



**Beatitudes**  
**Rev Cate Thorn**

Epiphany 4

Micah 6:1-8; Matthew 5:1-12

1 February 2026

Today we've heard Matthew's version of the Beatitudes. How many of you hold the Beatitudes dear? I've always struggled with the Beatitudes. I know many of my colleagues are delighted when the Beatitudes comes round and it's their turn to preach. I'm not sure exactly why but it's as if there's an easy feel good factor that puts me on alert. As if we take them as a guide for how to win in the God quest. Ways to get the reward, all you have to do is decide which reward you want and then go about enacting the behaviour required. Shades of a capitalist approach to gospel living, expected rewards for type work. I know, perhaps a tad cynical. Which isn't to suggest such intent resides **within** the text, more how it's been tamed for comfort. As reflected in the startling words penned this week by Matt Moberg, Minneapolis pastor from his context:

"Stop using scripture like chloroform.

Stop pretending Jesus was crucified  
because he preached good vibes and personal growth.

"You don't get to quote scripture like a lullaby  
while injustice stays wide awake.

You don't get to ask God to "heal the land"  
if you won't even look at the wound.

"The scriptures you love weren't written to keep  
things calm. They were written to set things right."<sup>1</sup>

Rather than intended for comfort and surety, perhaps the Beatitudes are to challenge us. Challenge us to live according to the heart of the law not just it's letter. For the gospel words to move from our heads, from being a good idea, to being the way we live, something has to give or we have to give up something. How are we to move these things from a safe ideological ideal to an embedded, indwelt way of being? What do I mean?

Let me ask you, while you are in reasonable health, state of being, while your world is pretty much on keel these words are grand, inspirational, aspirational

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<sup>1</sup> <https://prayerandpolitiks.org/articles-essays-sermons/let-the-poets-speak/>

even. But say you find yourself unexpectedly, suddenly injured, disabled in some way that requires medical, surgical intervention. Or your world's turned on its head through a sudden death, ending of relationship, through the actions of corrupt and abusive government, loss of livelihood, or house or destruction of your environment through natural disaster, how do these words ring? When the structure and surety of your world that provides you with standing, self-understanding, purpose, direction and meaning is seriously compromised, if not critically injured - how do these words ring in your ear? Their meaning, inspiration and aspiration, if not disappeared, can be like faded wash in the background, a memory of the way things used to be. Somehow they don't touch you, don't touch the reality of your lived existence, they don't reach in and meet you - it's as if they're pleasurable, pleasant words of privilege, distant from you, not words speaking to the gnarly guts of what your life is now.

I wonder if this is because they're words in our head, not our heart. For them to get anywhere near our heart maybe we have to let them go. Let go of them trying to mean or be something we think is important. Let go of what we think they mean. Let them speak **to** us, reveal to us the truth they speak - for they speak of the way things are, not future but present a no ting. And come to recognise them not because we **think** of it but because it is indeed our experience.

Ironically, even if it's a desirable, gospel recommended prerogative to live differently, be oriented differently, I'm not sure it's something we can just decide to do. In his book 'Insurrection' Peter Rollins, quotes an anecdote from philosopher Slavoj Zizek:

"There was a young man who met with a psychotherapist once a week for years because he was convinced that he was a seed. Eventually, after many years, he became convinced that he was really a human being. Thanking the therapist, he returned home happy.

However, two weeks later the therapist hears a loud banging on his door. When he opens it, he sees the man back again, sweating and breathing heavily.

"You have to help me," says the man, "my next door neighbours recently bought chickens, and I am terrified that they are going to eat me."

"But surely you know now that you are a human being and not a seed," replies the therapist.

"I know that," he says, "but do the chickens know?"<sup>2</sup>

Rollins comments, 'this bizarre and irrational story contains a profound insight into the nature of belief. It helps expose the logic that enables us to continue to act in a way that we consciously do not see.' Although we might believe having more and better possessions, car, house and so on will not ultimately make us happier. And uphold the idea that pursuing such things shouldn't take priority over relationships and quality of life we then act oppositely. We act as if they do

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<sup>2</sup> Rollins, P. (2011). *Insurrection*. Simon and Schuster., 44

make us happier and pursue them at the cost of relationships and our own quality of life. We do this because we've been formed at a deep unconscious level by the world around us, all the affirmations and messages are the means by which we know ourselves and our identity.

We can espouse a belief in what the gospel declares today. Yet our learning from young is not to live in the way the Beatitudes proposes: poverty of spirit, mourning, meekness, hungering and thirsting for righteousness that brings persecution, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, reviled and falsely accused. Rather we're to strive to prove our worth, assert ourselves, make our mark on the world. To be grown up means we've taken responsibility for our part, found and made our own way in the world. Over dependence is a sign of weakness - unless illness, mental or physical impediment account for our need of others. Success is measured by how well we accumulate those things that allow us to be protected and buffered from experience of vulnerability, of our frailty and heaven forbid the reality that we are helpless before our mortality. These shape, in fact dictate how we operate. We end up acting out what we **actually** believe, even if we say differently.

So what is there for us to do? If we can't do such gospel imperative change by our own will and discover we act quite oppositely to our espoused beliefs what is left for us?

In the story of Pooh Bear he's first introduced "coming downstairs now bump, bump, bump, on the back of his head. It is, as far as he knows, the only way of coming downstairs, but sometimes he feels that there really is another way, if only he could stop bumping for a moment and think of it."

Transformation of the heart may not be something in our power to effect but it doesn't mean we can't be changed. It may begin by being willing to accept that there is a disjunction between what we say we believe and what we do and to pay attention. If Pooh Bear stopped long enough he may have discovered another way to come downstairs. Scary as it may seem, maybe we need to stop trying so hard to live up to God, to find and please God, to make God as we need God to be, long enough to discover the God with us we miss each day.