

Year A, November 5, 2017  
All Saints Sunday  
Christ Church, Mexia

The gospel reading for All Saints in Year A is the beginning of that part of scripture commonly known as the Sermon on the Mount, the part often called the Beatitudes. The message was countercultural when it was delivered, and it is countercultural today.

Bishop Wright recalls the movie many years ago that portrayed the attempts of US pilots to break the sound barrier in flight, something we take for granted today, but it was very difficult to achieve in 1947. According to the movie, the pilot who was successful in flying at Mach 1 had figured out he must work the controls backwards when he exceeded the speed of sound – if you pushed the stick forward, the nose went up instead of down for example. Chuck Yeager, the actual pilot to break the sound barrier, insisted it wasn't like that, but if we accept the movie version, we can see that Jesus is doing the same thing in these few words. He is turning things upside down relative to the world of the first century, or right side up if you look at it from the perspective of the kingdom of God.

Our Bishop, Andy Doyle, wrote in the June 2017 *Dialog*: "A missional church is forever pondering how we engage with, reject, immerse or flee from the cultural context in which we find ourselves. We believe that God is reconciling the world to God's Self and that we are active participant's in God's mission." He goes on to comment on Niebuhr's book, *Christ the Transformer of Culture*. "Here God is clearly seen as being above culture: judging, acting, moving to transform people, culture and the world. Theologians like John Calvin and F.D. Maurice represent this position. Creation is broken, but God is moving within culture to redeem and make all things new." Good words to ponder.

Returning to Bishop Wright and the gospel text... "The word for 'wonderful news' is often translated 'blessed,' and part of the point is that this is God's wonderful news. God is acting in and through Jesus to turn the world upside down, to turn Israel upside down, to pour out lavish 'blessings' on all who turn to him and accept the new thing that he is doing. ...the point is not to offer a list of what sort of people God normally blesses. The point is to announce God's new **covenant**." (Matthew for Everyone, p. 37)

But what does that mean? Let me continue with Bishop Wright's words: "We are to pray (as we do every Sunday in here) that God's

kingdom will come, and God's will be done, 'on earth as it is in heaven.' The life of heaven - the realm where God is already king - is to become the life of the world, transforming the present 'earth' into the place of beauty and delight that God always intended. *And those who follow Jesus are to begin to live by this rule here and now.* That's the point of the Sermon on the Mount, and these 'beatitudes' in particular." (*Ibid*) Now that may not seem right to you based on our cultural norms, especially those of late, and it may seem daunting to achieve, even if we accept it is the right way. So, what can we do?

Warren Bennis, well known management consultant and leadership guru, wrote in *Why Leaders Can't Lead*: "Magnanimous and/or humble people are notable for their self-possession. They know who they are, have healthy egos, and take more pride in what they do than in who they are. They take compliments with a grain of salt and take intelligent criticism without rancor. Such people learn from their mistakes and don't harp on the mistakes of others. They are gracious winners and losers. Tennis star John McEnroe is neither magnanimous nor humble. Albert Schweitzer and Albert Einstein were. Today there are far more McEnroes than there are Schweitzers and Einsteins, and self-possession declines as self-impertinence rises. True leaders are, by definition, both magnanimous and humble." (Morgan, p 456)

Scott Bullard believes that humility is the common thread that runs through the beatitudes. He points out that the crux of the work by the likes of Saint Anselm, Martin Luther, John Calvin and John Wesley is that all of us are called to become fully human, as Jesus was fully human. We don't think about that much; we just assume that we are fully human. But we aren't, if we don't have humility.

As Bishop Andy says: "At the end of the day, faithfulness to God's mission is not about choosing the right model for engaging the culture. It is about being the right sort of missionary..." And a big part of being the kind of person who can impact our world, who can lead others, while being fully human, is to be humble. As John Ruskin said: "I believe that the first test of a truly great man (or woman) is his (her) humility. I do not mean by humility, doubt of (one's) own power. But really great people have a curious feeling that the greatness is not in them, but through them. And they see something divine in others and are endlessly, foolishly, incredibly merciful."

Br. Robert L'Esperance observes that: "Saints were men and women who understood the challenge of living the gospel in the context of their own place and time. They are remembered because they lived it

with imagination and devotion. They used what they had been given to live their lives into the freedom of the kingdom." And in the words of the hymn – "and you can be one too!"

Now if you're having difficulty let me put the subject into more secular terms:

If you can start the day without caffeine,  
If you can get going without pep pills,  
If you can always be cheerful, ignoring aches and pains,  
If you can resist complaining and boring people with your troubles,  
If you can eat the same food everyday and be grateful for it,  
If you can understand when your loved ones are too busy to give you anytime,  
If you can overlook it when those you love take it out on you when through  
no fault of yours something goes wrong,  
If you can take criticism and blame without resentment,  
If you can ignore a friend's limited education and never correct him,  
If you can resist treating a rich friend better than a poor friend,  
If you can face the world without lies and deceit,  
If you can conquer tension without medical help,  
If you can relax without liquor,  
If you can sleep without the aid of drugs,  
If you can say honestly that deep in your heart you have no prejudice  
against creed, color, religion or politics,  
Then, my friend you are almost as good as your dog.

And it has been said that all dogs go to heaven! So be humble.

May all of the saints who have gone before us rest in peace.

In the name of the One God - the Creator, the Word, and the Spirit.  
Amen.