

# Blessed are the Meek

*Lent – Journeying to the Cross*

*13 March 2022*

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## Readings

**Verse for the day:** Matthew 5:5 *Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth*

**Old Testament:** Psalm 27:13-14

**Epistle:** Romans 12:1-2 (J.B.Phillips translation)

**Gospel:** Matthew 11: 28-30

We had a beach holiday in January and one glorious morning I was walking on the sands –the tide was out and the cove that stretched for several kms looked deserted. But in the distance I could see a couple of horses coming towards me.

As we got closer I could make out 2 dogs running around with the horses, bounding into the surf, bounding out, racing up to the dunes and the grass and racing back onto the sand, sprinting ahead of the horses and then back into the surf again. They were having a marvellous time. Then I couldn't help notice that they were always perfectly together like synchronised swimmers –running in unison as if they were one. When the horses and their riders got close enough I could see that the dogs were joined by a chain to their collars about a metre long, that kept them very close to each other. The riders were farmers. They explained to me that they were training a young farm dog by making it shadow every movement of an older working dog who they were whistling commands to. The thing I noticed most was how happy the young dog was. His eyes were glued to the older – and at the slightest movement, with explosive enthusiasm he

would perfectly follow whatever the other dog did. When they bounded off I could see that the chain was slack because the young dog was so close to the other that there was no tension or resistance in it.

Jesus said - *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle (or meek) and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*<sup>1</sup>

He is using a familiar example from everyday life of his time, of a younger ox being bound to the older by the imposition of a heavy beam of timber (yoke) across the shoulders that gave the younger no choice but to follow the older. Like the young dog, these cattle were in a working relationship but a relationship that was imposed on them with no freedom of choice. These animals had been made to submit to their situations by their masters.

Using this example, Jesus offers a relationship to his listeners that is in distinct contrast because what he is offering is a relationship that begins as a matter of choice not compulsion.

.....*Come to me.*

His invitation is to participate in the Divine presence by surrendering to it. Participation in this relationship is therefore a matter of choice.

Jesus is thus gentle and whilst knowing that what he has to offer would be of great benefit and help he does not force or compel acceptance. He is deeply respectful of the God given human attribute of freedom to choose. He is a meek leader.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 11:28-30

Meekness and gentleness in the context of faith are interchangeable words. Meekness is not weakness.<sup>2</sup>

A meek and gentle person has a deep awareness of who they are in God's sight, a deep awareness of God's grace in their lives and so becomes a person who desires the same for others.

And so a meek and gentle person is a humble person who will seek to bring others into the same self assurance and peace that they have found for themselves by loving God. Such a person is a leader of others.

And look at who Jesus is making this invitation to.

*.....all you who are weary and burdened.*

The people on his mind are those who are worn out and tired of trying to make sense of things that don't seem right, who struggle from day to day in all sorts of ways and are empty of joy and have lost hope, who might be constantly worrying about their loved ones, who might be wrestling with anger and outrage at unfairness and injustice, drained of energy: always stressed.

Jesus is offering a relationship in which in all the tumblings of life that wear us out, there can be relief, rest, replenishment and healing for the soul. Jesus is a mental health therapist !

Jesus has just come out of 40 days in the wilderness and begins to preach, proclaiming according to Matthew ...*Repent* (meaning turn around and change direction), *for the kingdom of heaven has come near*<sup>3</sup>.... and the Sermon on the Mount gives a foundation of explanation to this. His people

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<sup>2</sup> Commentators explain that in original language *meekness* refers to inward attitudes of a person who does not resort to retaliation and selfjustification even if entitled to. One who controls and disciplines their inclinations to be angry, retaliate or bear resentment replacing these with gentleness and guidance – is meek. It implies a humble and high level of self awareness. See too Ps 37:8

<sup>3</sup> Mt 4:17

lived in stressful times for in their religious hierarchy and practices there was prejudice, injustice and discrimination, - and in their political structure there was military occupation and oppression. In this context Jesus teaches about the happiness and blessing that ought to be the experience of people in all sorts of circumstances. For example, take those who mourn. Amongst his listeners there would have been mothers still in mourning after 30 years from the shock and horror of having Herod's constables burst into their houses to slaughter their little 2 year old sons. The beatitudes are words of encouragement to people of the day, recognizing that there always will be those who are in dark places and also that there always will be people of unique virtue as well. Then he teaches about rejoicing in persecution, insults and abuse, - and about giving things away to help others, and turning the other cheek to someone who assaults you, and to top it all – loving your enemies ! This is a change in direction for how to live like none other, and to many it made no sense.

Lets's take the beatitude for today – *blessed are the meek (gentle) for they shall inherit the earth*<sup>4</sup>

The meek person is able to possess the blessings of a day, to look at what is before them and around them from day to day with humble gratitude and an appreciation of the good and the beautiful that can be found both in people and in creation. Being meek enables one to see through lenses that filter out the dark and let in the light and in this way the meek can be thankful for life. The meek are able to live in a ruffled world with positivity, belief, hope and optimism.

The meek thus possess the power to love their life here and now without letting the wonders of God be obliterated by weariness, sorrow, anger, frustration and confusion.

In that sense – the meek inherit their earth.

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<sup>4</sup> Mt 5:5

But there is the prophetic sense too in what Jesus is teaching.

The blessedness and happiness promised by him in these verses is pointing futuristically to the time when the kingdom of heaven is not just near, but is here !! Praise God for the good news that in the Cross Jesus renders evil powerless, breaks down the walls of human arrogance, selfishness and cruelty and opens the way for a new order where the earth and all of life will be forever in the gentle but firm hands of the meek.

How the world today is crying out for meek leaders.

Lent reminds us of the 40 days that Jesus spent in the wilderness – a time in which he would have plumbed the depths of who he was and what God's purposes were for his life. He had to reach the point where by his own choice he would willingly surrender to God and become as one with God, a claim that he himself would soon make to his listeners.<sup>5</sup> Don't think his surrender to the Father's will would have come easily for throughout those 40 days the cross would have been standing tall in his mind. There was a foreboding consequence that he was committing to as he fasted and prayed in the wilderness – the ultimate consequence of laying down his life. St Paul recognized this:

*.....being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!*<sup>6</sup>

So Lent can be a time for us to seek to know God better and drill down through the layers of our lives so that we can know ourselves better and commit to fresh or deeper surrender as we journey further. We can bring out into the open before God, our traits of independence and willfulness, and those things we keep secret or push away, and find the blessing of relief and comfort that is promised. The young dog had learned to stop

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<sup>5</sup> John 10:30

<sup>6</sup> Phil 2:8

tugging at the chain and be close to the leader. The key to discovering the relief and comfort that Jesus offers is to stop straining at the chain, to surrender the levels and layers of one's life, but always remembering that the path of such surrender lasts throughout all our days. We are work in progress. Lent is a good time to remember this.

Trying to be meek so that we can be blessed, like trying to be humble or trying to be loving, will always leave us disappointed and stressed because it will feel as if it is up to us to create the relationship with Christ that we seek, and we fail. Whilst there is nothing wrong with putting in effort by trying our very best to improve (after all we are asked to love with all our strength), we mustn't think that our efforts will create the relationship. Remember that being in a relationship with Christ is an antidote to stress. Jesus affirmed in his invitation to come, that the relationship we seek already exists as the gift of God. We do not have to create it. If it was up to me that could be dangerously close to putting me back in the centre and making it all about me! Our work and efforts to be Christ-like should not be so as to get us blessed, but as a thank offering for being blessed. We follow Jesus not to be blessed. We follow Jesus because we are blessed.

The young dog had learned that there was no effort in following when he kept close to the lead dog and because of his closeness he behaved just like the leader. Surrendering to Jesus immerses us in his presence so that we might behave as he does without even knowing it. Being close to Jesus is like being soaked in a marinade that flavours our attitudes and seeps into our spiritual DNA so that we bring difference to the way we live, like salt and light, without even knowing it. Dallas Willard puts it this way<sup>7</sup>:

*The kind of people who have been so transformed by their daily walk with God that their good deeds naturally flow from their character*

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<sup>7</sup> *The Divine Conspiracy* : Willard, Fount Press, Ch 6 "Don't let the left hand know"

*are precisely the kind of people whose left hand does not notice what their right hand is doing.*

*.....they are absorbed in the love of God and hardly notice their own deed and rarely remember it.*

So this Lent period explore another level of surrender to Jesus so that his gentleness might be ours and that in our walk with him, his life would more naturally flow from ours. Make fresh your choice to draw near to him and learn of him for he is a meek and humble teacher.

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