



# St Andrew's



United Reformed Church  
Penylan Road, Roath, Cardiff. CF24 3PF

12<sup>th</sup> February 2022

## **Weekly newsletter - issue 101**

Dear friends,

Here we are celebrating the sixth Sunday of Epiphany this week, where has the time gone? But what is Epiphany? If there is a single central theme or image to Epiphany, it is light. Epiphany begins with the light of the star leading the Wise Men; and it ends with the shining radiance of Jesus' garments at the Transfiguration. In between, this image of light haunts many of the readings throughout the season.

Luke's telling of the beatitudes fits right in with this - as the purpose of the beatitudes is to shed some new light on an old subject. But in

order to discover what's going on, we need to know what that old subject is.

For example, it is all too easy to imagine that the beatitudes are about us; that they are commands for how we should live, and what we should do. So, we imagine that Jesus is telling us, or at least telling some of us, that we should **'go out there and get ourselves poor', or 'learn how to weep more', or 'get more persecuted'**.

If this is what he is up to, Jesus is pretty much wasting his time. After all, advice like that, whether given by Jesus or by anybody else, seldom does much more than make us frustrated and guilty. We might think that it would be sweet or something to be, say, more tearful for Jesus; but it is pretty unlikely we would set out to do it. Besides, does being poor, or weeping, or being persecuted count if you do it on purpose in order to be blessed? That hardly seems right.

The harder you try to make these odd sayings into marching orders, the less sense they make. What's more, nowhere in the beatitudes is there a command or directive - to us or to anybody. Nowhere does Jesus use the imperative, nowhere does he give any orders or requirements. The entire section is in the indicative. Jesus is simply describing reality, he is not telling the disciples, or us, or anybody else, to do anything.

The Beatitudes are not about us; they are not a set of instructions on how we should live, or what we should do. But if they are not about us, what are they about? If they don't shine any light on how we are supposed to behave, what are they good for?

One suggestion is that the beatitudes have been presented as ways to help people live well in the world; or at least as things to do that will make the world a better place. It has also been suggested that if we would only be spiritually poor or hungry, or persecuted, that this will bring out the best in others and they will be the better because of it. So, sooner or later, people will realise how nice and valuable we are and give us what we want. Or, by and by the whole world will end up being a much better place for all involved; and everyone will somehow come out on top in the long run. So, the beatitudes become a handy tool, a cosmic way to win friends, influence people, and clean up the neighbourhood.

The problem with this, of course, is that it is just plain silly. You can only believe that the world respects and responds kindly to the sort of behaviour found in the beatitudes if you know absolutely nothing about the world. Things don't work like that. If you turn the other cheek, you will probably end up with two sore cheeks. And being poor now, spiritually or especially, physically, will probably insure that you won't go very far in the real world of business, politics, or industry. That's just the way it is, and that's the way it always has been, and Jesus was no fool. He knew that. Jesus was not trying to shine any light on how the world works. Besides, it really doesn't make any sense to crucify the Lord for giving sensible advice for getting ahead. Or even for giving silly advice about getting ahead.

Still, the beatitudes shine light, but they really don't shine any light about the way the world works. They are not about the world, just like they are not about telling us how to act. The beatitudes are about God, they are about who God is, and who God blesses, and

what the kingdom of God is like. They tell us what matters to God, they tell us who is especially important to God, and they tell us what God pays attention to.

The beatitudes, if you like, are a glimpse into the heart and mind of God. Again, they don't tell us what our world is like. We already know that so well that we assume that anything of value will work really well in and with this world. Jesus is trying to give us a different vision of life, one that has its foundations, not in the world, but in the very nature of God.

So, we have some new light on God. The question is: if God is really like this; if God has the preferences and the priorities of the beatitudes, then what could that mean? How could our lives be different, how could you be different? That's the issue, and that is the question Jesus leaves us with. It's a good question, and worth considering in your life.

## **NEWS**

It is with great sadness that we have been informed of the death of Miss Pam Ward. Pam was a faithful member at St Andrew's having transferred from Tredegarville Baptist with her late sister Hilda. With the onset of ill-health, the family decided that it would be advantageous for Pam to live in a nursing home nearer them in Leighton Buzzard. Pam was very happy at the home until she was taken gravely ill some three weeks ago, and then subsequently passed away. The family have indicated that they would like to hold Pam's funeral in St Andrew's, followed by committal with her sister Hilda at Thornhill cemetery. A date and time has now been confirmed as a service of remembrance for her life to be held on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup>

March 2022 commencing at 12.00 noon; followed by internment at Thornhill cemetery at 1.30 pm.

We have received the email below from our Cub leader.

***"If anyone in the church is still collecting used postage stamps, I am happy to say that the RNLi (lifeboats) are still using them for fundraising (some other charities have stopped collecting them). So, our cubs will be happy to receive stamps and forward them to the RNLi.***

***Many thanks.***

***Chris.***



Many thanks to Jill for providing this week's sermon and prayers. We have provided our weekly '***Thoughts and Prayers***' video, which, as always, can be found by holding down the Ctrl button and clicking on the YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/rqE7Gp500Qo>. The video is also available on St Andrew's, and my Facebook pages.

May God bless and keep you all safe.

*Des*

**Minister - St Andrew's URC Cardiff and Penuel Nelson**

## SERMON

**Luke 2:36-38, Galatians 4:4-7**

It seemed very strange to be turning the page on my calendar from January to February a few days ago. How could 6 weeks have passed since Christmas?

Christmas is a busy time for many people. There are the decorations, bright lights, carol singing, the buying and exchanging of presents, food shopping for enough food to feed the 5,000 again; not to mention all kinds of family gatherings. So much to do it can wear a person out.

One woman, for example waited until last minute to send out her Christmas cards. She had 49 people on her list. So, she rushed into a shop, and she bought a bumper pack of 50 cards without really looking at them. Still in a hurry, she addressed the 49 envelopes and signed the cards without reading the message inside.

On Christmas Day when things had quietened down a bit, she found the leftover card buried under some wrapping paper and she finally read the message she had sent to 49 of her friends. Much to her dismay, it read like this: ***"This card is just to say/a little gift is on the way."*** Suddenly she realised, 49 of her friends were expecting a gift - a gift that would never come. That poor woman didn't take time to think about what she was doing, and she ended up promising a gift she couldn't give.

In contrast, God spent centuries telling His people about the gift He intended to give them. He described that gift in detail so that, when Jesus came, over 300 prophecies described **WHO** He was, and **WHAT**

He was to do. And, when He showed up, Anna knew exactly **WHO** He was. We're told: "***She began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.***" Luke 2:38. This child had been born to bring redemption - a theme repeated throughout the New Testament.

Jesus is referred to repeatedly as the one who would redeem us.

Galatians 3:13 tells us "***Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us — for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.'***" And in Titus 2:14 we're told (Jesus) "***gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.***"

And Colossians 1:13-14 declares "***(God) has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.***"

The words "***redeem***", and "***redemption***" are interesting.

What do we mean by saying that Jesus "***redeemed***" us? My first thought was that it meant that Jesus' blood had bought us. And while that's true it's more than that.

To illustrate the concept of redemption here is a little story. It seems a young boy named Tom and his father had built a toy boat together. It took quite a long time to do but when it was finished it was beautiful. On a lovely spring day, Tom took the toy boat down to the river, attached a string to it, and carefully placed it in the water.

The little boat looked almost real as it floated on the river. But suddenly a strong current caught the boat and as Tom tried to pull it back to shore the string broke. The little boat raced down stream and Tom ran along the riverbank as fast as he could, but his boat quickly slipped out of sight. All afternoon he searched for the boat. Finally, when it was getting dark Tom sadly went home.

A few days later on the way home from school, Tom spotted a boat just like his in a shop window. When he got closer, he could see that sure enough it was his boat He hurried into the shop and said to the manager: **"Sir, that's my boat in your window! I made it!"**  
**"Sorry, son. Someone else brought it in this morning and I bought it from him. If you want it, you'll have to buy it."** Tom ran home and counted all his money. It took all the money he had, but he bought back the little boat he'd made. As he left the shop Tom hugged his boat and said, **"Now you're twice mine. First, I made you, and now I've bought you."**

So, what does that tell us about redemption?

Redemption literally means to **"buy something back."** It belonged to you but, for whatever reason you had to **"redeem"** it or buy it back. That little boy had owned that boat, but in order to get it back he had to redeem it.

Pawn Shops do this all the time. People will come and pawn a watch/ computer/ TV to get extra money. But then they have a limited amount of time to come back and **"redeem"** that object for the **"pawn"** price plus interest. The person who pawned that item had owned it but in order to get it back they had to redeem it.

God made us. We were made in His image. We literally belonged to God. If we don't realise that we were made in God's image, then we might begin to think we aren't worth very much.

Do you remember the film ***It's a Wonderful Life*** starring Jimmy Stewart, that is on TV every Christmas? In the film Stewart's character tried to trade in his life insurance policy. The trouble was that the policy really wasn't worth anything unless he died. His arch enemy gives him an evil grin and says, ***'It looks like you're worth more dead than you are alive.'*** Without realising that God created us, that's what we might believe.

The theory of evolution suggests that human beings are accidents of nature and have no inherent value or purpose because we are the result of the unfocused interactions of matter. As far as people having intrinsic value goes - people have none. Essentially, people are no different than a frog, or a tree, or a piece of moss. All we are just a collection of molecules.

But the Bible tells us that's not true. We are valuable; we do have a purpose; each one of us has a reason to exist because God thought we were worth His time. He created us and made us in His image.

Genesis tells us that ***"God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ... The LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature."*** Genesis 1:27 & 2:7

Someone said: ***"Evolution sees you as one step above the apes. But Scripture sees you as one step beneath the angels."***

So, we were created in God's image. God made us; He owned us; we were His treasured possession. So, what went wrong? How did God lose us?

Well - sin went wrong. God formed us, but Sin de-formed us. Sin robbed us of our relationship to God. Romans 6:23 **"the wages of sin is death."** Our sin condemned us to an eternity without God. If God was going to get us back, He needed to buy us back. He would need to redeem us

In the Old Testament Job declared: **"I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth."** (Job 19:25) God's plan was to be our redeemer and all through the Old Testament God pointed to that truth. But how was God going to do that? How was He going to **"buy us back?"** How was He going to redeem us?

St Paul in Galatians 4:4-7 explains: **"when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So, you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God."**

That's why Jesus was born - born of a woman, born under the Law!

He was born - God in the flesh - to be our redeemer, to be the one who would **"buy us back."** God formed us; Sin deformed us; but Jesus transforms us.

But did redemption happen when Jesus was born in Bethlehem? Well, no. Galatians 3:13 tells us **"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the**

*law by becoming a curse for us — for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.”* Our redemption took place at the cross. When Jesus died at Calvary, He paid the price for our sins. We deserved to die but Jesus took our place.

I saw this meme on Face Book that explained that Jesus came to die. ***“If He had not come, this babe in the manger; If God had not loved, restraining His anger; I would be lost... forever a stranger. But God so loved; Jesus so died; And I so live.”***

Most of us who have been going to church all our lives, know this. It’s the basic message of the Gospel! But the question is this: ***‘Does It Matter To You? You’ve heard the Gospel message all your life... but does it still matter to you?’*** It’s possible, after hearing the message over and over again, that you can get bored and not take it seriously. You might continue to attend church Sunday after Sunday and not even give that a 2<sup>nd</sup> thought.

Lots of people buy gift cards for others for Christmas and birthdays etc and you can buy a gift card for yourself. The Terms and Conditions relating to the gift card talk about ***“redeeming”*** your gift card. In other words, the money on the card is yours, but you have to present the card to the business to redeem the amount on the card.

A few weeks ago, I went to Waterstones and used a gift card to pay for some books. The receipt said I had £5 left on the gift card. Admiring my purchases, I left the shop leaving the gift card with the remaining £5 on the counter. When I realised what I had done I turned around and went back to the book shop, but the card had gone.

I felt sorry about losing the £5. But I consoled myself with the knowledge – it was only £5. That was the value of the gift card. So, I didn't feel so bad. I felt stupid... but it didn't really cost me anything, so it really didn't matter all that much to me. The same thing can happen to Christians. Christ's gift on the cross, cost Jesus everything, but it really didn't cost us anything. And because it didn't cost us anything, we might be tempted (over time) to not consider it all that important. So, how can we make sure that that doesn't happen to us!

Well, the best way not to forget is what Jesus left us to be the central part of our worship: **"The Lord's Supper."** We partake of it, so we won't forget why we're here. We're told that **"the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'** **In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'" For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."** I Corinthians 11:23-26

It's at The Lord's Table that we're faced with that simple message: **"If He had not come, this babe in the manger; If God had not loved, restraining His anger; I would be lost... forever a stranger. BUT God so loved; Jesus so died; And I... so live."**

## **PRAYERS**

Lord Jesus, you told your friends not to worry about the future. You showed them how to have the attitude of simple trust that young children have, so that

they could place themselves into the caring hands of your Father. And so, I ask for the power of your Spirit that I may remain positive throughout all that is ordinary in my daily life. I know that your touch can change people and situations, and so I ask you to join me in offering to our Father not only the good things of this day but also the suffering and sacrifices that I want to offer cheerfully and lovingly, and in a quiet and hidden way.

And so may any difficulties and frustration and pain of this day be transformed in your presence for the benefit of other people.

***Amen.***

### **Prayer of St Anselm**

O Lord my God. Teach my heart this day where and how to find you. You have made me and re-made me, and you have bestowed on me all the good things I possess, and still, I do not know you.

I have not yet done that for which I was made. Teach me to seek you, for I cannot seek you unless you teach me, or find you unless you show yourself to me. Let me seek you in my desire; let me desire you in my seeking. Let me find you by loving you; let me love you when I find you.

***Amen.***

God our Father, until the time of the printing press, people copied the Gospel, writing it by hand. Slowly the Gospel took shape - both on the page and deep within themselves. I ask that the Gospel - the Good News of your love - may be written in me not with ink but with the Spirit of God for only then will I grow as a credible witness of the wealth of your love.

Day by day, as the pages of my own life turn over, remind me that you write my name on the palm of your hand. I ask this prayer through Jesus, who is your Word, living amongst us.

**Amen.**

God our Father, if I could trace back through the last two thousand years, marking out routes from Jesus himself and then through people whose faith has touched others and so reached me, I would be astounded by the individuals I would encounter.

I give thanks, Father, for all those people over two thousand years who have inspired others and played their part in passing on to generation after generation the living heritage of their faith. Especially I give thanks for those who lived their faith through difficulties and hardship and persecution. I pray, Father, that I may grow in your faith and love through good times and bad.

**Amen.**