

SERMON FOR THE DIOCESE OF BUNBURY: 1/2/2026: EPIPHANY 4 OS4A
SUNDAY BETWEEN 28th JAN AND 3rd FEB: GEOFF CHADWICK:
MATTHEW 5.1-12:
“ATTITUDE”

¹ When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ² Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: ³ ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ ‘Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ⁵ ‘Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ⁶ ‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. ⁷ ‘Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. ⁸ ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ⁹ ‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. ¹⁰ ‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ ‘Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

I have always had a fascination with flight. As a little kid I wondered how birds flew. As a five-year-old, I even made a parachute for myself out of some old curtains. Fortunately my Mum spied me atop the garage roof ready to launch myself into the air. She managed to stop me having realised that as a five year old, I had yet to come to terms with all the finer principles of aerodynamics!

In later life, as a teenager, I made control -Line model aircraft. I spent my weekends crashing them, and my weekdays repairing the wreckage. It’s amazing what you can do with balsawood, contact adhesive and your mum’s finest embroidery pins.

One thing I learnt was that, if a plane is to fly well it must have the correct attitude. This also goes for the pilot, but that’s another matter!

In terms of aircraft, *the attitude* is how well balanced the plane is in flight. The aim is to make sure that the wing-tips, the nose and the tail are level when flying level! If not, the plane is flying inefficiently and ineffectively.

Next time you see Bishop Ian, you may ask him about his flying attitude!

Now what’s this about?

Well at the risk of a very bad pun, today's Gospel reading is commonly known by the Latin name: *The Beatitudes*. The name comes from the first word of each line: *Beate*, meaning "Blessed." Incidentally the word in the original Greek is *makarioi*.

My bad pun is this:

Blessings come when our attitude is right.

Now we need to place the Beatitudes within the context of the first hearers.

In the 1st Century, the prosperity doctrine of life was very popular. This was the view that wealth and fortune were blessings from God. Poverty or mis-fortune, were, quite obviously, signs that God was against you. Putting it simply, the rich were blessed and the poor were cursed. Perhaps this view is still common today!

The fact that Jesus spent so much time with the poor, and was poor himself, scandalises this view. Sadly it may be something our thinking has forgotten. To many of the time, God being with the poor was a nonsense!

This morning's 1 Corinthians reading speaks about this;

²³ ... but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,

²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

²⁵ For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

²⁶ Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.

²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;

²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are,

²⁹ so that no one might boast in the presence of God. (1 Cor 1:23-29, NRSV)

Matthew writing to Jewish Christians, portrays Jesus as the new-Moses. So here Jesus is uttering a set of new commandments from a new mount Sinai.

(Unlike Luke, who has Jesus say these things from a level place.)

Nevertheless, these commandments are not “*Thou shalt* or *Thou shalt not...*, but rather “*Blessed are... (Beate, Makarioi)*”

They are couched in positive language with a radical sting. According to these commandments the prosperity doctrine is dead.

These blessings, require a new way of thinking.

These blessings require *metanoia*, a change of mind, or if you like a new “attitude”.

Let’s look at them.

³ *‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Matthew includes the words *in spirit*, which are not found in Luke. He’s making the point that God’s blessing is not just about physical abundance. It is, in fact, found in in spiritual poverty!

Confronting words indeed, for those caught up in the wealth trap!

⁴ *‘Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*

We mourn when we’ve lost something precious- yet it is a paradox, this is when comfort is at hand.

⁵ *‘Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*

In a culture where “might was right” and political power was highly prized; Jesus turns it on its head. It’s such a paradox. Those who humble themselves end up with the earth!

⁶ *‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*

Corruption and political expediency were the norm in the First Century. They are still the with us today! But it will leave you empty! You may have all the material goods in the world but you will have nothing. Knowing that you have done the right thing fills what otherwise is an empty aching spiritual hole.

⁷ *‘Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.*

Leaders in Jesus' time feared being seen to be weak. Confusing mercy with weakness, they missed the blessings of mercy's strength.

⁸ 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.'

The Jews of Jesus' time believed that purity was a way to God, but they had missed the point! Purity turned into outward appearances, and the inward motivation was lost. Jesus turns it around. Purity, he says, begins in the heart, and that's where God is found.

⁹ 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.'

There was a lot of warmongering in Jesus' day. Many would invoke the name of God to champion their war cries. We've known it in our time: "*We fight for king and God*", but God's offspring are not found there. God's offspring are found with those who tread the difficult path of peace-making.

¹⁰ 'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'

Have you ever been persecuted for doing the right thing? It's a terrible feeling, yet paradoxically the kingdom of heaven has come near!

¹¹ 'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.'

This is a direct word to Matthew's church. These early believers were reviled, persecuted and spoken against. Yet, they were encouraged to remain steadfast, and to understand that they were in the company of the great prophets of old.

These encouraging words are also for us today!

This has been a bit of a gallop through the Beatitudes. Nevertheless, let me remind you that these blessings are:

- Poverty of spirit
- Mourning
- Meekness

- Hunger for righteousness
- Mercy
- Purity of heart
- Peacemaking
- Persecution

And to revisit my bad pun:

May blessings come when our attitude is right.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.