Reflection on: The Beatitudes, November 11th 2020 with Sr Marie DW

Opening words: This week, we have a transcript. We are no longer providing video resources every week but may continue to create these for important seasons of the year. We have attached some pictures/ resources to help you in your meditation. The tradition we meditate in is Centering Prayer which is fully inclusive of all traditions of Christian Meditation and welcoming of World Traditions.

Welcome to Christian Meditation in the Centering Prayer Tradition: A very warm welcome from Fiona, Marie, Rob, Hazel and Paul, the leaders of the Christian Meditation group at Wisdom Centre, Romsey. The whole session is about 50 minutes. We meditate beginning with an opening prayer followed by reflections and then 25 minutes of silence. We hope you enjoy your meditation with us.

Opening Prayer: *Eternal God,* through our meditation may the ears of our hearts be attentive to your Word. May we seek and find You. Awakened to Your presence may we be joyful, embodying peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-awareness. May we follow Your teaching, seeking also, the wisdom of the Holy Fathers and Mothers. May we, therefore, commit to community, love of earth, peace and justice making. **Amen**

Introduction: This month of November many of us are mindful of those who have gone before us as we celebrated the feasts of All Saints and All Souls. Last weekend we celebrated Remembrance Day, held in the UK as a day to commemorate the contribution of British and Commonwealth military and civilian servicemen and women in the two World Wars and later conflicts. Also today is Armistice day: commemorated every year on 11 November to mark the armistice signed between the Allies of World War I and Germany for the cessation of hostilities on the Western Front of World War I. During this pandemic we have been constantly reminded of those who have died from this terrible virus, now numbering one and a half million. To help our meditation this evening I have chosen a well-known text from Mt 5: 2-12 : The Beatitudes; in them you will be able to recognise those that have gone before us.

The beatitudes translated into European languages do not always capture the images expressed in the original Aramaic spoken by Jesus. Neil Klotz has identified the root images inherent in each beatitude. The following is a rendition made from those images. The images are printed in bold italic. When we read the beatitudes in the light of their original Aramaic roots, we come to understand them in an entirely new way.

1	Poor in Spirit	Blest are they -- the ***hollow reeds*** of God; the stirrings of the Kingdom breathe through them.
2	***Meek***	Blest are they who soften rigid places; in ***humus*** and in ***humour*** God is theirs.
3	***Mourners***	Blest are they with ***unhealed wounds***; their nameless longing shapes their future joy.
4	***Hunger and Thirst***	Blest are they -- the ***burnt*** ones -- ***parched of tongue***; they drink their fill of justice and compassion
5	***Merciful***	Blest are they - the ***wombs*** that ***birth*** compassion; they glow within the warm embrace of mercy.
6	***Pure of Heart***	Blest are they who ***blossom*** pure as ***light; transparent*** in their eyes the face of God.
7	***Peacemakers***	Blest are they who ***weave*** bright webs of peace; the ***bonding*** of the ***cherished child*** is theirs.
8	***Persecuted***	Blest are they - the justice-***bent***, the ***shamed***; in them God's reign has ***burst all bounds***.



Let's look at each of these in more detail: ***Blessed are the Poor in Spirit.*** The Aramaic image for Blessed are the poor in spirit is a reed growing in or near a stream. By its very nature the reed is hollow and seems to cry out for the breath of life to flow through it. To be melodious, the reed has to allow itself to be cut to a certain length, to have an opening made for the breath from the lips of the player, and to have six or more holes cut into it at precise intervals. Once empty and shaped, the hollow reed becomes a flute – awaiting the breath of God; ready to sing the melody that God has designed for God's own melody to reach out to and inspire others.

In the world where Jesus lived, Jewish society believed that God had blessed the rich with wealth and that they were the fortunate ones. In our own, world, even those who ignore God, think that the rich are the privileged ones and the rest of us are not only less fortunate but also less capable. But Jesus stood up and proclaimed the very opposite, "Blessed are you who are poor.." (Lk 6:24) This does not mean that it is good to be destitute and in need. Still less, it is a promise that one day the poor will be rich. It means, "You should regard yourselves as fortunate that you are not among the rich and the wealthy." It is those who are rich who are the unfortunate ones. Why? Because the only way the human race can survive will be for the rich to lower their standard of living and share their wealth with others. The rich are going to find that very difficult.



Blessed are the Meek: The root image for blessed are the meek is ***humus***, rich dark earth made from the natural fibres of leaves and vegetables. This is soil that flakes easily in the hand. Dark and moist, it is life-giving and promotes the growth of whatever is planted in it. In human beings the root quality is humour. By this is meant, not the sophisticated wit that serves to bring glory to its author, but rather the earthy humour of people who are in close relationship with each other. Humour often serves to reduce tensions between people and to soften difficult situations.

The truly meek person is rare. He or she is the one who knows how to soften rigid places as farmers soften the earth so that life might grow. First of all, through attentiveness and fidelity to Wisdom at work in their daily lives, through pain and joy, through success and failure, they learn from their life experience and allow it to soften what is unnaturally hard within themselves.

Truly meek people are a treasure in community. They know how to soften tensions by their genuine sense of humour. They know how to soften rigidity in structures and in individuals. They know how to lift the heaviness in a group, and how to help individuals to bear their burdens. The interior pain that they themselves have suffered makes it possible for their words to break through the tough shells of others and touch their hearts.



Blessed are they that Mourn… The image for 'blessed are those who mourn' is that of a weeping, unhealed wound. Directly connected with this image is another, that of weeping itself. Holistic medicine, both traditional and modern, teaches us that grieving is essential to healing. On the physical level, *tears wash out toxins*; we now know that weeping actually carries away harmful chemicals from the body. On the psychological level, weeping helps us to carry the dark side of ourselves and of all that happens to us. Mourning helps us to bear the pain and to arrive at the day when we can begin to hope again in a future. There is more. The mystics tell us: *Until you have wept, you do not know God*. When one looks at the face of a Mahatma Gandhi, a Nelson Mandela, or a Mother Teresa, one is immediately aware of the immense suffering that each of them has not only endured but embraced. And yet these faces glow with happiness. They communicate the love of a gracious God. This is another saying that turns our world upside down. What people seek is happiness, not misery, rejoicing not grieving. But this beatitude does not encourage us to be miserable. Far from it! Mourning has two faces: one that looks to the past and the other that looks to the future. First of all, to mourn is to take the time to grieve for our losses, our failures, our hurts, our sin – and this is an integral part of the healing process. But also, the root for the word 'mourn' in the original Aramaic means to long deeply for something to occur. This is what gives us hope.



Blessed are they who hunger… Once again the Aramaic roots shed light on the dramatic aspects of this beatitude. The image for the verb '*hunger'* include: to turn the mouth toward the mother's breast; the body's thirst for health and strength. The verb '*thirst'* adds other images: burning with longing, dried out inwardly, and burnt out after long years of struggle. The noun '*the hungry ones'* suggests watching by night, waiting by lamplight, but more importantly: a whirlpool of possibility that casts aside what is not essential and draws down into its depths the object of the heart.

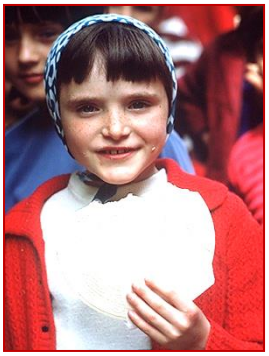


Blessed are the merciful… This beatitude is the inseparable 'twin' of "*Blessed are the pure of heart…*" They form two sides of the same coin. Its Aramaic roots are equally beautiful. The Aramaic word for 'mercy' suggests: the womb, movement from the centre; motion from the depths, radiating heat, compassion, breath of grace, answer to prayer.

Mercy is God's self-understanding. It is who God is. It is God's ultimate entry into powerlessness. But mercy is also written as the divine image within each one of us. Finally, it is the fruit of experience, for we do not know mercy until we have really needed it. In its positive aspects, *Blessed are the merciful* is one of the most attractive of the beatitudes. It turns some traditional spiritualties on their heads, for we are <u>not</u> invited to be 'perfect' but to be all-embracing. Also it is far more demanding to be 'all embracing' than to be 'perfect'.

Loving kindness flows to and from the saint as medicine goes to the pain it must cure.
Wherever the lowlands are, the water goes.
If you want the water of mercy, make yourself low;
Then drink the wine of mercy and be overwhelmed by joy.
Mercy upon Mercy rises to your head like a flood.

[Rumi (Persian poet) Mathnawi, II, vv. 1938-40.]



Blessed are the Pure in Heart… In this beatitude, Jesus makes a somewhat curious connection between the heart and the eye. When the heart is right, our way of seeing is changed beyond all comprehension. In short: *Hearts cantered on God give us pure seeing. Likewise, pure seeing gives us bright hearts.*

Of all the beatitudes, this is the one most focused on our passion for God. All the other beatitudes, are grounded in Wisdom's gratuitous love for us and our spontaneous response to that love. The Aramaic root for the word 'heart' is rich in meaning. It suggests: the core of love or sympathy in a person; the electrifying purpose that motivates one's life; the centre from which life radiates; the flower blossoming solely because that is its deepest nature; the universe expanding according to God's vast designs.

Likewise the Aramaic root for the expression 'they shall *see* God' suggests: inner vision; sudden earth-shattering insight; oneness with God in creation and in prayer; our deepest identity as expressions of God's love; the fullness of the here and now.



Blessed are the peacemakers who ***weave*** bright webs of peace; the ***bonding*** of the ***cherished child*** is theirs**…** The key word in Aramaic for '*peacemaker'* suggests the following images: those who not only perform an action but are committed to it in a process over time; those who plough and dig, plant, nurture water and weed, bring forth fruit, and celebrate! The word '*peace'* suggests health, safety, and any happy gathering, but it also means: the unexpected yet suitable agreement that resolves a difficult situation; the skilful word that unites all in sympathy. Likewise, the expression 'to be called' here suggests digging a channel that allows water to flow; opening a well to ensure life for a whole village. The word '***peacemaker'*** is used only once in the whole Bible, in this beatitude! It represents the most difficult task of all: to resolve conflict and reconcile those who quarrel.

Blessed are the Persecuted… The Aramaic root for 'persecuted' is also very graphic. It suggests: driven away, or dislocated by scandals spread about those who struggle for peace; dominated or burdened by the blame society heaps upon those who live the beatitudes; the burden of shame that society imposes on 'kingdom people'. Jesus does not incite us to seek suffering. Rather, he suggests: If you choose to denounce the oppressors and the wealthy, you will be rejected, scorned, shamed, and put to death as I was. I cannot spare you from this, but I will be with you to help you to know what to say, to comfort you by my presence, and to be with you and suffer with you even unto death; If you are a refugee or a migrant for the sake of justice, then my followers over the whole earth must find ways to open up a home for you.



Beginning Meditation: I invite you to take up a posture that is comfortable and restful. Become aware of certain sensations in your body that you are feeling at this present moment but of which you are not explicitly aware: the touch of your clothes on your shoulders, the feel of your hands, your feet touching your shoes, your sitting posture, the taste in your mouth… Continue to go round moving from one part of your body to the other, a couple of seconds on each part. The important thing is that you get the *feel*, the sensation of each part to bring you to a stillness ready for prayer.

Bell Sounds…25-minute meditations begins…Count down timer starts

Bell Sounds…Meditation ends

Let us close with another beatitude reflection which is very clear about the link between inner discipleship and prophetic mission.

1 - *Poor in Spirit* Happy am I when I come to know my own utter helplessness in the struggle for the Kingdom. Only then can God do something in my life for other lives.

2 – *Meek* Happy am I if can learn the proper time and place for anger, only then can God's own strength begin to ground my heart in justice.

3 – *Mourners* Happy am I when my heart is broken by the pain of others and by my own inner darkness, only then can God's joy break through in me.

4 - *Hunger and Thirst* Happy am I when I hunger for the rightness of all things as a starving person longs for food, only then can God fulfil the deepest longings of my heart.

5 – *Merciful* Happy am I when I can be with others in their time of deepest need, only thus can they be freed to do the same for others.

6 - *Pure in Heart* Happy am I when I have eyes to see what lives in me, only then will God appear to me in those I meet.

7 – *Peacemakers* Happy am I when I can make a bridge from one heart to another, only then shall I find out what it means to be God's child.

8 – *Persecuted* Happy am I when I am so loyal to Christ that I accept with joy contempt and wounds and even death, for then God's Kingdom comes to fullness in my life.

Inspired by a meditation of Jean Vanier

Closing prayer: Loving and Eternal God, we thank you for the gifts of prayer, meditation and contemplation. We thank you for being with us and for this community. May we, therefore, pray with all others, as one community, one world and one spirit to One God…Moments of your personal prayer follow…**Amen**
Thank you for meditating with us, please join us again soon.

Images/ resources: Pictures from Pixabay

Klotz, Neil *Prayers of the Cosmos: Meditations on the Aramaic Words of Jesus*, Harper San Francisco, 1990.



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