

***“True Wisdom”***

**(Matthew 5.1-12)**

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***Introduction***

I listen to a lot of radio... often when I'm gardening... mainly Radio National. They have some brilliant programs... and I like to stay up with current affairs. But there *are* times when I turn it off in disgust... often when it's the chatter of politicians, and sometimes when 'lifestyle experts' are on... because they speak such *nonsense*. And it's dangerous, destructive nonsense... encouraging me to be self-centred... fearful and mistrusting... grasping and acquisitive... dissatisfied with everything including myself... and angry with everyone. And I'm supposed to accept this rubbish as 'reality'... as 'truth'... as 'wisdom'.

I worry about where all this is taking us as a country... and as a world. But it's personal for me too... At 61 I still get lost and confused in the complexity of life. I am in need of *true* wisdom. I need *wise* voices to help me understand how to live, and how to live well.

***Paul and True Wisdom (1 Corinthians 1.18-31)***

In today's text from *1 Corinthians*, Paul reflects on where *true* wisdom is to be found. He says that despite its pretentiousness, a lot of what passes for wisdom in the world is really empty stupidity. God is the only source of true wisdom...

Which is what we'd expect to hear from any Christian evangelist... but Paul goes further. In contrasting *human wisdom... false wisdom...* with God's wisdom... he says that at first glance, God's wisdom actually looks like madness... foolishness... to most people. It is so different, so counter-cultural, that it becomes a stumbling block to many. And I think he's dead right...

Paul *is* clear about where true wisdom resides...

*“Human wisdom is so tinny, so impotent, next to the seeming absurdity of God. Human strength can't begin to compete with God's weakness.”* (MSG)

I love the way he puts it... and I'm sure he's right... but he reminds me that *my* first response to the Gospel is often, *'Surely that can't be right can it?'*

Which is a perfect entrance into the Beatitudes... We know them so well that we feel warm about them... but if you listen to them as practical advice on how to live a satisfying life... they're outrageous.

*'Happy are you when you're poor... overcome with grief because you've lost everything... empty and sad... reviled and persecuted.'*

This is a majorly alternative understanding of where true blessing and happiness lies. As Paul says, it's a complete contradiction of the assumed values of normal society. Promote this teaching as THE way of true wisdom, and 99.5% of Australians, would dismiss it out of hand. I'm a card-carrying-fanatic in the church, but if I'm being honest – even after all these years of trying to understand them – my first response to The Beatitudes is *'Surely that can't be right can it?'*

### ***The Beatitudes***

This is strange alternative wisdom... *'If you want to be blessed... happy... this is how to live.'*

Now it's not a code of rules, but a vision of a way of life – you need to hear them with heart as well as head... to feel them... imagine them... explore them... even play with them. It's a wisdom built around living in a non-competitive, non-grasping way. It's the direct opposite of *getting ahead... having it all... holding-on to what you've got.*

It's being willing to lose everything... to have nothing... to be empty.

It's being willing to accept and embrace sadness, grief and pain.

It's about being gentle and unselfish... content to be who you are.

It's about being hungry for God and the things of God.

It's about being merciful... offering unstinting forgiveness and charity while never taking advantage of another's weakness... it's about always choosing justice.

It's being soft-hearted... honest and true,

... a peace-maker not a fighter.

It's being willing to be seen as a loser rather than a winner...

and staying with it when people laugh at you, or criticise, reject and even attack you for it... because this is the way of vulnerability, trusting only in God.

But the Beatitudes don't really work as a list. You have to feel them... imagine them... allow them to whisper to you, especially at the next point of decision you come to.

It's wisdom... true wisdom. *'If you want to be blessed... happy... this is how to live.'*

### ***Finding the Wise Guide***

Matthew organises his gospel so this teaching begins the 'Sermon on the Mount'... a long slab of sayings from Jesus gathered into one collection. Inspired by the Bible films of my childhood, I've always imagined the Beatitudes being addressed to a mass crowd. But no... Matthew is quite explicit – they are given to the disciples alone. (Here's Eugene Peterson's translation of the opening verse...)

*"When Jesus saw his ministry drawing huge crowds, he climbed a hillside. Those who were apprenticed to him, the committed, climbed with him. Arriving at a quiet place, he sat down and taught his climbing companions. This is what he said..."*

This wisdom then is given to the disciples... to those on the journey. It's wisdom that *applies* to everyone, but Jesus knows that only 'the committed' will be able to receive it. It's too challenging, too 'different' for the casual interest of those in the crowd.

Which leaves us with a difficult question. Where do we position ourselves to receive the Beatitudes – from the safe casual interest of the crowd, or from the committed intention of one who follows? From the crowd it's likely to be as Paul says... it will sound like madness. Whereas the disciple opens her self to the challenge regardless, allowing the teaching to disturb, unsettle and change. The disciple receives them as true wisdom... even if they don't at first understand them.

I've always yearned for wisdom... and as a young man I dreamed of the romance of leaving everything to sit at the feet of some amazing holy man who lived in a cave in the mountains. Indeed as a 25 year old I *did* head off... back-packing around Europe, ending up in an ashram

in India... looking for the guide who could teach me what I desperately needed to know... how to live a happy life. It's only in relatively recent times that I've decided that Christ *is* the Wise Guide... the One with the words of life. I don't need to go off looking, for Christ has come to me. There is no need for heroics – it's simply a matter of receiving and following what he teaches.

### **Conclusion**

If we want to know how to be happy, every day begins with time and energy spent reflecting on the Holy Scripture... simply sitting at the feet of Christ the Wise Guide... listening to his teaching.

Last Wednesday was one of those days I woke feeling quite lost... flat as a tack... As always I staggered to my time of prayer... hoping o hear *something*... And waiting for me was the reading from the prophet Micah (6.1-8) we received this morning... telling me that "*God has already made it plain how to live, what to do*" ...

*"It's quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbour,  
be compassionate and loyal in your love,  
And don't take yourself too seriously —  
take God seriously."*

There it was. I didn't even need to turn on the radio let alone book a ticket to India. True wisdom! All I need do is follow it.