

Worship from King's College Chapel Podcasts

Season 3 – Wednesday Worship Winter Term 2021 – The Beatitudes

Episode 1 Transcript – Blessed are the Merciful

Voiceover [00:00:03] This podcast is brought to you by the University of Aberdeen.

Introit *Cantate Domino* J J Chepponis (b1956)

Rev Marylee Anderson [00:01:35] Well, a very warm welcome to this our first chapel service together for this new academic term. My name is Marylee and I am one of the Chaplains here at the University of Aberdeen, and it's lovely to see many familiar faces as well as many new faces, including some new members in the choir, you are all welcome and I hope you have a warm welcome here too. Please do join us for tea and coffee after the service, it is going to be served in James McKay Hall which is a sentence I like to say. It's between the unicorn and the lion in the quad. If you just go through the doors there you'll see James MacKay Hall. I'm also required to ask that unless you're exempt masks have to stay on throughout the service – including when we're singing.

At the back of your orders of service there are some announcements – most of our activities are online still but it would be great to have you come along to some of them too and also there will be a retiral offering which is for the Shining Lights Scholarship which supports refugee students here at the University of Aberdeen.

Here in this place, there are no foreigners,
for all are welcome in God's house.

Here in this place of worship, there is only acceptance,
for love is the language of faith.

Here in our lives, there are no divisions,
for God dwells in each of us.

So, let us worship in unity and love as we begin together with our opening affirmations which are in your order of service.

Leader: God is our light and our salvation, whom shall we fear?

All: **God is our shelter and refuge on the days of trouble,
and our hope and joy on the days of celebration!**

Leader: Day after day, we seek God's face and the assurance of
God's holy love:

All: **O God, do not turn from us or hide your face from us!
Be our guide and our light instead!**

Leader: One thing we ask of God:

All: **That we may live in God's dwelling place all the days of
our life, and never cease to behold the beauty of God's home.**

Leader Beloved of God, enter this worship in thanksgiving,
for God is among us and within us!

All: **Thanks be to God!**

We'll stand together and sing our first hymn, Sing for God's Glory, number 172.

HYMN 172 Sing for God's glory

Please do have a seat.

Let's pray together:

Loving God, we thank you that you are not a distant God,
disinterested in our lives but that you are present,
within our world and in our lives.

And so compassionate God, we come together to worship,
a people who would like to think that we love you
with all our hearts and souls,
with all our might,

Yet, there are so many other things in our lives
that fight for our attention
that we often limit you to Wednesdays and Sundays
and times when we want you to rescue us or it just suits us.

And yet tender God, we want to hear your voice
above all of the other voices in our lives.
But we get overwhelmed and distracted in daily routines.
We forget who you are.
We forget who we are.
We forget what your people are supposed to be.

So here we are, before you,
with our human frailties
and our short attention spans,
asking that you would make yourself known to us,
that you would help us to recognise
the presence of the Holy,
that you would continue to challenge us,
inspire us,
and make us into the people you created us to be.

Thank you that your loving arms embrace us all.
Thank you that your loving kindness and compassion never end.
During our time together may our ears,
hearts and minds be open to you.

And together we pray the Lord's Prayer in your orders of service ...

**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**

Olivia is going to share our scripture reading.

Reader [00:10:32] When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:
'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

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 [00:11:51] Thank you, we're going to stand together and continue in our worship with hymn number 694, brother, sister, let me serve you.

HYMN 694 Brother, sister, let me serve you

Please do have a seat.

Let's come together in prayer.

Merciful God,
Your love for us knows no limits.
You are gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.
There is no other god who can compare to you.

And yet, you walk among us.
We have experienced your presence in our midst,
and have felt your guiding hand.
You have faithfully kept your covenant with us,
and shown unfailing and unconditional love to us all.

And so we come before you with confidence,
believing that you hear the prayers we offer,
and that you will respond.

Peaceful God, we come together recognising that our time apart has been longer than we would like. That we each come here with different fears and excitement. Different levels of anxieties and happiness. Different hurts and triumphs and we mourn for those who are not here with us. Thank you that you have travelled with us throughout all this time and your comfort is freely given.

God of wisdom we come before you at the beginning of a new academic term.

Many new students have begun their studies and many more have returned.

May these students settle well into their studies and their new homes. We are mindful that this year there are many more complexities to coming together as a community.

For those who might struggle we pray that they would find the help they need. May you place people of peace around them who might support them and show them kindness and we also think of all our university staff. Those who will nurture our students and make their studies possible. May they find a renewed vigor and enthusiasm as they face the term ahead and may we all remember that small acts of kindness are important.

Shepherding God, we also remember those who lead this university, the Principal, Vice-Principals, management teams and directorates. May you help them to have the vision and wisdom, good judgement and courage that is required to lead well. May they remember to have compassion and understanding as we find new ways of working together and adjusting.

Gracious God, hear our prayers.

Look with mercy on your gathered people.

Go with us, as you have gone with your people throughout history.

Give us a desire to do your will in all things,

To grow in our attitudes

so that the world may see the light of your love.

Amen.

The choir are going to continue leading us in worship with the anthem. The Lord is my shepherd.

Anthem *The Lord's my shepherd (Brother James' Air)*

Text: Psalm 23 (Scottish Psalter, 1650 (CH4 14)

Music: James Leith MacBeth Bain (1860-1925), arr. Alan Bullard (b1947)

Marylee Anderson [00:22:00] So today we are beginning our series on the Beatitudes and thinking together about what it means to be merciful. The Beatitudes are found in Matthew five and form a kind of preamble to the sermon on the Mount. Jesus, having seen a large crowd begin to gather, takes his disciples with him further up into the mountain, perhaps with one eye on the crowd, Jesus turns to his disciples and begins to teach them. Now you might think that this is going to be some kind of list of do's and don'ts about how they have to earn salvation, and if that was the case, perhaps Jesus would have given a list of spiritual priorities that were important, like how to have a good prayer life, how to worship or the importance of reading scripture. But instead, Jesus gives a series of statements that tell us what the Kingdom of Heaven Jesus will announce is like. They are the principles of kingdom life, essentially a self description of Jesus and the ultimate description of what it means to be a disciple and follow Christ and the Beatitudes are not meant to be a burdensome. If I can even say it, a burdensome list of unreachable goals,

but statements of Grace, my father-in-law described them as the beautiful attitudes and not things that we have to do. They are essentials to living a blessed life, attitudes that are countercultural to the world that we inhabit, inner qualities of the heart that come from knowing and walking with God and so the beatitude that we're thinking about today reads 'Blessed are the merciful for they will receive mercy'. So what do the merciful look like? What do they do? The Hebrew term for merciful refers to the love, compassion and kindness upon which God's covenant with Israel was formed. In the Old Testament mercy is considered central to God. God constantly shows mercy to the people of Israel. Time and time again, they reject God, worship false idols, fail to love their neighbour, failed to look after their poor, yet God's back is never turned against them. God is merciful and God's mercy is unmerited, undeserving and inexhaustible and we then see what it means to be merciful in the life of Jesus. Jesus modelled what it was to have compassion that was felt and experienced. When Jesus saw the needs of others, he was emotionally moved. Jesus had compassion on those in need, but his compassion turned into action and he provided healing of every kind. Those that others in society treated as outcasts Jesus provided healing, gave sight to the blind, cleansed the leper, fed the hungry. Those who were outcast and isolated Jesus treated with compassion and kindness. He was merciful. To be merciful starts with compassion but it leads to actions of kindness towards those in need, and it's given without judgement.

So over the last 18 months, there are plenty of days when my family would certainly not have described me as merciful. If mercy is compassion and kindness these are words that they would definitely not have used. In the midst of working from home, homeschooling and actually just getting through a day, kindness was not always my go to attitude. It was easy to let the annoyance of a dishwasher not emptied, a homework assignment not completed, or just others being grumpy, to get right under my skin. Instead of having compassion it was easier to hold on to what others were doing wrong. To be hard done by because they weren't doing what I needed them to do and meanwhile I was working hard and doing it all. So often we see the world as owing us something, the world tells us what's important is power and wealth. We're told that we should view life like a transaction and that resources are scarce. So we view the world in fear and fear as powerful and it blinds mercy. We're told that those who are different are a threat, that our health systems and housing won't cope if we allow freedom of movement. When we view the world through fear, we become greedy and defensive and we can't be merciful from a place of fear and scarcity. Mercy is not a virtue that we choose to put on, it's a different way of seeing the world. It is to cease seeing everything as transactional rather than unconditional. It is to see seeing the world as punitive rather than restorative. It is to see seeing everything as something to be controlled rather than shared. To be merciful is to see our relationships as more important than being right. It is to forgive and forget the times we are wronged. It is to see a world of abundance.

I don't know if anybody of you will know Roald Dahl, but I loved his books when I was young and one of my favourites was the Twits and one of the illustrations from that book has always stayed with me. There was a picture of Mrs Twit, a terrible, horrid lady with her pointy nose and her small eyes, her wonky teeth and her sticking out hair. She looks super mean, and she was. And then the next illustration was of a lady with a pointy nose, small eyes, wonky teeth, sticking out hair and she's smiling and she looks radiant, and Roald Dahl writes that when there is beauty within, it always shines. When we see the world with a merciful attitude we begin to see beauty, the places where light shines. There were days, especially in that first lockdown, that having that kind of attitude was hard. When you've emptied the dishwasher, there's a theme, for the umpteenth time or been talked to unkindly it was easier to hold on to and only see the wrongs of everyone else. But to look

at the world without mercy draws attention away from compassion and kindness. I had to look at my own attitude in order to fully see my daughter, who would rather be in the playground with her friends than doing yet another colouring in task and was baking a cake for her auntie, a son who having just changed schools and began to make new friends, was isolated, having to complete his higher qualifications online and actually has just emptied the dishwasher without me asking. A son who was working at a supermarket with a bullying boss and tough customers and has just gone and done more shopping for his grandparents who are isolating. A husband who is constantly on work calls but is giving support to teaching staff struggling to cope with the new reality. To be merciful forces us to look at ourselves. I had to look at myself and recognise my lack of compassion and kindness. I needed to change my attitude, my way of seeing the world, before I could respond mercifully to those around me.

The Beatitudes help us to see the world differently. They are about changing our own selves and not other people. To be merciful impacts and changes our relationships with others and ourselves. It is having compassion that leads to action, compassion that is borne out of love. To be merciful means recognising the value in everyone, as created in God's image, that God's unconditional love and unending mercy are for all and not just the easy to love people. And it can all sound so hard, right? But we have been shown mercy first, it's difficult to be merciful to have loving compassion and kindness for others at times. But we are each unconditionally loved by God and mercy flows from that love. Can you imagine a world where our natural reflex was to be merciful? Richard Rohr described the Beatitudes as offering us a more spacious world, a world where we allow a larger mystery to work itself through, through us and in us, and to be merciful opens up space. Space for forgiveness, to love relationships more than being right, to be slow in retribution, to show kindness, even when it doesn't seem deserved, mercy is not easily offended and compassionately sees a hurting heart behind a hurtful word. Mercy accepts another just as they are. To be merciful is to allow the spirit to work within us, to allow our attitudes to be changed and the way in which we see the world. To be merciful is love in action, to bring light into a darkened world, to be merciful. Flows from God's mercifully unconditional love, freely given to each and every one of us. Amen

We are going to stand and close our time in worship with hymn number 187, There's a wideness in God's mercy.

HYMN 187 There's a wideness in God's mercy

May you go from here with courage,
Trusting in God's merciful presence and love.
And may the blessing of God,
Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer
Be among you and within you
For now and evermore.

Amen sung by Choir

Recessional

Prelude in D major, BWV 532

J S Bach (1685-1750)

Voiceover [00:42:28] This podcast is brought to you by the University of Aberdeen.