

I want to begin with this word MOURN. Because the origins and wider meanings of this word are so very apt for the spirit of our age. To mourn, is to feel **and express** sorrow and grief. But it also comes, with a sense of regret and longing. And there's a beautiful word from scripture that captures the full sense of this. Which is, to ***lament***.

And in the way that the Spirit so often seems to work, all this was brought home to me in a conversation with my eldest daughter Jennie in the UK a few days back.

Inevitably we got talking about Ukraine and Covid. And she talked about her sense of loss, grief and an ongoing undercurrent of anxiety. She said its hard to name how I feel Dad, it's just there and never seems to go away.

She reflected on how we in NZ just seem to be entering the Omicron tunnel that they've gone through and come out the other end with all restrictions ended. But she said that in many ways for her, it was just the beginning of another journey. **How to re-find her spirit of joy. How to re-find her spirit of peace.**

It brought home to me one of the gifts of our Christian faith. It's not that we are immune to any of these feelings, because of course we're not. But it does mean that we have somewhere to take our loss and grief. Our ***lament***.

The promise of Jesus in this second Beatitude, is that those who mourn and lament, are actually blessed. WHY would this be? Well, a huge part of the answer is captured in this deeply insightful translation by Eugene Peterson...



“You’re blessed when you feel you’ve lost what is most dear to you. Because only then can you be embraced by the ONE, most dear to you.” We are blessed because God will comfort you says Jesus.

It's in the place of our deepest sorrows, those times when we can feel completely bereft, that we are embraced by the One, who scripture promises us over and over, is ultimately, **with us and for us**. God comforts us in the chaos. Even when it doesn't always feel like it.

One of the most powerful and profound truths of these beautiful Beatitudes is that they reveal to us the character God and what God cares about. Because remember the Beatitudes are given by Jesus in the sermon on the mount. And who are the kind of people in the crowd that have flocked to see Jesus and hear Jesus? Who is Jesus giving this good news sermon too?

Well, it's the sick, the lame, the blind the deaf and the tormented. It's the broken and hurting people. The people who are mourning a great deal of loss in their lives. But Jesus tells them, “God cares about you”.

For me this is one of the standout inspirations of St Paul. Here's this great man of faith who no-one can say doesn't know what it's like to truly suffer. And yet he's still able to say with all conviction and authenticity these words from **2 Corinthians 1...**

“Our God is the Father of mercy and the source of all comfort. 4 As God comforts us in all our troubles so we can bring comfort to others.” Which is another great insight on how we as the body of Christ can bless each other with the gift of encouragement and comfort.

What makes these words from Paul so powerful, is that Paul is so clearly trusting in the promise of Jesus Christ from **John 14:26. I will send the Holy Spirit in MY name and the Spirit will be your Advocate, your Counsellor and your comforter.**

As I said at the beginning, we want to experience this promise of Jesus in a very real and tangible way today. Because all of us are grieving a loss of some kind from this seemingly never-ending journey of uncertainty.

- Maybe you mourn the loss of precious times with loved ones that you can never get back. The loss of the freedom to travel to see your loved ones.
- Or the loss of the important rituals and occasions that mark the transition times of life and you know they'll never come round again. The end of school Balls. Graduation ceremonies. Leaving jobs and saying goodbye properly to colleagues. And of course, saying goodbye to loved ones at the end of their life.
- Maybe you mourn and grieve over the loss of close relationships which have been stretched to breaking point because of strongly held perspectives on covid. It's been one of the big casualties of this whole journey. You grieve over that differences that couldn't be worked through to a place of grace.
- How many of us are lamenting the reality, that this virus has taken us to places where at times, we've lost sight of each other's humanity and we wonder if we'll ever get back to the way of life, we took so much for granted.

And who of us at this moment, is **not** feeling a deep sense of lament at the state of our world. Grieving the suffering and injustice we see. Truly awful things that we hunger and thirst to see put right.

It's one of my biggest griefs I have to say. Christ came to break down the dividing walls of hostility on the Cross... and yet we continue as a humanity to build these dividing walls straight back up. Violence and power still with its deadly grip on the human heart.

Now more than ever, let the Church of Christ show the world the blessed ways of mercy and meekness, the blessed ways of peace and reconciliation. The blessed ways of and all that is pure and noble.

This has been a very long and sustained journey, and it's taken its toll on our soul and spirits. And there is still much to negotiate as we move forward.

So in this Holy season of Lent, can I offer 2 fundamental truths of our Christian faith, that are central to the promise of Jesus in this beatitude. And central to our spirit of Hope. **The first is this.**



CENTRAL TO THE SPIRITUALITY OF SCRIPTURE IS THE SPIRIT OF MOURNING AND LAMENT.

Do you ever feel a little guilty or reluctant to express your frustrations and even anger at God when you are truly struggling? Because all through Scripture, is the recognition that to mourn, grieve and lament is a natural and necessary part of our human condition. Scripture recognises that when we suffer, we will vent and voice our confusions, hurts and even our anger. And sometimes we will direct this at God. There's even a whole book called Lamentations.

A five-poem book full of Lament from the people of Israel over the destruction of Jerusalem and their whole way of life. So if you ever feel guilty at your venting to God, listen to the raw pain of these words...

He God) has broken my teeth with gravel and trampled me in the dust. This is a pretty graphic description of what it means to feel crushed.

17 I have been deprived of peace; I have forgotten what prosperity is.

19 The thought of my suffering and homelessness is bitter beyond words.

How many of you are feeling a sense of dislocation? A physical, emotional or spiritual sense of homelessness. **And how many of us identify with these final words?**

20 I will never forget this awful time, as I grieve over my losses.

This is Scripture recognising that when we suffer, we can even get to the point of asking questions about God's character. But none of this looked down on in scripture. In fact, it's the total opposite. Lament and grief are how we process emotions. To express what is so often inexpressible, is how we begin to find God's comfort.

Because paradoxically it's when we express our pain that we can begin the healing. Having exorcised all the pain and darkness we can begin to see a chink of light. We also know that to suppress our grief and frustrations, to deny or run away from it, isn't healthy and only leads to more hurt and trauma.

We must always remember that at the centre of our faith is the both the Cross and the Resurrection. We follow the one who is the suffering servant, and who heals the broken-hearted.

The second offering and final offering I want to give, that's central to our Christian faith and the promise of Jesus in this Beatitude is this.

**WE MUST SEE ALL THE EXPERIENCES OF OUR LIFE,
WITHIN THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE ETERNAL**

For me this is our Christian distinctive. This truth is a fundamental part of finding comfort in our mourning. We must see *all* of our human experience (the precious times and the times when our hearts are truly broken) ... within the perspective of the eternal. It's at the heart of the Beatitudes and the proclamation by Jesus Christ that "the Kingdom of God is near". The kingdom is now but it's also not yet. Resurrection and new creation have begun but they haven't fully arrived

Its why these words from today's passage in Revelation, I would say, are among the most important words of the whole bible for our Christian hope.

I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! God will live with them, and they will be his people. God will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or mourning or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever."

The big theological word for all this is *eschatology*. Meaning this is where all our human experience is headed. This is our eschatological hope. That God through Christ will wipe away all our tears and all the brokenness of our human condition. And listen to these final stunning words of this scripture passage....



And the one sitting on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new!” What I tell you is trustworthy and true.” I am the Alpha and the Omega—the Beginning and the End. To all who are thirsty I will give freely from the springs of the water of life.

This is a beautiful picture that we must engrave into the very core of our being. Because this is what the word ‘FAITH’ is all about. We believe in that that is not yet seen.

But do I always totally understand all of this?

No I don’t.

Sometimes I cry out myself, “how long God?” How long must we live in a world where the little children suffer and are sacrificed at the altar of adult folly, violence, and power. **“Why God can’t you just behold and make all things new... now”? Why wait any longer God.**

But if my own personal journey of the past few years has taken me anywhere. It’s taken me to the deeper place of surrender. To the deeper place of trusting. To the much deeper place of a simple faith. **That God must know what God is doing.**

So, I trust in the promise of these beautiful Beatitudes and the promises of Scripture. I trust in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ the Alpha and Omega. And I trust, that if I thirst for the way of mercy, thirst for the way of the peacemaker, and thirst for the way of justice and righteousness with a pure and gentle heart... then I will receive freely from the springs of the water of life.

So let’s have a time now as a way of response where bring all our grief, frustrations, pain and loss to the foot of the Cross.

**What do you most mourn today? What’s your heaviest sense of grief and loss?
What is it that you feel you’ve lost that is most dear to you, and now need to be embraced by the ONE who is most dear to you?**

As the music plays hear what the Spirit is evoking in the depths of you soul and then as you come forward for Communion, take a flower from the Cross and place it at the foot of the cross as symbol of your grief, loss and lament.

ON SCREEN AS PEOPLE COME FORWARD

**If this is not a place where tears are understood,
where do I go to cry?**

**If this is not a place where my spirits can take wing,
where do I go to fly?**

**If this is not a place where my questions can be asked,
where do I go to seek?**

**If this is not a place where my feelings can be heard,
where do I go to speak?**

**If this is not a place you’ll accept me as I am,
where do I go to be me?**

