

SERMON: 17 February 2019 – Mrs Sarah Finegan

“Making Space for Vulnerability” (Luke 6 - The Beatitudes)

Dividing by 0 on a calculator + ERROR CODE story

I get a massive ERROR code in my brain when I read the so called “blessing” statements. WHAT, in order to laugh I better start crying, in order to be joyful I have got to have people exclude me and make fun of me. I’ve got to have people that want to persecute me. I have got to be starving. I’ve got to be poor. Hang on a minute - these statements are just not logical. And hang on a minute God, I am not sure I want to be part of this special blessing that Luke remembers Jesus talking about.

As usual, when we encounter the scriptures we must ask ourselves “what kind of writing is this”? This is not a letter, or a poem or law or historical fact but it is actually the notes from a sermon Luke heard Jesus give. Actually, the bit we are reading today is actually only the opening remarks of Jesus. Luke also gives us information on the crowd that Jesus was speaking to. He was speaking to a huge variety of people from different cultures, religions and social backgrounds. The technical term is MISHMASH.

Making a space for real human need

The beatitudes often get misused to be used as some sort of philosophical calculator of how to be blessed by God. Jesus was not doing that. He was announcing something, he was drawing a crowd, he **was making a space** so that THE MISHMASH all knew he was talking to them. He was announcing the type of people he wanted to talk to, the hungry, the grieving, the poor, the persecuted. These were the people Jesus could see right in front of him. He was talking to a real audience who had real problems. Have you ever watched the street performers at the festival? Drawing the crowd and engaging the crowd is the first job. So if you have ever approached the beatitudes in complete confusion, don’t be. The beatitudes are firstly an announcement or an advert for who Jesus was talking to. It seems Jesus is more interested in talking to the people who are not “sorted”. Imagine if Jesus was doing the sermon today - he knew the need that you have on your heart. He would probably say blessed are you who.....you fill in the blank.....

Jesus was showing us the kind of space that he wanted to move amongst. He wanted to talk with needy people. It would be really daft to read this and go off take a vow of poverty to be blessed, to pursue weeping as a project in order to be blessed, or try and drum up some enemies of social/religious group or starve yourself to be blessed. That would be trying to take on those problems belonging to those people back then. We have got our own real problems that Jesus meets us in.

Making space to see my own need and vulnerability

Most of the needs Jesus was addressing back then were things that gave real shame in that culture and the people at that time would have seen these problems as outward signs that God had not blessed them. Jesus was turning that all on its head. He might as well have said “ if you think you have not been blessed by God – you are the very person I want to be friends with.

Quite often we all carry a condition secretly in ourselves that we believe that if that was not there God would love us more.

Sometimes we have some sort of points system or spiritual mathematics inside us that tells us ... If only I

-was more spiritual, prayed more, believed with more conviction, did not do that thing that I always do...

I would be blessed by God. Me plus that thing = blessing.

When we encounter the beatitudes today as an announcement that God blesses needy people we must admit that is a wrong belief or an ERROR.

We cannot earn God's favour,

If we can devise any logical pattern from the beatitudes it seems that God is attracted to lack rather than anything that we already have. LACK IS MORE ATTRACTIVE TO THE EYES OF GOD THAN ANYTHING THAT WE THINK WE HAVE. We might mistakenly take that to the opposite extreme as well and assume that we need to lack something in order to be blessed. Crazy people start starving themselves, pursuing poverty, finding enemies just to say they will be blessed. That is ridiculous.

Me – something = blessing ERROR

Me as I am = blessed: this is very hard for the human mind to accept – let alone the human soul but if we do not accept it we will never be able to live the transformation that will spring out of that.

You as you are = blessed. That is why the gospel is good news!

And let us be honest with ourselves we don't need to pursue lack. We are already lacking in many things. We don't need to go after some outward poverty to show to the religious world that we deserve God's blessing. We are born in a human body and we lack things all the time. At this very minute me and you are in need. It doesn't matter what the need looks like – enough money to pay the mortgage , the peace of mind about an adult child who is struggling, the hurt of a broken relationship, the uncertainty of doubt, the fear of never fulfilling another's expectations, ... you can add yours to the list in science. Allow God to hear your need.

I have met a few people in my life, not many, who claim to have everything. These are people that I struggle to relate to or connect with at any deep level. They don't appear to embody the complexity there is to human life where one moment we feel content and the next moment we are wrestling internally with our needs. Sometimes we deny our needs to protect ourselves from them and the fragility of what it means to be alive. There is something incredibly beautiful about a human being that can open themselves up to their own needs and be comfortable in their own skin. They seem to be the people through history that are most able to come alongside another in need and make a connection that creates belonging.

Brene Brown: researcher on shame and vulnerability. I like to think about vulnerability as a need which is expressed to another or maybe - Our insides shown on the outside.

“Vulnerability is the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, courage, empathy, and creativity. It is the source of [hope](#), empathy, accountability, and authenticity. If we want greater clarity in our purpose or deeper and more meaningful spiritual lives, vulnerability is the path.”

In Luke 6 we see a massive contrast between the vulnerable in verses 20-23 and the people who have it all 24-26. Jesus seems to be showing us a deep spiritual truth. If we recognise the reality of our own needs we can know God present with us but if we deny our own vulnerability and convince ourselves that we are sorted we turn our backs on the truth and preach a false reality.

I would like to suggest today that we must get to grips with this truth personally in order to make real human connections. We all know that a friend that we can share our worst moments with are our truest

connections. It applies to our relationship with God as well AND If we have not experienced this connection with God we need to learn to share our most needy places with him.

Just the other week there I had a very powerful experience with God where he showed me that I am still very frightened of what happens to me after I die. That whole week I chose not to run from it, deny it or preach to myself. I just told God about my fears raw and unfiltered. I walked into my deepest doubts and still felt his loving connection. God is not frightened of our “spiritual poverty” – after all Jesus said Blessed are those who are poor in spirit. Blessed are those who just cannot “believe enough” today. I am on your side. Maybe you know what I am talking about. Maybe you have had days and moments, long seasons when you just can’t believe enough. Me too, it’s okay. God is on your side.

If you get that then I hope you can really hear the last thing about vulnerability I want to say.

Preaching Jesus with a tone of vulnerability

We live in a culture that susses out credibility everywhere. There is so much fake news, exaggeration and lies floating around that people are naturally distrustful of what other people are saying, especially people in power and this includes religious power. As a reaction to this I think we have two choices of how we preach. We can continue with preaching with a tone of certainty, like we know all the answers and if you just give us time and listen we can give you the meaning of life OR we can try and strike a new tone.

If we continue to choose the tone of certainty in preaching Christ we choose to side ourselves with the people who believe we have it all sorted in verses 24-26 and we preach a dishonesty akin to as Jesus described the “false prophets”.

We need to speak to people about our faith with a tone of vulnerability admitting that we couldn’t possibly know all the answers.

Brene Brown says that: Faith is a place of mystery, where we find the courage to believe in what we cannot see and the strength to let go of our fear of uncertainty.” –

In this culture of uncertainty a gospel that is so certain is viewed with great suspicion and falls on deaf ears. When we talk with our friends we must be

willing to enter into mystery and uncertainty with another person. Not in pretence but around the areas we are genuinely searching around.

2 conversations about death and fear and God

People have said sharing faith is like one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread but what if the conversation is more like 2 beggars searching for bread together.

One can only do this if he can admit that he really knows very little and nothing is certain. People who can do this can let go of religion and search the deep mysteries of what is still unknown will create spaces for people to explore together what it means to be human and stumble into God.

The Church worldwide must be willing to lay down their corporate addiction to certainty in order to walk with humanity in all its uncertainty. Blessed are those who move in conversations of uncertainty because they will meet open hearts and minds. Woe to people who cling to certainty as they encounter deaf ears.

The power shifts from me giving something to “us” in a place of wonder together. Both in need relying on a God who says those are the types of people who will know his solidarity.

“People who’ve had any genuine spiritual experience always know that they don’t know. They are utterly humbled before mystery. They are in awe before the abyss of it all, in wonder at eternity and depth, and a Love, which is incomprehensible to the mind.” ROHR

“Faith does not need to push the river because faith is able to trust that there is a river. The river is flowing. We are in it.” ROHR

Or as I like to say it. Faith means that I don’t need to prove God in any conversation if he is TRUE and I believe he is we can stumble upon his truth over and over again.