## MAKES YOU WONDER RESOURCES

BE-ATTITUDES

By Ian Robinson

“Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” Matthew 5.

Readers are warned that some of the scenes to be described in this sermon may cause offense.

The vicar of Dibley TV show, which is secretly a documentary of South Perth Uniting Church, said these sayings of Jesus were so wonderful that **the Beatitudes** became for her God’s call into ministry. I admit they can sound inspiring. But this week, I wonder what Jesus thought he was on about.

There is nothing blessed or happy about grinding poverty. The food is monotonous, and so is the lack of adequate work. Illnesses cannot be treated because even if you can get a doctor you cant get the medicine. You and your children will live in pain and disability, and preventable early death. Crime is high because people are quickly desperate. You learn to get by without the services that other parts of town take for granted: Public transport, a place to hang out, clean footpaths, movies, library and a place to get work. Instead, the parasites move in – alcohol, sex and drugs are available for money, gambling, Satanism, bashings, gangs, family breakups, and suicide is the exit strategy for some. A baby born in Bangladesh has a better chance of seeing adult life than an Australian Aboriginal. Compassionate

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In Australia these wounds are evident among the poor in any place, so what is so blessed about being poor in spirit. Does Jesus mean you get to watch a lot of day time television?

Recently it has been observed among many Aboriginal families that there are deeper wounds underlying even all of the wounds of poverty. The overwhelming grief of loss that questions your identity, assaults you integrity and even your right to exist. Having taken their land slowly by white invasion and expansion, they had misery for company due to loss of land, loss of heritage, loss of honour , loss of spirituality, loss of health, loss of language and culture. All they had was each other. So, we removed the children in order to assimilate them, and so they didn’t have even each other. Promises by the government were forgotten. Lies were told about their parents. How would a people turn out after generations of removals, official lies, lack of parental affection and discipline, loss of cultural pride, made to feel ashamed for being aboriginal and being people of uncertain place.

Compassionate Christians have always been at the front of community support strategies among Aboriginal peoples. Don’t believe the cynical mythology that says we were just there to make converts. But the church has largely failed to call the situation by what it is still to this day, in today’s newspaper : a shameful disgrace of colonial greed and prejudice.

Yes, I see among my Aboriginal friends that our failure to call it what it is allows some others to press the wounds, and the hurts continue to grow. How can any federal party agree that there is a need for a Aboriginal-specific intervention and yet deny that there have been Aboriginal- specific causes for such a systematic social destruction?

Jesus, what blessing is there in that?

This land has been good to all the migrant peoples. Through hard work they made it productive, mined it and created complex infrastructure. There is a wide tolerance toward the races, except for this willful, long standing blindness and deafness about Aboriginal people. We have high standards of living as the proceeds and consequences of our hard work. We were working on land that was someone else’s, and our story about ourselves is full of lies in school history books and in the portrayals of much of the media about how it came about. Politicians still posture in words of profound ignorance and wilful misconstrual of the situation, the history, the remedy and its meaning. Where is the blessedness in that? Bitterness, yes. Belligerence, I can see. Blindness.

I can only believe that there is a missing ingredient in this saying of Jesus. It is this ‘kingdom of heaven’ of ‘Kingdom of God’ or ‘Reign of God’ that he promises that the poor in spirit will see. For there is a foolish happiness among followers of Jesus. It is like the laughter of kookaburra in the dawn. Hope is coming. We cant see how it will work, we cant see what it will do, don’t know who will actually be the one to hear God’s word of command to ‘go’. But sometime somehow it will come. Christians believe that. What is more, Christians believe IN that.

We are foolish enough to **deny** that the accumulation of higher real estate values means a single worthwhile thing. In our relationships, we are foolish to want to hold out for a faithful committed love that is big enough and strong enough to be life-long. In our bank accounts we give regularly and sacrificially, not just to the super fund and the mortgage and the kids school fees, but to charities, missions and churches around the globe. We hope for light to come into the dark places and take steps **together** to bring it about. We have seen it work so well that our idea of aged care is now government policy, ditto, youth work, universal education, hospitals, humanism, prison reform, liberation of slaves, equality of men and women, and so on and so on. Even the *do ra me* singing scale came from us- it is the first syllables of the first verse of a hymn about John the Baptist.

Christians give up careers to follow the leading of God. My brother in law was offered a doubling of his senior executive salary by his employer if only he would NOT go to Cambodia in Christian service. Foolishness. A friend who is a builder took an extra staff member as an assistant so he could spend more time with his church and children. Foolishness. Another friend reduced to three days a week, so she could put one day into creative activity that she considered honoured the creator, and one day into spending more time with people. Foolishness. Through our history our brothers and sisters have preferred to die, to see their children’s opportunities wiped away, than give up our precious scriptures to be burned. What sort of Foolishness is this heritage of ours?

What sort of foolish God-lovers will bring an end to poverty and an end to the shame of ongoing Aboriginal deprivation? What will they do, these silly saints who believe in resurrection, when their desire to look sensible in the eyes of their friends conflicts their desire to please God and to live lives of holiness? What sort of silly smile expresses this ‘blessedness’, this happiness that comes from living as though God reigns? What idiot is going to love their enemies? What madness will prompt a normally sensible person to ‘do justice , love mercy and walk humbly with their God’?

Friends, God is God. God rules and will come to rule absolutely. When you see that, and when you welcome that, they say, and when you stop just believing that and start believing IN it, people report, a foolish grin will escape your anxious face, a lightness of being will start to soften your heart, everyone will become a source of light, the day will have more colour, you will feel just so…blessed. And so will the poor. Decide today whether you will be the world’s sensible or God’s fool.

Join me in this prayer if you dare.

Master, we confess,

we have sought other kinds of happiness

instead of your blessedness.

We have made other things our security,

and followed other patterns and values in distributing our wealth.

That is, maybe we did. We get confused.

Sometimes we see it then don’t know how to act.

Other times we hear your call to act but just don’t get it.

Give us the things to see that we can process,

and the things to do that we can sacrifice for.

Give us the things we must repent from and repent to.

Thank you that you do not break our back

across the bench of abstract principles.

Thank you that you call us to a place and a task

and then grow us into what it takes.

Thank you that you are Grace personified.

Thank you that a life lived in you

is blessed and effective and purposeful.

Thank you that there is healing for our sorry pride,

and healing for our sheer bitter brokenness.

Carry us along that way, tender shepherd,

loving Lord, Holy God. Amen.