

Utter Foolishness

(Preached @ Footscray Baptist Church by Cheryl Williams, January 29th, 2023 - Matt 5:1-12 & ! Cor 1:18-31)

The cross.

Symbol of our faith, central in our understanding to who God is, who Jesus was and who we are.

The cross, according to Paul is foolishness to non-believers.

Preaching Christ crucified was foolishness. The Greeks valued wisdom and rationality, so instead of a crucified God, they would have expected God to send a politically powerful, worldly and wealthy person to lead the people. A crucified Messiah made no sense to the Jews either. First, crucifixion was a curse and secondly the Messiah was meant to be an un-suffering servant. A crucified Messiah was nonsense.

The sermon on the mount is consistent with such understandings. A God who valued humility, peacemaking and desiring the less fortunate to be blessed would have sounded absurd to those gathered to hear Jesus preach. The picture Jesus painted was of an upside down kingdom, a kingdom where those viewed by the world as insignificant are the ones who are blessed. I suspect the religious status quo were horrified as they listened, but the ordinary folk, the poor, the hungry, the doubter, the outsider would have stood up a bit straighter that day. This passage to me has echoes of Mary's song we read just before Christmas, a vision of a world turned on its head.

Even before Jesus, many of our ancestors in the faith were seen by others as fools. A woman who both laughed at God and then had the audacity to believe she would be blessed by God and given a child in her old age. A man who began to build a boat when there was no sign of rain and yet saved his family and the animals. A believer who was ready to follow God, except he didn't want to go where he was called, so he runs away, ends up in the belly of a whale and in the very place he was running away from. A man who has a conversation with a burning bush and then hands the community ten rules to live by. Then a young shepherd boy who takes on a giant of a man with just a slingshot and wins and will become a King.

Jesus not only outlined the crazy list to the people, he then went on and lived it. He told his followers to love their enemies, to believe like children, to take up their cross. He engages in a theological conversation with a Samaritan woman with a checkered past at the well, he lets another woman wash his feet with her hair, he calls a bunch of burly fishermen to be his followers, he asks rich people to give away all their assets and says God is like the father who welcomes home the wayward child who has wasted half his wealth, by throwing a party.

And his followers continued to live out the craziness – trying to walk on water only to lose their focus and begin to sink. A betrayer who is still loved by Jesus. A denier who is forgiven by Jesus. A sceptic whose questions are taken seriously by Jesus.

And we friends are called to live out such foolishness as well. I remember once coming across a Christian group who referred to themselves as a ship of fools, maybe that is who the church is called to be.

These blessings or beatitudes are also our agenda and will appear to be in our world utter foolishness.

I wonder how you understand them in 2023.

Let me share with you a kind of reworking them that might help them be more understandable in 2023.¹

Fortunate are the humble-minded, they will live in the best possible world.

Fortunate are the mournful, they will face the future with strength.

Fortunate are the non-violent, they will govern the earth.

Fortunate are those whose passion is for justice, they will receive justice.

Fortunate are the compassionate, they will receive compassion.

Fortunate are the undivided in heart, they will commit to the way of Jesus.

Fortunate are the peace-makers, they will forgive and reconcile humanity.

Fortunate are those in danger for living Jesus' way, they will be freed from fear to follow him.

Yep, utter foolishness in the eyes of the world, seemingly impossible. But it isn't impossible, simply because the God we follow is a God of love and we are called to love and act in the same way.

Let me conclude with these blessings, reworked as 'Beatitudes for the Weird'.² Hopefully you find yourself somewhere in the list.

Blessed are the weird people – poets, misfits, writers, mystics, heretics, painters and troubadours – for they teach us to see the world through different eyes.

Blessed are the those who embrace the intensity of life's pain and pleasure – for they shall be rewarded with joy³.

Blessed are you who see beauty in ugliness – for you shall transform the vision of how the world might be.

Blessed are the bold and whimsical – for their imagination shatters ancient boundaries of fear for us all.

¹ From 'The Jesus Creed' by Lorraine Parkinson

² Found on Rex A Hunt's website for Jan 29, 2023

³ Changed words from 'uncommon ecstasy' to joy, to suit this congregation

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Blessed are you who are mocked for unbridled expression of love in all its forms – because your kind of crazy is exactly the freedom for which the world is unconsciously begging.

Blessed are those who have endured breaking by life – for they are the resplendent cracks through which the light shines.

Go in peace and turn the world on its head as you put people first, blessed fools of Footscray Baptist. Amen.