

Attitudes and Beatitudes

It has been said that people with good intentions make promises, people with good character keep them.

We gather today to give thanks for the Royal Warrant issued 85 years ago to form the Air Training Corps but also to make and hear promises made by Cadets. Promises are important, and it's important that they are heard by people. In church we hear lots of promises: baptism promises, confirmation promises, wedding promises, ordination promises, the promise we make every Sunday to live new lives with Jesus.

So, it is good that we do so in the context of our readings, both of which are promises in a way. In our first reading we hear the promise of God to care of the people, young and old, to give strength and encouragement. It is a promise we need to remind ourselves of as the news constantly reminds us of the broken promises, even the lies, of politicians and those in power. That promise of encouragement and strength is one that Christians need to listen to again to avoid the despair of the world as it stands and to be able to see the world as it can be.

And it is the world as it can be that is the theme of our gospel reading, the beatitudes. Each gospel writer presents the start of Jesus' ministry after his baptism slightly differently. Matthew's gospel presents Jesus' teaching in 5 blocks, to mirror the 5 books of the Law of the Old Testament. Right at the beginning of this is the Sermon on the Mount, in one sense Jesus giving a new Law, the law of the Kingdom of Heaven. It's important to understand that because the beatitudes are in a sense a set of promises in themselves.

They are promises of who Jesus is. Every single one of them: poor in spirit, mourning, meek, righteous, merciful, pure, peacemakers, and persecuted, Jesus lives out in his earthly ministry. So, before we even start thinking about how they apply to us we are given a promise of who it is we are called to follow, called to be disciples of.

Then they are promises of how a well lived life looks, of how our character helps to shape the world around us. You'll notice there's no talk of success, or of wealth, of power or of fame. That's not to say any of those are bad in and of themselves, but if they become the foundations and goals of our life, well we see every day at the moment how that turns out. The foundations of a life that follows Jesus are things that give us the capacity to not take ourselves too seriously, whilst taking those around us and those we meet and

those we serve utterly seriously. They are a disposition to the other, that the way we live out our lives brings peace and mercy through seeking the right, though not putting ourselves first all the time, through mourning the things that diminish each of us and our world. They are foundations that believe that another world is possible, that the world that God intended for us to live in is possible if we follow the example of Jesus Christ.

And then they are a promise of the result of that life: blessed or happy it could be translated. It might seem counterintuitive that mourning, meekness, and persecution could make you happy or blessed, but again we are being reminded that to live well means to have good foundations. So right at the start of Jesus' ministry, we are given promises: this is who Jesus is, this is how you can live, this is what can happen if you live like this. That another world is possible.

And the promises that the Cadets will make, and all of us are invited to consider this morning are in the same vein. Honour, faithfulness, loyalty, obligation, duty all point towards how we live our lives for others, how our service, in whatever form, creates a better world around us, for us and for the future. They are, of course, made within the context of service, specifically service to a specific country and King, to a specific corps. Much like the

beatitudes they should say something about who the people making these promises are, they should be lived out, but they should also be promises that build a better world not just in their specific context but in their wider one as well. They too are promises that shape character.

The promise of God in Isaiah to lift us when weariness and fatigue strikes, is the promise to give us the strength to live out a life of promise. The beatitudes show us what living according to Jesus' teaching looks like and what a better world looks like. The promises that will be made today and other promises made help create that world. But they cannot just be good intentions, they must be lived out. So, as we make and hear those promises made all of us are invited to consider the promise of God to give us the encouragement and the strength to shape a better world, and make our own promises to be a part of that.