

# What if

Matthew 5:1-10

Sermon given at the funeral of Cathrine Baker

What if we look at the beatitudes not as if Jesus is telling us about these people, or about whether we should BE these people... but rather like He was tossing blessings around like lollies from a Pinata? After all, there's nothing particularly blessed about being poor or sad or weak. Imagine blessings scattered in His wake like confetti after a wedding. What a world that would be.

And that is the world He wanted us to imagine. Imagine a world full of love and faith; full of generosity and kindness. A world where the strong would step back and let the weak have a go. A world where God weeps when we are weeping.

The shortest chapter in the Bible is John 11:35, "Jesus wept"<sup>1</sup>. And that was for a friend. It might sound strange to say to weep is divine – and that's not just because we've been told WHO wept. It is because love makes us weep. In almost every faith in the world, God is represented by love.

It is the yin and yang of life – the balance of the spirit. We would not appreciate joy if we had never known sorrow. We would not be weeping today, if we did not love Catherine.

I know faith is tested. Our institutions have let us down many times. There are parts of church history and things done in the name of God that cannot be forgiven. It happened and it is still happening today. Religion has been, and is being used, for sectarian violence. It is a form of racism – not faith. Let's not mistake religion for God. Religion is a set of rules and rituals and structures designed by men which is supposed to *help* us worship and honour God. And mostly, it does. It also creates a hierarchy that is self-protecting. It will always be flawed as it was designed by humans.

Life can test our faith. Losing a child and watching them struggle through illness makes us ask, 'where is God in all of this?'. As a chaplain, I was always afraid of this question and yet, when asked, the answer was always obvious and always different.

God is love. The love that made these people cherish each other and bring life into the world. The unconditional love that child taught the parent. Jesus wept. He knew and accepted the pain and sorrow that came from living in this world, with these bodies. He took these on – for the love of God. He walks with us still.

---

<sup>1</sup> I know this because I failed this question on a trivia night

Would we choose not to know Cathy so that we would not weep today? No. Could we choose to live in a world with no faith and no God to walk with us? Probably ... but to do so would mean never knowing the joy of endless, unconditional love and never having the comfort of divine companionship. Knowing that someone, greater than us, bears witness.

After the big shebang, the birth and wedding of our long, or short, lives; after the band had gone home and the piper has played – imagine a lonely figure, dressed in rags, slowly walking a path and picking up the confetti. He reaches down and plucks the poor of spirit from their depths and puts them in his basket. He gathers to his arms those who are mourning, the meek, the hungry and those that are longing for some sort of divine relationship. He reaches out for the merciful and the innocents and puts his hand on the peacemakers.

The Beatitudes ask us to imagine that kind of world. Because the world we live in is already enriched by people like Catherine Baker. What if we see it through her eyes and give thanks.

Let it be so.

Rev Jean Shannon