

Mourning **24.06.18**

Open with Prayer

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

This is the last in our short series on the Beatitudes. So far we have looked at what it means to be Peacemakers, to the merciful and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. We could say that these are all positive characteristics and also that they might not relate to all of us.

However we can all relate to this beatitude, for we all have or will lose someone close to us to death. We know what it feels like to suffer through the death of Grandparent, Parent, brother or sister, child or Partner. We know that Jesus dealt with the death of those close to him and also people came to him to save their loved ones from death. One of Jesus closest friends, Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary, became very ill and died. It is also believed that by the time Jesus started his ministry his own father, Joseph, had died.

But how often would we called our self “Blessed” when we mourn? When someone who fills a large part of our heart and life dies would we really call this a blessing. We miss them so much, we turn to talk to them and realise they aren’t there any more to answer our questions, to impart the wisdom that only they can give. Life can just seem to stop, we can’t understand why this person has been taken from us.

The dictionary definitions of Blessed don't feel right either: holy, consecrated, worthy of deep reverence or respect, characterized by happiness or good fortune. Doesn't seem to fit with when we are mourning!

There is a common step model sometimes quoted to people who are grieving; denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. None of these sound much like a blessing to me and if we've been through them they don't feel much like a blessing either.

It doesn't feel much fun when we are mourning the death of a loved one. We can be lost and angry, "Why did this happen?" "It wasn't their time". "They were so young". "Why?" certainly seems like an often asked question and comes with much anger.

So the first part of this passage doesn't feel like much of a Blessing. Maybe the second part can shed some light on this *"for they will be comforted"*.

In Jesus culture when someone died there would appear to be almost "professional" mourners who join the family to weep and wail with them. Mourning was a very open, public event. When Jesus raised Jarius's daughter from the dead we read the words *"Meanwhile all the people were wailing and mourning"* and when Lazarus died it says *"many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother."* I wonder how much of a comfort that really is?

In our own culture things are very different, we appear to be uncomfortable with other people's emotions when they lose a loved one, we don't know what to say to those closest to the person who has died. We don't feel comfortable to mention the person or to talk about the things we remember of them. And if you have been the person mourning how long do people stand with us? Even if we get along-side them when the person first dies how long do we try to walk with them?

Looking in more detail at Jewish customs for mourning and how long this goes on for it depends on the relationship of the person. If it is a parent then the children are to mourn for 12 months, for anyone else it is 30 days. In the Christian tradition there are no set customs for mourning.

Even if you set time periods and customs for mourning we are all different and it will depend on our relationship with the person who has died. Each of us will mourn that person for as long as we need to. We don't just snap out of it after a few weeks, 30 days or even a year.

As I read regarding the stages of mourning *"generally, a long period of "depression" (not clinical depression), isolation, and loneliness happen late in the grief process, **months** after the tragedy strikes. It actually is normal and expected for you to be very depressed and sad eight months later.*

Outsiders do not understand this, and feel that it should be time for you to "get over it" and rejoin the land of the living. "So when we mourn it can be for a long

period of time. I don't think my brother and sister-in-law will ever get over the death of their son, my nephew, who was only 11 when he died.

Can we be part of the blessing for those who mourn? Yes we can. Just because the funeral is over and life might appear to be back to normal for the person mourning life is not normal, whatever brave face they might be putting on. So talk about the person they have lost, reminisce with them about the good times, ring them or send a short email on the special days of importance, birthdays, the day the person died, wedding anniversaries, Christmas, all of these will be difficult, not just the first year but maybe for years to come.

My sister in law shared with us the first time we saw them after Samir's death, they live in Australia so this was nearly a year later, that her family don't talk about him, but we regularly mention him, how much he would enjoy something we are doing, or what a monkey he would be about something and how much that means to her, we've not forgotten him. He was a lovely, lively, cheeky little boy with an infectious grin and we don't want to forget that. Yes it is so sad that he is gone but we have many precious memories and want to share them.

If you feel prompted to ring someone do it, invite them to go for a coffee or a meal or make them a meal at yours. Let them know that they can talk to you about the person, be there for them when they need to cry.

One of the most difficult things through a death with all the questions of "Why?" can be wondering where God has gone in all this, why God let this happen. You

know it's **ok** to be angry with God, to rant and rave at God. To cry at God. The sacred has big enough shoulders to take it and has been through what you are going through. God saw the son die on a cross. God has seen many people mourning those they have lost and has travelled with them.

It can be really difficult to know that God is with us in this. Maybe rather than thinking about the distant God you might have a picture of, the distant parent, use other pictures and images, Jesus who was fully human and lost his earthly father, Jesus the friend of the disciples who was there when Peter's mother-in-law was sick. Jesus who called the little children to him to bless them. Jesus who looked out for his mother even when he was on the cross.

Or it might be easier to use some of the words we often use at Christmas to describe the Messiah; Prince of Peace, Wonderful Counsellor, Comforter.

Or you might find it easier to remember the words of songs we sing, songs that have special meaning to you. Songs sung when not in a time of mourning but that can be clung on to in the difficult times. Songs with words such as

Oh no, You never let go, Through the calm and through the storm

Oh no, You never let go, In every high and every low

Oh no, You never let go, Lord, You never let go of me.

Or hang onto the promises that have been made to us such as those we read in our Psalm earlier "*He will not let your foot slip – he who watches over you will neither slumber or sleep*"

Psalm 121 has always had meaning to me, it's been one I've turned to many times when things feel hopeless, when God has seemed very far away. In the times when God has seemed absent it reminds me that God **is** always there, always watching over me, even if I can't feel their presence because of all the other things that are going on and all the other feelings I'm full of it helps remind me of the promises God has made. This along with the words found in Hebrews 13 *"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you"*.

I encourage you in the good times to find and learn the promises that God has made to us so that in the bad times you can draw on them. Don't be afraid to mark them in your bible, to underline them, use a marker pen, and write a list of verses to help you in the front or back of your bible so that you can find them when you need them the most. Take a copy of the readings we use in a service or a copy of the words from songs that really speak to you and keep them somewhere you can find them and read or sing them when you need them, there are always copies of everything we sing here available at the end of the service, just ask the leader or one of the singers what they have done with their words and take them.

Because although as people we are called to be a comfort to one another the real blessing we get when we mourn is that the deepest comfort we are given, the comfort that is there in the darkest places, in the place where we are completely alone comes from the Sacred. We might not feel it, we might rant against it, we will still ask "Why?" and not understand what has happened, but there is a comfort that we can lean on that is always there. We might not get the answers

we are seeking but you can feel the comfort, the arms of God around you giving you that comfort and holding you when it is darkest.

Amen