generations. But the response from traditional readers indicate that they went a bit too far in choosing the word 'happy' instead of 'blessed'. 'Fortunate' may have been a better choice, it conveys the jarring, attention grabbing, counter-intuitive nature of Jesus words without adding a layer of emotion. Happy leads to the complaint that we aren't happy. Blessed and fortunate lead to questions, exactly the sort of response that Jesus was seeking, "How are we blessed? How are we fortunate?"

The essential truth of this list of seemingly negative life situations is that they are all reversed through the presence of God. The upside-down nature of God's kingdom. The first shall be last, the poor welcomed and rich sent away, sinners welcomed and those who think they are righteous condemned. That is the Gospel! God meets us where we are. God doesn't wait until we are good enough, strong enough, moral enough or any other sort of enough, so that we are somehow fit to be welcomed. When we are poor in spirit, God comes. When we are grieving, God comes. Even though we are meek, God comes. When we are burdened with worry about the state of the world and the lack of justice, God comes. And in that coming is our blessing because whatever we are going through, we are not going through it alone. In faith we can know the benefits of the Gospel – in Christ, God has come close to us.

And that is the essential truth about saints. Not that they are strong, confident people able to do anything, but that they are those who have grasped the Gospel and rely on the presence of God in all that they face in life. Not that they are morally upright and have earned their place with God, but that they are the meek and pure in heart who have been met by grace. Not that they hold themselves holy and separated from the world, but that they show mercy and seek peace in response to the merciful and peacemaking Christ they follow. That is why we are fortunate; God meets us and offers all the benefits of presence – comfort, strength, inspiration, and hope. Paul always addressed his letters to 'the saints' of which ever church he was writing to, even when he was calling them to task or criticising their behaviour. Not just to the leaders, those who might appear on a long list by performed great deeds by faith, but all the members of the church who had passed through the waters of baptism and knew the presence of God in their lives. The poor in spirit, the meek, the peacemakers and those who were going through persecution – all the saints.

Each of us has a list of those who are saints for us, those who have demonstrated the comforting and inspiring presence of God in their lives. Those who go to work, day after day even though they regularly face ridicule and bullying for their faith. Those who face death, illness, or disability with a smile on their face and a prayer on their lips for those who are in need. Those who cannot explain all the theology and doctrines, and probably doubt or don't understand some, but who know their living Saviour and face life with joy. The saints whose living example brought us to faith, or held us in faith, or taught us about the truth of the faith, or made faith come alive before our eyes.

The great names of faith resound through our history,
Paul, Augustine, Francis, Luther, Knox, Wesley, Bonhoeffer
But we mostly remember the faithful people
unknown to others who shone in our lives.
The small saints who loved beyond reason,
persevered through adversity and challenge,
gave of themselves even when it looked like they had nothing,
and especially when no one was looking.
Those who knew their God and lived their faith in all their life.
The small saints who lit up the world around them
and sparked faith in us and others.
In their memory we live out our lives
and hope to be a small saint in someone else's life.