

# Worship from King's College Chapel Podcasts

## Season 3 – Wednesday Worship Winter Term 2021

### Episode 6 Transcript – The Beatitudes: Blessed are the poor in spirit

**Voiceover** This podcast is brought to you by the University of Aberdeen.

**Introit** *Kyrie eleison* Nicholas Palmer

**Rev Marylee Anderson** A very warm welcome to this evening's Wednesday worship. My name is Marylee and I am one of the Chaplains here at the University of Aberdeen. A very special welcome to Reverend Jonny Clipston, who joins us from Newhills Parish Church and will be preaching for us later in the service. Announcements are at the back of your orders of service. Please note that some of our activities are now moving from online to in-person and we also have our Peace teams back in the Chaplaincy. So if you would like a bit of canine therapy, a bit of pet therapy, please do email us at the Chaplaincy to book an appointment.

As I'm sure you're all aware, the United Nations Climate Change Conference, or COP26, is meeting this week in Glasgow. Pope Francis, referring to climate change, said "Listen to the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor who suffer the most". The urgent need for interventions can no longer be postponed. So tonight, during a week when leaders from across the world meet, our prayers will hold COP26 in mind, and they're based on prayers from Christian Aid and Compassion.

We gather in the presence of a God whose love is freedom, whose touch is healing and whose voice is calm. We gather in the presence of a God who welcomes all, regardless of how good or bad a day we've had and regardless of how we feel, God welcomes all and all are welcome here.

We'll join together with our opening affirmation:

Leader: The world belongs to the Lord,  
**All: The earth and all its people.**  
Leader: How good and how lovely it is  
**All: To live together in unity.**  
Leader: Love and faith come together.  
**All: Justice and peace join hands.**  
Leader: If the Lord's disciples keep silent,  
**All: These stones would shout aloud.**

We'll stand together and sing hymn number 149, Let all creation dance.

**HYMN 149** Let all creation dance

Please do have a seat. Let's join together in prayer.

Creator God, bringer of beauty from chaos, welcoming all who are lost, we thank you for your presence with us. Sustaining God, today the stones are shouting for the Lord's

disciples have been silent. Today, the cycles of the seasons which tell of your faithfulness are gagged and stifled. Yet we have blocked these voices out and with them the human voices of those who are hurt first and worst by emergencies. Not just the climate, but the injustice on which our human societies have come to rely. For what the rich do to the poor, our species does to the Earth as a whole. We acknowledge and seek forgiveness for our part and our knowing silence in these and more sinful choices of today. Food waste, biodiversity loss, plastic pollution, deforestation, air pollution. Mismanaged agriculture and factory farming. Global warming from fossil fuels, melting ice caps, food and water insecurity. Sustaining God, as in Christ you enter with mercy, energy and compassion into the life of the Earth. Speaking out wherever creatures are out of place or lost. Shout with the stones, call all of us to account. Show us the power we have and how we continue to misuse it. Set us free from imagined responsibilities to keep things as they have been and show us, with the energy of forgiveness, the path of healing for Heaven and Earth. May our praise join the chorus of all that has breath with a loud shout of challenge. For we are your people, your people forgiven, your people committed, for the healing of the Earth by God's grace alone. And together we pray:

**Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come;  
thy will be done;  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts,  
as we forgive our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom  
the power, and the glory,  
for ever. Amen.**

Leslie's going to come and do our scripture reading.

**Leslie McLeish** The scripture reading is from the gospel according to Luke, Chapter 18, verses 9 to 14, the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector.

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: 'Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax-collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax-collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income." But the tax-collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.'

Reader: For the Word of God in Scripture,  
for the Word of God among us,  
for the Word of God within us.

**All: Thanks be to God.**

**Rev Marylee Anderson** Thank you, Leslie. We'll continue in our worship and stand together to sing hymn number 97, O God, you search me and you know me.

**HYMN 97** O God, you search me and you know me

Please have a seat.

Let's continue in prayer together. God of wisdom, we pray for all world leaders participating in COP26. We ask that you give them wisdom as they work to lay out concrete plans to reach the targets set out by the Paris Agreement. Give them courage as they act and the ability to make bold and impactful decisions. Give them perseverance and determination as they face opposition. God of action, we pray that the decisions made during COP26 won't be empty words. We ask that those in positions of power will be held accountable to the targets that have been set and that they will work with conviction to not only achieve these but go beyond them. We ask that the momentum is not lost after the talks have finished. God of justice, we pray for fairness during the COP26 talks. Lord, we know that those who are worst hit by the climate crisis are those who have done least to contribute to it and have the fewest resources to implement change. We therefore pray for radical justice and for fairness in the decisions made at the conference. God of love, our hearts break at the devastating impact the climate crisis is already having on those living in extreme poverty. We pray that this injustice will not be ignored, that more will be done to protect those left vulnerable, and that governments will take action to protect those most vulnerable around the world, not just those in their own countries. God of compassion, we thank you for your love. The love that restores, the love that renews, the love that builds hope. Help us each day to seek practical opportunities to put that love into action. Amen.

The choir are going to continue leading us in worship with Ubi caritas.

**Anthem** *Ubi caritas*

Maurice Duruflé (1902-1986)

**Rev Jonny Clipston** Hello there. It's great to be with you here this evening. So thank you very much for having me. Although I realise that you had very little to do with the choice, I remain grateful nonetheless. We are continuing this series in the Beatitudes this evening, going through Matthew Chapter five and we come to verse three. Which says 'blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven'. I was having a conversation with somebody many years ago when we were having a break while we were volunteering. I don't remember what led us to this point in the conversation, but there was a bit that has always stuck in my mind. He said, "When I die, and I stand before God this is what I'm going to say" (and then he puffed his chest out as if he was challenging God) and he said "I've done some good in my life, I've done some bad. I reckon the good outweighs the bad, you decide." The sheer brass neck of it, before God! Perhaps you've heard similar things, it's not an uncommon notion, although I'm not very sure where the idea comes from. I've never heard of anybody who's planned defence of a murder would be to say before the judge that I've killed one person, but I've not killed thousands of others. I reckon the thousands I haven't killed outweigh the one, you decide. Or perhaps if you are ever caught with one of those cameras going through a red light, you could just send in photographs of all the times when you did stop at a red light and maybe they'll decide that you maybe don't deserve a fine in the end after all.

The thing about sin is it's not so much about the act, it's about what's embodied in that act. It's a rejection of God. When the bible talks about sinners, it's not using it as a moral word, a moral word about how good you are or how bad you are, it's a theological word. It talks

about someone who has been separated from God, or is living in opposition to him, someone who has rejected God's ways and the hope of the sinner isn't that they do enough good things so that they will be ok. The hope of the sinner is another biblical word; it is to repent. Or if you like, to un-reject God, to say sorry and to commit to live in his way. So, what does this have to do with our verse in Matthew Chapter 5 Verse 3? "Blessed are the poor in spirit", one of the big questions of that verse is that who are the poor in spirit? The Greek word used for poor would usually be understood literally, especially outside of the Bible. So the literal meaning of the materially poor is never far away, but yet with the addition of "in spirit" it has been qualified in some regard and actually in quite a significant way. It turns out to be not something that is true of someone's outward circumstance but of their inward being.

There's a significant theme in the Old Testament that talks about the poor, not as those who are so much poverty stricken, but those who are 'God's poor'. Those people who remain trusting God, even though it might disadvantage them in the realms of oppression or even in material wealth. They could be oppressed by tyrants and yet still trusting God. They are people who have no resource apart from God and that, I believe, is leading us towards more of what this verse is getting at. Here the emphasis is on the complete reliance on God.

So Matthew's Beatitude doesn't necessarily exclude the rich, there are significant overtones of (what would we call that?) poverty – piety relationship that we see elsewhere in Jewish writings. That is to say, that the proud self-reliance that is often fed by prosperity can breed this forgetting of our dependence on God. The poor in spirit, are those who accept that spiritually they can bring nothing to God, they are empty before him and so perhaps to be understood in a similar way to 'lowly in spirit.' It's a humble attitude before God which we say in Psalm 51:

David says,

*My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart  
you, God, will not despise. (v17)*

or God says in Isaiah,

*'These are the ones I look on with favour:  
those who are humble and contrite in spirit,  
and who tremble at my word. (66:2b)*

It is the opposite of puffing your chest out before God and relying on your own track record. It is to recognise God's greatness and how far short of that **we** are and it is a principle that is exemplified in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. It's not uncommon in the Jewish tradition to appeal to your keeping of the commandments before God, and the Pharisee has gone above and beyond in what he's done but he rehearses his good deeds in front of God as though God should be in his debt. He is not thankful to God for what God has done but simply thankful that he is not like others who he considers inferior. Did he really have to exalt himself by denigrating others? If he had a proper view of God he would have realised that what can any of us bring before him? It was a speech of arrogance, of self-reliance, and a small view of God.

The tax collector on the other hand, was aware of his sin, which everybody listening to Jesus' words would have assumed was considerable. He knew he had nothing to offer God, but to throw himself upon God's mercy and goodness. He was poor in spirit. And though his sin was large, perhaps the most comforting words in the gospels are, "I tell you, this man went home justified before God." The Pharisee stood before God in self-congratulation, the tax collector stood before God in prayer. There is not one who is good enough, in and of themselves to enter God's perfect holiness and his kingdom of righteousness. The truth is, two sinners stood before God in that parable, but only one of them realised it, only one of them confessed, and only one of them went home justified.

The poor in spirit are those who come before God in humility, confessing sin, and seeking his mercy. There is no other way to enter into God's Kingdom.

'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'

Shall we pray,

Heavenly Father,  
You are glorious in majesty,  
perfect in righteousness,  
brilliant in holiness.  
Who are we that you are mindful of us?  
What have we done to deserve your continuing affection and steadfast love.  
Yet Lord in your grace and mercy you do love us.  
Forgive our sin toward you,  
and anything within us of an arrogant disposition.  
Help us to love you in that response to your love of us,  
And to share that love with others,  
In Jesus name, Amen.

We're going to continue our worship singing the hymn number 625, O thou who camest from above.

**HYMN 625** O thou who camest from above

**Rev Marylee Anderson** Go in peace to love and serve the Lord, and may the grace and peace of God, the Creator, the Redeemer and the Sustainer come upon you this day and remain with you always.

**Amen sung by Choir**

**Recessional**

*Praeludium and Fuge in G moll*

D Buxtehude (1637-1707)

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