

I don't know what you do on Friday mornings, go to work, shopping, meeting up with friends, gardening but I hope that whatever it is you enjoy it. Every Friday morning I attend my Art class in Christ Church hall along with fourteen others, some of whom I didn't know when I began but are now friends. Usually it is a pleasant occasion and the two hours pass quickly. The tutor is encouraging and although I have never produced any masterpieces a few of my paintings do adorn the walls at home and I have actually sold a couple. It is a pleasant time and I know that I am most competent and comfortable when using watercolour.

The last two Fridays have been very different. The tutor has asked us to make a picture in collage. Now I was never any good at cut and stick when I was a seven year old in Primary School and several decades on I have discovered I am no better. The pieces of paper I

cut out never seem to be the shape I intended and the glue gets everywhere. I could have done the picture in a quarter of the time if I had been allowed to get my paints out. I am definitely out of my comfort zone.

When they heard Jesus saying the words of our gospel reading, I suspect the disciples were also out of their comfort zone. They were used to Jesus teaching them as they made their way around the countryside and I am sure they were expecting the usual Rabbinic talk from Jesus as they went up into the mountain with him.

They would presumably be expecting a quiet homily, a peace of unchallenging teaching from a Rabbi. If that is what they were expecting they were in for quite a shock. The fact that Jesus sat down to teach makes his words more important. Rabbis traditionally taught as they walked among their students – it was only when there

was a serious message to get across that they sat down to teach.

Jesus words formed no simple platitudes, no well - known verses from scriptures, no familiar stories.

Instead he presented them with a series of statements, a series of promises which challenged all their ideas, all their experience, all their accepted beliefs. In today's parlance it was a bombshell.

It was a jaw dropper of a speech – its contents were totally unexpected, its ideas challenging, its consequences incomprehensible. Perhaps the nearest we can come to it - and it's still a long way off - is the Martin Luther King " I have a dream speech" which in its day challenged the American nation and the world to revise the way it thought about black people.

Jesus had decided that the time had come to tell his disciples precisely what following him might involve and what the ground rules of Gods' kingdom were.

Jesus words to the twelve, referred to as the sermon on the Mount, would have left his disciples speechless, bewildered and taken them far from their comfort zone.

If they had been in the 21st century they could well have said – “Just a minute are you **really** saying that people who are poor, who are hungry, who are sad, who are persecuted are blessed - and by implication that all the people who are rich, well fed happy and well thought of, will not be. Haven't you got it the wrong way round Jesus? We know it – the poor are not happy, we don't see the meek inheriting the earth.

In fact then as now and perhaps even more so in today's celebrity culture, the world had the popular concept of happiness that

Blessed are the rich

Blessed are the famous

Blessed are the beautiful

Blessed are the gifted

Blessed are the powerful.

But Jesus had not got it the wrong way round. He is telling his disciples that although they and many others may be poor and hungry now, they are rich in ways that really matter, because the kingdom of God belongs to them. Though they may be sad now and men might persecute and revile them, the day will come when they will laugh with joy and receive a great reward in heaven.

Jesus reminds them that this is how the prophets were treated. Being treated in this way puts them in the same league as some of the greatest heroes of the Old Testament.

Even so this talk by Jesus which has been called the greatest sermon by the greatest teacher, must have given the disciples quite a lot to think about. And if we had read the version of the sermon on the mount in Saint Luke's gospel we would have found that Jesus immediately follows the beatitudes with even more demanding words. He tells his disciples to love their enemies – tough talking indeed.

In those beatitudes Jesus is telling his disciples and us what members of his kingdom should be like. His kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, is not concerned with outward show, with pomp, or with power. Citizens of

the kingdom of heaven should be merciful, meek, be pure in heart and be peacemakers and they will know sorrow.

I do not intend to go through all the blessings in the beatitudes - that would take far too long. But I will look at one. Blessed are those that mourn for they will be comforted.

The word used for mourning in this passage in its original form is the Greek word for the most severe form of lamentation, for the effect of the loss of someone most dear to us. Mourning for someone who has died is natural. Losing a relative or a friend changes life but it is an essential part of life. And it can be life destroying if comfort is not found. If we mourn someone, then we must have loved someone or at least respected them and the memory and knowledge of that love can sustain

us. Bereavement is part of living and life cannot always be easy and unchallenging. There is an Arab proverb which states that "All sunshine makes a desert." or as my father who came from the Lake District would put it when we complained of yet another wet day on holiday "Without the rain there would be no Lakes."

Those in God's kingdom who mourn will be blessed for they will have the comfort and reassurance that comes from God and also from other members of that kingdom.

Today we are observing All saints Day when we mourn and remember those who have gone before us in faith.

In this church this afternoon there will be a service to remember those who have died this year during which those who mourn will be comforted.

Last week my younger daughter was in Mexico and experienced their preparations for Day of the dead,

when families make altars and place food on it which their ancestors liked and wrap the food in paper which meant something to them. She said it made her think what food she would put out for her ancestors and how she would display it. For my father, her grandfather it would be fried bacon and onions, something he made every Sunday morning and it would have to be wrapped in the Sport pages of the daily Express. For my mother it would be a piece of homemade currant slice wrapped not in paper but in a piece of material from Ada's stall on the market! Some of you may remember that. My mum was a talented dressmaker and could buy material on Saturday morning and I would go out in a dress made of it on Saturday night. Going through that exercise made Ruth remember her grandparents with joy and thanksgiving and she said in Mexico all through the day the celebrations will be joyful and colourful. It would

certainly be a time of praise and thanksgiving. People who have mourned will indeed be glad.

Today we celebrate the dead and especially the Saints. I have to confess that my knowledge of Saints is decidedly limited. The Methodist church in which I was brought up was not big on Saints and I have been somewhat remiss in acquiring greater knowledge.

Although I am aware of the many saints who suffered persecution and death for their faith, and I appreciate Saint Peter who could get things wrong, and I am very fond of Saint Thomas who asked awkward questions.

In searching for inspiration for this sermon I found that a young boy when asked what a Saint was replied “ The light shines through them” he had obviously seen images of Saints in stained glass windows but I think it’s a rather fine definition of a Saint – someone who the

light shines through – someone who allows the light of Christ to shine through them to influence and illuminate the lives of others.

All of us must have encountered Saints like that people not famous, but who have allowed us to see Jesus through them. Saints who have helped and encouraged us on our Christian journey – although they probably did not think of themselves as Saints - those Sunday School teachers, Vicars, our parents, grandparents and friends even our children, and allow though we mourn those who have died, we are grateful for their actions and guidance.

We too are called to be Saints – not as my mother would have said – plaster Saints - but living ones who allow the light of Jesus to shine through us and fall on the lives of others. We have a responsibility to enable others

to come to know Christ through our words our actions and our prayers.

Living up to all the demands of being a member of the kingdom of God is not easy and I find that the words of the prophet Micah resound. What does the Lord require of you but to love mercy, act justly and walk humbly with your God. Sounds simple, but it might not be easy - we may well be taken out of our comfort zone - but the rewards of the kingdom of heaven far outweigh the costs.

Let us pray that we may take our place with the saints.