

How did we get on with writing a letter to God? Is anyone willing to share something of their experience? What did we learn about God or about ourselves?

*This week we are looking at The Beatitudes, which must be among the most famous of Jesus' teachings. However, it is very possible that most of us have been looking at this sermon the wrong way round. **Read Matthew 5: 1-12.***

- **Q: Which of the Beatitudes, negative or positive, do you relate to most?**

1. What Jesus did not mean.

- We thought about the 'false narratives' that find their way into our thinking last week. One of these is the idea that we can earn God's favour through our actions and if you read the Beatitudes with this in mind they become a prescription for how to get God to be happy with us and therefore likely to bless us.
- The people who know how to behave become welcome to enter the Kingdom of Heaven: they will reach 'spiritual well-ness'. This perception is a stumbling block to Christian faith and ignores context.

2. The Kingdom of Heaven as understood in 1st Century Palestine.

- The main subject of Jesus' teaching is the Kingdom of Heaven. Jews under Roman occupation hoped that meant God was coming soon to restore their kingdom to Israel, but there were 'entry requirements':
- The Kingdom of Heaven was the potentially exclusive environment for a very narrow group of people: healthy, wealthy, religiously and morally upright male Jews. Jesus blessed the poor, touched the sick and forgave notoriously sinful females. Jesus' welcome was inviting them into His family. **Matthew 21:31.**
- **Q: Have you ever been excluded from a group? What did that feel like?**

3. So What did Jesus mean?

- Jesus says 'You are blessed **even though** you are poor in spirit/ meek/ mourning'. You can joyfully count your blessings in spite of everything because the Kingdom of Heaven has come near to you in Me.
- The poor in spirit are those who are in a bad state, feeling marginalized from God and spiritually barren. They may look poor, but they may not and they could even belong to the clergy, who are not perfect! Christ's invitation to enter the Kingdom of heaven does not depend on us and what we do, but on Him and what He does for us: welcoming us into His Kingdom, into His home, offering us His Hospitality.
- **Q: Kevin's story is lovely: has God ever used you in weakness; have you ever met a 'living Beatitude?'**

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**Soul Training Exercise: Offer Hospitality to someone a bit 'different' from yourselves.**

1. There is a fine line between honouring your guest by tidying furiously and hiding the real 'me'. Make sure you welcome people as you really are and not as you think you ought to be.
2. Hospitality is more than offering someone a coffee or a meal, it is letting the other person be who they really are, whether they are poor in spirit, mourning or a peace-maker.
3. Hospitality can happen in the home, in the office or at church before and after the service. We could do with thinking about whether we expect people to dress, talk or behave like us? And we will find it takes effort to adapt to people who are 'different' and leaves us like Adam and Eve, yelling for a fig leaf! We find ourselves questioning our own preconceptions.
4. Hospitality is welcoming someone into ourselves. If I'm not being 'me', I am welcoming you into a false reality and not offering a relationship.
5. Hospitality goes beyond environment. The Kingdom of Heaven didn't remain somewhere else, to be attained, it came with Christ, it is Christ's welcome. Our welcome begins in the street, waiting in the queue, interacting with people and being Christ to them in the power of the Holy Spirit.