

## TALK FOR CAREY, ALL-AGE WORSHIP, MATT 5:1-10 & ISAIAH 60:17-22

### 'FROM BRONZE TO GOLD'... ?

There's been a song trapped inside my brain this week. You know what it's like. A song from a show at St Alban's Arena which celebrated Motown and all the Motown classics. The song goes: 'I will make you love me, yes I will, yes I will'. I've since developed my own version: 'I don't need to make you love me, no I don't, no I don't'.

The good news of the beatitudes is that God's heart is already a heart of blessing. No need for us to **make** God love us - God already does. God loves all his creation and that includes us. Even though we sometimes think that we are somehow an exception. Good news indeed. We know this, but we too easily forget. Somehow imagining that God will only love us if we are somehow 'good enough'. How easy to forget the most important and wonderful truths.

Something else we forget. These words of Jesus were spoken on a mountainside. The clue is the title of course, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount'. But here, the context is very important. Not in a synagogue or the Temple. But out in the wilderness. These people were sitting among wild flowers. There may even have been some bewildered wild animals, looking on from a distance. As they listened to these 1st blessings of Jesus, these people could not help but be reminded. God's blessings to them and all creation are amazingly abundant.

The beatitudes of Jesus are like a musical scale. Jesus invites us to go on a journey. Starting from a place of emptiness, through the challenges of mourning and meekness; of hunger and thirst; through to a place of learning about mercy and pure-heartedness and peace-making. And then through the trouble of persecution and back once again to emptiness. Repeated notes we find ourselves playing on this journey with Jesus. All about living the Kingdom of God, beginning to end. Like the first disciples, we come to Jesus to learn.

This week there was a new guy on the Lifeskills course. He talked of how he had been free of alcohol-dependency for a number of weeks. He spoke of how learning to pray has been helping him with this. How he was learning to be a peacemaker, instead of getting into trouble. So, the other day, at a group therapy session, another member of the group had been deliberately trying to provoke him. Usually our guy would have got into a fight. But instead, he smiled as he prayed the serenity prayer over and over... 'Lord, give me serenity

to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can change, and the wisdom to know the difference’.

That’s a prayer very relevant to climate change. This weekend marks the mid-point of the COP26 global conference. And I believe these words of Isaiah are particularly pointed for COP26, as well as for us all here at Carey. This is a word from the LORD. A promise that God wants to take us ‘from Bronze to Gold’.

Now bronze, when it’s polished up can look like gold. Indeed that is how it has been used. To make something look more impressive than it actually is. And, if we are honest, this is part of the story of COP26. Too much of it is PR. Making things look good. Harder questions need to be asked about the small print. Harder questions for those who did not show up.

But there is a more positive message to this promise too. God wants to take us all on a journey towards the ‘gold standard’ of concern for the environment. Yes. You better believe it. Whatever that might look like. God wants Carey to aim towards becoming a Gold Eco Church. Like Tring BC, only different...

Let me tell you another story of another person’s journey. It’s about Eric Holthaus. A leading American climate change scientist. In 2018 Eric found he was stuck, in a place of mourning for the planet. Paralysed by anxiety about the future. So, he did what most Americans do and he went to see a therapist. After listening very carefully to all Eric’s fears the therapist offered him this simple advice: ‘Do what you can’. Eric says, ‘his words made me realise something important: that we are all in this together’.

We can all feel like Eric. Poor and without power. But we can go on a journey with Jesus. We can each reclaim a sense of our power by seeking God. Asking God what we might do.

Isaiah 60 promises a miracle on a grand scale. It talks of how things can unexpectedly and even very quickly fall into place. By God’s grace, something ‘clicks’ in our brains. Ooh. Maybe there is something I can do. Maybe this is how I can respond to this moment. This is how I can live the kingdom in these days. And I believe, this is how we can, together, move beyond bronze to gold. Move beyond thinking about appearances. To understanding that this is all about God’s heart for us and all creation. Bronze Eco Church, COP26 – it’s only a beginning. Let’s be sure to offer God our best shall we, as we seek to go the way of Jesus? The one who laid down his life for all creation, and even for us.