

Blessed are...

Pitt Street Uniting Church, 2 February, 2020

A Contemporary Reflection by Rev Karyn Burchell- Thomas

Epiphany 4A

Micah 6: 1-8; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; Matthew 5: 1-12

This reflection can be viewed on You Tube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AK0rpNyaK1Q&t=2s>

(Referring to the pulpit behind her). It's no surprise why I'm standing here, and I need to move, 'cause I can't talk without walking.

What does it mean for people to be living in a time of transition and change? It means transition and change, doesn't it! You're in a time of transition and change now, between Ministers; (referring to Gareth and herself) a new, old couple on the block for a little while in the meantime, trying to walk along the road with you and be company on the way.

That's exactly what was happening in the time of Matthew when he wrote the words that we read today, the beatitudes: *blessed are those who...* Now if we read them in Luke, we would hear the blessings and the woes. Blessed are those who are, you know, sick, despised, broken, infirm and woe to you who think you've got it all together now 'cos, life's gonna change. But that was John. Ohh LUKE! I'm getting them confused see, my fifth mistake in the last 10 minutes - that's pretty good. So then, uh, that was Luke.

In Matthew though we've got a list of nine and it has a completely different focus altogether. It's not blessed are those of you who are weak and poor and infirm, it's blessed are you who care for them, who show compassion for them, who are peacemakers, who take notice of others, who are relationship builders. That's my paraphrase, but that's exactly what it's all about.

Jesus is up on the hill, we're told - with Matthew - a bit like a bit of a reflection of Moses and Sinai - one speaking with authority, this is God speaking to the people. And Jesus is speaking not to the crowds, although they're there, he's speaking to his disciples, the ones who are already part of the movement. The ones who are already there. The ones who have been following Jesus for some time and learning, and possibly, just possibly, starting to think they've got it together.

Just possibly thinking: *'we don't have to do anything more so long as we just stick with Jesus we'll be okay, we've got our, we've got our, you know, our 'opal ticket': we're right, we don't have to do anything more'*. Jesus is saying be transformed, become part of this vision that God has that we have in that Lord's Prayer; become part of God's vision.

To become part of God's vision is to become part of the people of God and the people of God are the people who - build relationships, build peace, build bridges, make change - and

the biggest change is often within us. It's not a personal gospel about our own personal salvation, it's always about our relationships and how we are in community.

So, what does that mean for a people in transition? Matthew wanted the people in transition in the time, in that early time of the church in the first century, to know that the history - Matthew's congregation or people were Jewish Christians, they weren't gentile Christians, they were Jewish Christians mostly - and so they were in a time of persecution and difficulty.

What do you do in a time of persecution and difficulty? You try and cling to the past and say '*Wasn't it better then?*' The rose-coloured glasses come on and maybe we just should just go back to the old ways. Maybe we should hold onto the laws and make the rules firmer, don't they hold us together?"

And Matthew was constantly about interpreting the law for today. Yes, let's fulfil all the laws - and the greatest law is love and compassion, because it will fulfil all the laws. I think I heard Jesus, or read of Jesus saying that once or fifty times.

So what did it mean for them in a time of transition? It was - interpret what this means for you today and be the people transformed to become the vision of God; this place where God holds all equally and holy together as a sacred people on earth, in relationship, in community.

So that's nice for then. What does it mean for us now? Pretty much the same. It challenges us at every moment to think, yes well we used to do it that way so that's how we've got to always do it. I'm sure nobody's ever said that here. (Touching her nose) I'll just hold my Pinocchio nose.

Or, we've got to make changes, 'cos this is the time for the big sweeping changes I've been wanting for the last ten years. That's never happened either, has it? (Again touching her nose) No, no. Of course not!

What it probably is, is about how we do community together. How do we find our way together and take hold of not our, not what we want individually - but what God might want for us and for this wider community into which we are called.

Every one of you is sacred and loved and unique and valued and to be blessed and every one of you has a calling to hold others as sacred and loved and valued and unique and to be blessed.

So, all decisions need to have that as their undergirding wisdom. All things that are put into place are to have that undergirding wisdom and any decisions to be made need to be made in an environment that allows that grace to be present.

(Referring to Gareth) We are privileged and delighted to be part of the journey with you.

God bless you.