

SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time – 29 January 2023



I always await the first number of speeches from a newly elected person in a role. Political leaders, principals throughout my teaching career, church leader and more recently commanders in my Army employment. Most often than not, there is an enthusiasm for the business at hand, coupled with passion and a sense of hope.

Today we hear Jesus' first public speech, outside of the temple that is. We have been building up to this point since before Xmas. We have heard John the Baptist preparing the way of the Lord who is coming. Christ our saviour is born, yet the people wait 30 years to hear, in last week's gospel, Jesus state that we are the light, not just him; we are the universal church that will bring change to the Kingdom which can be right here, right now.

Today's gospel is about how we do this.

Deacon Minje preached last week that Jesus had not spoken until last Sunday's gospel - Jesus may have been busy preparing how he would communicate the beautiful poetry that is the Beatitudes.

There are 2 stanzas: In the original Greek form, there are 39 words in stanza 1, and another 39 in stanza two. Interestingly, the first stanza has one present tense, then three future tenses, whereas the second stanza has three future tenses and one present tense. Beatitude 1 and 8 bookend promising the kingdom in more general terms, whereas Beatitudes 2 to 7 do so in more concrete ways to the people concerned.

We learned that *'multitudes' and 'crowds'* were following Jesus when he went up to the mountain and addressed them. When I visited the Sea of Galilee with ACU in 2019 I participated in a lecture where scientific evidence was tabled of where Jesus gave this speech. Audiologists have concluded that there is only one place by the sea, on a mountain ridge, that when Jesus spoke thousands could hear here.

What is amazing was Jesus had prepared this beautifully and well-articulated poem as a presentation. Location was key in delivering this.

Jesus meticulously planned this, to be heard by many.

If we are to bring the Kingdom amongst us, we need to exhibit some behaviours and actions that promote this. The Beatitudes are simply that.

So, what did Jesus say?

I have recently spoken of Metanoia in my homilies: that change of thinking and acting – turning away from behaviours that don't allow people to flourish. Jesus illustrates this today through a beautifully constructed poem, which maps out a Christian *'Code of Conduct'*.

The poor in spirit – worn down by poverty in its many forms – spiritual, material, societal, financial. Those who struggle for basic survival. There will be no spirit poverty in the kingdom.

Those who mourn. As in our society, life is cut short for many who suffer war, food and housing insecurity, and infectious diseases. It is also the loss of land! For those who mourn, Jesus proclaims a coming comfort.

The meek – those exploited by the prosperous powerful. But also enduring injury with patience and without resentment.

Hunger and thirst for righteousness – social justice. A societal restructuring that sees the equal distribution of resources.

The merciful. Rome was not known for showing mercy and was violent in expanding their rule. Gods rule is different, and all will be welcome.

The Pure in Heart – thinking and doing God’s will, not being a hypocrite. Those who commit to God will see an image of intimacy, a face-to-face encounter with God.

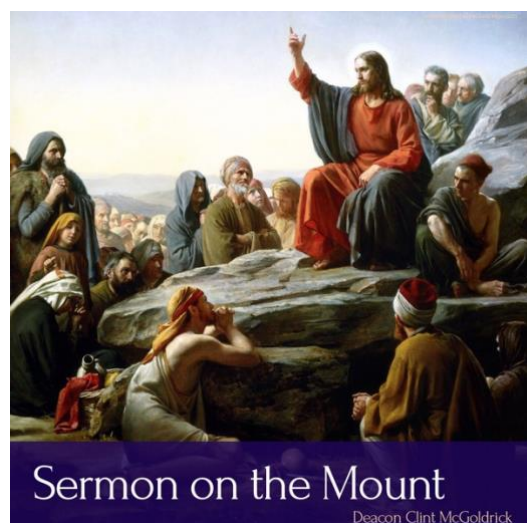
The Peacemakers. Rome asserted itself as peacemakers, yet their peace only came through domination. Peace here is not simply the absence of conflict: entrance into the kingdom is voluntary. Peacemakers don’t enact the empires rule but the reign of God.

Persecuted for Justice’s Sake. Being a disciple of God is counter-cultural, many experienced this in Jesus’ earthly time; it is certainly prevalent in today’s age.

When we live a life of justice for the oppressed and marginalised, when we extend mercy to the outcast; when we walk with people in their suffering; when we are patient and not resent, but advocate for those who the least, the last and the lost; we live the values outlined in the beatitudes. And when we live out the Beatitudes the rulers of this world will resist us, but we must persevere if we are to be blessed.

Deacon Clint McGoldrick

Readings: <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/012923.cfm>



Carl Bloch, Sermon on the Mount (1877) | public domain