

**29 January 2023 Matthew 5:1-12 Pastor Fraser Pearce**

Do you think that you can see someone – another human being,  
Do you think that you can see who they really are,  
Do you think you can understand them and know them,  
If you don't *trust* them?  
If we don't trust someone, we can look in their direction,  
And perceive that there is a human being right in front of us,  
We'll use our eyes, but we won't *see*;  
We won't *know* them or be *known* by them.

This is how it is with God,  
The evidence for God can be right in front of our eyes,  
But without trust, we can't see God,  
We can't know who God is,  
And we can't experience the blessing of being known by God.

Today I'm proclaiming Good News from God's word:  
Jesus cleanses our hearts; He purifies them,  
And he does this by giving us his Spirit-filled word  
So that we come to trust God,  
And in trusting God, we see who he really is,  
And see each other as people loved by God.

In the Gospels Jesus talks a lot about *seeing*,  
And what the *eye* means - not just as a physical organ of perception,  
But as a clue to what life with God is like.

Listen to how today's reading begins: **When Jesus *saw* the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:**

In Greek, the very first word is 'seeing',  
Jesus sees the crowds, those who have begun to hear the report  
Of his teaching and his healings.

We know from the Gospels that when Jesus sees, he acts in compassion,  
And we know that one of the ways that Jesus shows compassion is through *teaching*.

Now Matthew hands on some details as he develops his narrative.  
Firstly, he says that Jesus **went up the mountain**.  
To Jewish people reading this Gospel,  
And to us as we develop a sensitivity to symbolism,  
This calls to mind Moses going up Mt Sinai.  
In fact, as the sermon on the mount unfolds,  
Jesus is going to compare himself explicitly to Moses,

But as the one who *fulfils* the law spoken through Moses.

Matthew also says that Jesus **sat down**,  
That he adopted the posture of authoritative teaching,  
Much like a judge in our society  
Sits down to give his or her judgment.  
It then says that Jesus' disciples came to him.  
Now all this is happening at the beginning of Jesus' ministry:  
Jesus has just chosen Peter and Andrew, James and John.  
He called them, they didn't choose him,  
And by being called by Jesus they leave everything, and follow him.  
Now, as Jesus goes up the mountain and sits down to teach,  
They come to him, and Jesus begins to teach.

Let's pause here.

In the Gospels, people become disciple by being *called* by him.  
But what about us? How do we become disciples of Jesus?  
Well, at the very end of Matthew's Gospel we hear these words,  
Words that we also hear at the very beginning of our rite of baptism:  
**Our Lord Jesus Christ says: All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.**  
As we are baptised, as we are washed with the washing  
Started by Jesus, as we receive and keep *his* word,  
We, who are not Jews by birth, live together as God's people.

Now this means that the Sermon on the Mount  
Is teaching also *for us*,  
And Jesus starts his teaching with a list sayings  
That in the church we call the Beatitudes, or the blessings.  
Jesus starts his teaching *to his disciples*,  
*In the presence of the crowds*,  
By giving them as series of assurances of God's blessings  
To those who may, from a human point of view, seem unblessed,  
Or even cursed by God.

Today we'll look only at one of the beatitudes:  
**'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.'**  
But before we do that, I'll just make some comments in the beatitudes.

Jesus starts his great Sermon on the Mount  
Not by telling his disciples to do anything,  
*But by telling them about the realities of the kingdom where he reigns*,  
And by opening their hearts and minds

To what it means to be his disciple. Think about it this way:  
Imagine the coach of a team giving a talk to his players  
At the start of the season, and he says, when you're up before dawn in the winter cold,  
And you're training in the rain when you'd rather be in bed,  
Then you're on the path to the premiership:  
*It's training like this that builds up the players and the team.*  
And when members of the opposing teams single you out,  
When they sledge you, and when they try dirty tricks on you,  
*Then that's a sign that you're playing well.*  
Don't be put off by these harsh realities, rather, be happy when these things happen,  
Not because they're pleasant – they most emphatically are not,  
But because these things show that you are on the path to victory.  
If you can get this picture, then I think you can get a grasp  
On how Jesus is beginning his great sermon to his disciples, to us.

OK, again, let's hear the one beatitude we're focusing in today:

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

What could this mean? What is Jesus talking about?

Well, as I said previously, in the Gospels Jesus talks a lot about *seeing*,  
He talks a lot about *how we use our eyes*,  
So, for example, later in the Sermon of the Mount Jesus says these words: **'The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!'** Matthew 6:22-23  
But again we could ask, what is Jesus talking about?  
Is he talking about literal eyes and literal seeing?  
How are we meant to understand all this?

Well, one way to understand what's going on  
Is to receive a parable that Jesus told later in Matthew's Gospel:  
The parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard.  
You may remember that Jesus told this parable in response to Peter,  
When he asked what he and his fellow disciples would get  
For leaving everything and following Jesus.

Now, on the one hand Jesus assures his disciples that God is just,  
That in the Kingdom of God there is justice for workers.  
But he also reveals to them that God is not just *just*,  
But that he is *good*, that he is *generous*.

You might remember that in the parable workers are hired to labour in the vineyard:  
Some are hired first, at dawn, for an *agreed wage*,  
Others are hired later, and assured of a *just wage*,  
And some are hired last, at the eleventh hour,

And are promised *no payment at all*.

At the end of the day the labourers receive their wages,

With those hired last paid first,

And they receive a whole day's wages.

Those hired throughout the day receive the same amount.

Now listen to how the parable ends: **Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, "These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat." But he replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?**

Now that last sentence, translated literally from the Greek says,

**Or is your *eye evil* because I am *good*?**

The landowner, God, is right in front of them,

But they cannot see who he is, that he is *good*, that he is *generous*,

Because they are thinking that life with God is only about *justice*.

Now God *is* just, he keeps his word, he deals fairly with human beings.

But God is *more than just*, he is *generous*,

And he shows his abundant goodness in showing mercy, in helping those in need,

In helping those *who do not deserve to be helped*.

In this way of reading the Beatitudes, the pure in heart

Are those who trust in the goodness, the generosity of God.

They see that God is not just *just*,

That he is not primarily like a strict boss, but that he is a true loving Father,

Who indeed has rules for his household,

But who shows his fatherly love in helping us in our need.

St Paul, in our epistle reading today, put it this way:

**He [God the Father] is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.'**

In other words, Jesus, the one who gave us the Beatitudes,

The one who gave us the Sermon on the Mount,

He himself showed to us the goodness, the generosity of God,

Not simply by telling us what to do,

But by graciously giving us the forgiveness of our debts with God.

By buying us out of slavery to sin, and by washing us with his word of peace with God,

So that we may draw near to God with eyes that see him: That see that God is love.

In Christ, the kingdom of God is near.

Listen to what Jesus says to you, It's his word that will cleanse your heart,

That will make it pure, so that you can see God, and get to know who he really is,

And live with peace and joy in his kingdom. In Jesus' name. Amen.