

GOOD FRIDAY SERMON 2022 FINAL

As you came in this morning you will have passed the very powerful and evocative sculpture of Christ being taken down from the Cross. It's by one of our former parishioners John Ewing... and it reminds us of something crucially important.

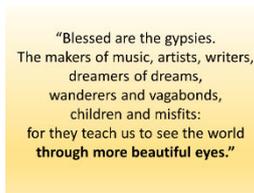
That great art (be it a painting, music, poetry or sculpture), has a way of bypassing the barriers and limits of our rational left side brain, and can open us up to different ways of seeing and being. Because great art it can reflect back to us, a greater awareness of who we are and what we are capable of being.

Its why each year I like to show the images we've just watched. Because these images when set alongside beautiful music, can evoke so much of the provocative spirit of the Cross. It's why I love these 2 quotes.



“Music expresses that which cannot be said and on which it is impossible to be silent.” Shakespeare **“Art is an international language understood by all.”** Igor Babailov

But in the spirit of the beautiful Beatitudes, which we have been exploring, these are probably my favourite words.



“Blessed are the gypsies. The makers of music, artists, writers, dreamers of dreams, wanderers and vagabonds, children and misfits: for they teach us to see the world through more beautiful eyes.”

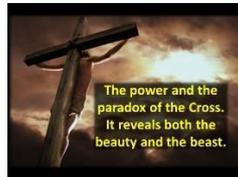
See for me THIS is JESUS CHRIST.

- Jesus was a **wanderer** who had no address and no place to call His home.
- Make no mistake, Jesus was an **artist**. He was weaver of prophetic **dreams**, a story teller, who **painted pictures with his words** of a new vision for humanity, he called the Kingdom of God.
- He **made music** by singing a healing symphony of hope, He called ‘good news.’ The gospel.
- He was a **misfit**, who said misfit things like **“do not hinder the children because the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”** Those with a child-like spirit.

But most of all, most of all, Jesus went round teaching people to see the world through more beautiful eyes. To see the beauty of mercy, the beauty of forgiveness. Of what it means to be an instrument and a channel of God's peace. The beauty of the Beatitudes.

If someone were to ask me, "how has Jesus Christ, most changed me? I couldn't say it any better than this. Jesus taught me how to see the world **through more beautiful eyes.**

As much as anything else this is how I understand the saving power of the Cross. Salvation means to save and to HEAL. Well, seeing the world through **the more beautiful eyes of Christ** has been a crucial part of my saving and healing. For the here and now and into eternity.



And herein, is both the power and the paradox of the Cross. Because the Cross reveals both the beauty and the beast of which we are all capable.

EVERYTHING in our human condition that is ugly, dark and that diminishes us, is on display at the Cross.

- Religious and political subterfuge from corrupt powers. Does it ever goes away?
- Men with so much earthly privilege and power, but so weak in heavenly character.
- People going to ANY lengths to protect their vested self-interest. Producing false witnesses with false information, to make false accusations against an innocent man.
- Jesus' own friends declare their undying loyalty but when the going gets a little too tough, a little too dangerous – self-preservation kicks in and the noble cause gets ditched.
- The baying, bullying mob mentality searching for the scapegoat. Someone to project our hurts and fears upon. And all of us are capable of all of this. I can be both the beauty and the beast in the space of a day. **This is our human sin.**

BUT THERE IS ALSO THE REDEEMING BEAUTY OF THE CROSS.

Here is a just man, a sinless man, a man who has done no wrong... prepared to die for everything he has taught and lived for in His short life.

Everything that IS true, pure, noble and just.

Everything that has helped us to see through more beautiful eyes.

And Jesus takes this commitment all the way to the Cross.

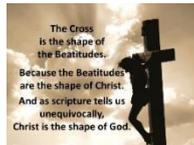
SO how telling, how appropriate, that the Beatitude we arrive at for this Holy Day is... **Blessed are those who are persecuted for doing what is right for theirs is the Kingdom of the heavens. Christ on the Cross**

And what the Cross did at Calvary - what it has continued to do for 2,000 years – and what it still does for you and I today ... is Confront us. Confront us with a choice and a challenge.

**Do we choose the beauty, or do we choose the beast?
And for these times in which we now live, I would suggest,
that the choices we choose, are now urgent and critical.**

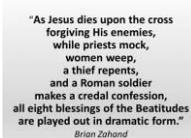
Is there anything that this world needs now - more desperately- than to have more people who can see the world **through the more beautiful, transformed eyes of Jesus Christ. Only then can we be the change in ourselves, that we wish to see in the world.**

The real gift of this Lent journey for me, is how we've gone much deeper into the beauty of the Beatitudes. And it's taken me to a place of realising something I've never fully connected before.



**That the Cross is the shape of the Beatitudes.
Because the Beatitudes are the shape of Christ.
And as scripture tells us unequivocally, Christ is the shape of God.**

Brian Zahnd captures it like this....



As Jesus dies upon the cross forgiving His enemies, while priests mock, women weep, a thief repents, and a Roman soldier makes a credal confession, all eight blessings of the Beatitudes are played out in dramatic form.

So on this Holy day, let's spend a few moments exploring this.

Blessed are the poor in spirit is Jesus in Gethsemane.



Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted.

Who do we see mourning at the Cross? We see the faithful women who have followed Jesus from Galilee. **And who are the first to receive comfort on Easter Morning the first day of the new creation?** It's the very same women. And I really liked the way Liz Fairgray put it in her moving Beatitude reflection... we can all be a ministry of comfort to each other. You and I helping to make Jesus' promise fulfilled.



Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.

We live in a world, a culture that screams daily, blessed are the powerful and the privileged and Pilate is the epitome of this. Jesus versus Pilate is the shape of power versus the shape of the meek. The servant heart.

But which shape inherits the earth?

How many despots, dictators and power-hungry politicians have we seen come and go? And what do they inherit? Infamy, death and the judgement of God to come.

But how many people (ordinary people) have followed in the gentle, servant-hearted footsteps of Jesus Christ, and in every arena of life, they've planted kingdom seeds... built kingdom legacies, of truth, beauty and goodness for generations to inherit? **And which inheritance lasts into eternity?**



Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness and justice.

When Jesus overturns the tables of exploitation and exclusion in the Temple, he overturns any notion that God wants us to be 'nice' and avoid conflict when faced with injustice. **If injustice exists and there's no anger in our hearts, then injustice persists.** Think of our Anglican confession. In good we have done and the good we Have NOT done. Apathy is not the shape of the Cross.



And what about the beauty of mercy?

Two thieves hang next to Jesus on the cross. One of them sneers at Jesus. **"If you are Christ then save yourself"**. The other thief offers words of mercy to Christ. **"We deserve our punishment, but this man has done no wrong. Remember me Jesus when you come into your kingdom."** And what is Jesus' response? **Truly I tell you, today you will be with ME in paradise"**. Mercy shown – mercy received.



Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.

And here's a real challenge from the Cross!

Who sees God more clearly at the Cross?

Is it the religious leaders who **claim the authority of God** but are so blinded by their own spiritual pride, they can't see the presence of God right in their very midst?

Or is it the pagan Roman soldier? A man who made no claims of spiritual insight but who looks at Jesus hanging from the Cross and declares **"truly this man is the Son of God."** Who sees the world through the more beautiful eyes?



And ALL of this brings us to what for me, is the most compelling beatitude of them all. In the dark shadow of Ukraine and the spirit of this age, here is challenge from Jesus Christ, that we as a humanity have never managed to grasp.

Here is the starkest of difference between the shape of our ways and God's ways.

And it's caused more destruction and more suffering than any other of our human SIN. Our propensity for violence.

When Jesus tells us that it's the peacemakers, the shalom bringers who are on the right road to God... not only does he live this out fully on the Cross, he takes us to a place that not many are prepared to go.

Look at all the violent provocation that confronts Jesus Christ at the Cross. Surely this justifies some righteousness retaliation. But what does Jesus say to you and me? **"My kingdom is not the way of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest."** ... If I wanted, I could call on my Father for legions of angels"

And when he's being arrested in Gethsemane, Jesus says... **2"Peter put your sword away" And here's the key line... "Because all who draw the sword will die by the sword.**

Isn't this the challenge of the Cross that humanity has never managed to grasp...

That we cannot and we will not, ever defeat the beast by becoming the beast.

Violence always begets violence. Hatred begets hatred. Division begets division.

"If revenge is what you are after, start digging two graves. "

Isn't this why Jesus pleads... **"Father forgive them, for they know not what they do".**

And the truth of this DAY, is that we should all KNOW this?

We see it with our own eyes every day and through all the pages of human history.

Show me one instance where the shape of tribalism, scapegoating, condemnation, exclusion, violence and revenge and have led to a better, more noble, more Christ-like humanity.

Then show me where the ways of mercy, love, compassion and peace have been at work, and I'll show you endless stories of changed lives and healed lives. I'll show you **a people who see the world through more beautiful eyes.**

The shape of the Cross, the shape of the Beatitudes, the shape of Christ.



In a moment we'll have an opportunity to come forward and receive an anointing with oil. There's also an opportunity to light a candle. Write and prayer and leave it at the foot of the Cross. We want this to be time for sacred space. A time to reflect.

- What are you carrying that you want to bring to the cross?
- Where do you need to find healing, to find peace and shalom?
- Where do you feel that you've lost a little of your capacity to see the world through the more beautiful eyes of Christ.

Hear what the Spirit is saying you on this Holy Day – Lets pray

**Loving God as we prepare to come to the foot of the Cross
and to receive our anointing with oil**

Let us remember with humility and gratitude

That Christ took up our pain and bore our suffering,

He was pierced for our transgressions,

Crushed for our iniquities

We all, like sheep, have gone astray,

Each of us has turned to our own way;

But by his wounds, Christ's wounds we are now healed