

*Living without masks.* A Sermon preached at St. Giles Presbyterian Church, Prince George on March 25, 2018 by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons: PSALM 139:1-10, 23-24

JAMES 4:7-8

MATTHEW 5:8

Some congregations know today as Palm Sunday – marked as we have by palm processions and Palm Sunday hymns and choruses of triumph  
Other congregations mark this Sunday as Passion Sunday – the Sunday that begins Holy week – Jesus’ last week and the drama around those days.

A Sunday that is a celebration with ominous overtones – so accurately set to music by this morning’s closing hymn – Ride on, Ride on in Majesty

Ride on, right on in majesty  
The angel hosts beyond the sky  
Look down with sad and wondering eyes  
To see the approaching sacrifice (vs.3)  
Ride on, ride on in majesty;  
In lowly pomp ride on to die  
Bow thy meek head to mortal pain  
Then take, O God, thy power and reign (vs.5)

So when it comes to setting the theme for worship on this Sunday does one concentrate on the palms,

Or on what lies ahead?

In a word “both”!

For among other things this is a Sunday that clearly illustrates what the late English Bible scholar and preacher John Stott called ‘the human paradox’.

Many of the very same people who joyously welcomed Jesus by waving palms and spread their cloaks on the road way before him on Palm Sunday

Were the same ones who shouted “crucify him” on Friday!

What we have is clear proof of what Stott and others have termed the “paradox of our humanness”.

Each of us is capable of great and selfless things  
And nasty, base, ugly things!

One moment we can behave like one created in the image of God

And the next like nasty wild animals, from which we are meant to be completely distinct.

Human beings are the inventors of hospitals for the care of the sick,

Universities for the acquisition of wisdom

Governments and parliaments for the just rule of the people

And churches for the worship of God.

But we as human beings the inventors of concentration camps,

Weapons of mass destruction and horrible methods of torture

Government and parliaments can be overly stuffed with self-serving and callous individuals. And churches can be places of anything but worship of God.

I remember all too well being part of a Presbytery visitation of a church that seemed only to be united by spite.

The continuing paradox of our humanness throws light on both our private and public lives

*Yet, no human being is irredeemable*

*Jesus' actions as we move with him again over the next week, remind us that GOD HAS NOT GIVEN UP ON US.*

*God NEVER gives up on us*

*Always he holds out his hand to us and says, Come, follow me*

Or for me personally what is profoundly moving is that verse from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah.

**See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me (Isaiah 49:16)**

This is the God who so clearly and earnestly wants us to enjoy the abundant life he promises so often.

This human paradox makes following and modelling Jesus' beatitudes more immediate and more urgent does it not?

This morning we look at the final Beatitude of the series,  
 Though not the final one in the Sermon on the Mount.

On Palm/Passion Sunday, it is a most appropriate one upon which to reflect

**Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.**

Or as Eugene Peterson phrases it in The Message

**You're blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and your heart –put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.**

PURE IN HEART

No pretensions, no masks that might cover how we really feel or what we really think

Nothing devious or having hidden agendas or ulterior motives

For the pure and heart, there is no hypocrisy and deceit in one's thoughts or actions toward God or others.

PURE IN HEART

Necessary as never before.

For we live in a world where duplicity, hidden agendas, what is in it for me is too much with us

Some people weave around themselves such a tissue of lies that they can no longer tell which part of them is real and which is make believe.

And I have in mind not only Donny J, but so many others in so many areas of our lives.

In such a climate, it is hard not to be an Eeyore or a cynic....

More than ever, God's people need Jesus' reminders and counsel of the Beatitudes – especially this verse 8,  
But not just vs 8 – each of the Beatitudes

**Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.**

Very definite – WILL see  
Not maybe, or perhaps or might see  
NO – will see!!

They will see God work  
They will see him in their lives  
They will feel his presence  
There will be no waking up in fear that someone is going to find out the real truth  
For duplicity, hypocrisy, hidden agenda, masks to cover our lies are not a character trait of the pure in heart.

There is just the living of a life before the all-seeing presence of God

This is memorably set down by the Psalmist  
in the Psalm Wayne read minutes ago

**You search out my path and my lying down,  
and are acquainted with all my ways.**

**<sup>4</sup> Even before a word is on my tongue,  
O LORD, you know it completely.**

**<sup>5</sup> You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.**

**<sup>6</sup> Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
it is so high that I cannot attain it.**

**Psalm 139:3-6**

Pure in heart – having a singleness of heart toward  
God.

Transparency and an uncompromising desire to  
please God in all things.

**Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will  
see God.**

The grammar indicates that it is not a once only  
seeing,

But a continual seeing of God

Further, this “seeing” will not be from a point of  
fear,

But the fulfillment of longing.

The ‘pure in heart’ will see God from a position of  
love and acceptance

So,

How do we move this verse from the Bible to a way  
of life?

For clearly, Jesus demands of all his followers nothing less.

*You have to want it.*

Jesus is never going to force, cajole, threaten, berate, belittle or natter you to seek to live this way – His way.

I believe that eventually everyone will see God.

The question is ‘in what capacity will you see him’? Will it be humbled, all too aware of your humanness?

A posture so well echoed by internationally known worship leader and song writer, Robin Mark in his When it’s all been Said and done

*When it’s all been said and done.*

*There is just one thing that matters.*

*Did I do my best to live for truth*

*Did I live my life for you.*

Or will you be among those who see God, but see Him only once

And spend eternity separated from Him and from all, because you lived your life without a moral compass,

Lived it by duplicity, lies and hidden agendas,

Lived it thinking only of yourself.

That is no empty threat – that is promise – God’s promise repeated again and again in scripture.

*You have to remember you cannot do what Jesus asks here in your own strength.*

This holds for each Beatitude.

We must become more, not less dependent on the mercy, strength, grace, forgiveness, provision of God.

*Nothing in my hands I bring  
Simply to the cross I cling*

*Put into practice of being thankful for what you have, rather than complaining, griping or whining about what you do not have.*

St. Paul's letter to the Philippians – known as his letter of Joy,--was written from a Roman jail.

The steps Paul heard along the corridor outside his cell could be only a passing guard,

Or they could be coming for him.

Yet, over and over, Paul remains thankful and grateful in spite of the situation in which he finds himself.

**° I rejoice<sup>[a]</sup> in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it.<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>11</sup> Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. <sup>12</sup> I know what it is to have little, and**

**I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. <sup>13</sup> I can do all things through him who strengthens me. <sup>14</sup> In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress. [Phil. 4:10-14]**

I am under no illusion how hard that is to practice all the time.

But a grateful heart, a soul that gives thanks more than just on the second Sunday in October Moves closer to being in step with the pure heart of which Jesus speaks in Matthew 5.

To live a life never being satisfied, always feeling short-changed and dealt with unfairly,  
Or feeling that you never have enough will spiritually shrivel your live and harden your heart.

*Practice daily acts of kindness, forgiveness, mercy, grace, love, provision toward others – predicated on your own realization of how God has treated and dealt with you in these areas.*

Stop with the record keeping of wrongs done to you.

Stop rationalizing your own bad behavior.

Ask and seek forgiveness when necessary.

How does the prophet Micah phrase it?

**He has told you, O mortal, what is good;  
and what does the LORD require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,**

**and to walk humbly with your God?  
Micah 6:8)**

Nothing hidden or complicated is there.

In another place and time, I was chairing a church meeting, where egos began to dominate. As the temperature and hubris of the meeting rose, One member raised his hand and said,

- You are all members of this church aren't you? --stupid question some thought, of course they were!
- Then why is it so hard for you to follow the teachings of St. Paul as to how we are supposed to treat others within the community of faith?

No snappy response was given – this time, there was total silence for the first time in several minutes.

This person then moved that the meeting adjourned until the matters could be discussed in a more mature and Christ centred way. Would you lead us in prayer?

Motions to adjourn do not need seconders...

Done and dusted as they say.

I lead the group in prayer.

This person had given us all a very humbling reminder of how easy negative energy, our shadow or dark sides can emerge.

I do not know YOUR hearts, but God does.

What I do know based on life experience as well as over half of my life as a congregational minister, is that eventually, what is really in your heart will come out.

If you are and have been just going through the motions of living life as a Christian, Wearing and changing masks as and when necessary,

You will return or continue to serve what has always been and will remain the centre of your hearts – yourselves!

And a life lived only for yourself is truly an empty life – no matter how much worldly power and things you have!

However if any of us actively seek and by God's grace model a pure in heart stance,

The awareness of the presence of the Risen Christ will truly be life giving and sustaining in and through all life's experiences and challenges.

**Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.**

The choice we make, the direction we follow is ours,

But choose wisely, for the consequences do have right now and eternal implications. AMEN

