

I have not wanted to preach on Donald Trump, so I am not going to. But, I think, I cannot help but talk around him.

Two things need to be said about him. Firstly his levels of self-awareness and his spiritual maturity could benefit from gaining some depth. Secondly he is neither stupid nor bad, and he has been fairly elected president. We need to hold all of those in mind. He too is a child of God and offered redemption in Christ. We can neither dismiss him nor judge him.

When we look at elected officials we need to recall that they get elected because we, the electorate, are largely impressed by power posturing, glittering promises and the assurance that we, personally, will be better off as a result of electing them. Democracy promotes a culture of strutting power and those elected reflect our collective hungers. Those worst-trait appetites are not honourable. Collectively we behave like a 3 year old faced with a choice between green beans or chocolate. Remember Rob Ford. Remember Stephen Harper.

But I want to say that we *do* need to break the TV-news-trance of fascinated horror. We need to turn away from our fixation upon management by tweet, executive order and plain dishonesty. This is the vortex of shock-horror that causes drivers on the 401 to crash as they gawk, aghast, at the accident they are passing. We need to look up!

Paul says this in words oddly prescient of today. Compared to the power-based culture of Rome and the empires that went before it, the Christian way is sheer foolishness.

Trump is like the earthquake and tsunami that will hit Vancouver Island killing thousands. Attention must be paid.

Un-checked industrial and financial capitalism will destroy not just the lives of the majority, it may destroy all that our generation has assumed to be the given-ness of life on earth. Attention must be paid. Opinion must be expressed. Marches must be attended and votes must be cast. The price of freedom is constant vigilance, mostly directed towards our own rulers.

But Paul says “Pause a moment. You can recognize their power. It is real. It has money and weapons. It has courts and laws and it has corruption and fear and it plays on our greed. Against all that we come only with foolishness.”

Foolishness is essential to living the path faith.

Power is based on leverage, getting your gang to be biggest, being able to push someone else over.

Foolishness is arriving without muscle, without bribes or inducements. It is about standing up and saying, “The truth I know and hold to is like another language to you and you cannot understand it. But here I stand, and I will be Christ-like, even when you laugh at me.”

It is laughable to care for the helpless, huddled masses. It is pointless and unprofitable to devote energy to the needs of those with mental illness or those who didn't get an education. The weak are dull. Those who succeed, who win, who glitter and are paraded on our screens....these are those who matter and we should emulate.

“No, actually.” says St Paul. “Our apparent foolishness is a wisdom of great depth. The weakness of our God is, in fact, stronger than the power you rely on.”

Jesus, in this “sermon on the mount” upsets all those guidelines to success, comfort, respect in the community and the common understanding of what being “blessed by God” might mean.

The prevailing picture was, and mostly remains, that if you have all the usual earthly goodies of happiness, wealth, food, big family, etc....then you are blessed.

But Jesus could almost have begun by asking everyone, “Who do you think is well blessed? Who seems to be so close to God’s heart as to be blessed?”

And there is the hinge. Is it “blessed” to be lucky, or successful, or wealthy, or beautiful, or powerful?

Jesus focuses in the other direction. Who is blessed? The key question to ask is “Who is living their life close to the heart of God?”

It is the poor in spirit. Those who are not loaded with certainties and rigid conclusions, but whose spirit is poor and with room for more.

Those who mourn are blessed because they took off their armor enough to risk love. And it hurts when someone you love leaves or dies. The vulnerable mourner is blessed.

The meek. Oh dear! The hesitant. Those slow to decide. Those who are afraid of offending. Those who just want everyone to be happy and kind to each other. The meek in movies invariably die first. But in Jesus’s view the meek are held in the heart of God, sheltered there.

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Those irritating people who keep on calling for justice for the transgendered, for the immigrant and refugee, for the people in prison and the sex-workers in our city. These are real people who are aware of how they fall short of their own standards and yet keep on asking for us and themselves to rise higher. They are like irritating grit in an oyster’s shell. And because it takes great courage to stand at the front and speak up, they, Jesus tells us, are close to God’s heart.

The pure in heart are those who actually make peace at the kitchen table or, through lives of silent prayer, deflect the winds of hate. They have put away judging. They just offer love. I think Jim Kostifas is one of these. Close, again, to God’s heart.

And finally those who the power-based world turns on and crushes. The persecuted who stand alone before the tank in the empty square and say, “What is happening to our brothers and sisters is not right.”

This list is too long and detailed for me to be able to hold in my head.

Thank God for Micah!

In three short lines he captures all of what I have said so far.

What does the Lord require of you? What, in short, is the spiritual practice which leads to blessedness?

To do justice.

To love kindness.

To walk humbly with your God.

Trump and Caesar, Stalin and Ghandi, Nelson Mandela and the kid who bullied you in school, they will all come and go.

But we who follow the Way of Christ, we chose to walk in the paths of the eternal one.

These paths are carved in the living rock, and all the rest is just shadows and light.

Our path is upon the rock of Christ. It is a narrow path.

We are those who follow in the way of Christ.

When we do this we are walking in eternity already.

And from there we come to care for God’s broken world, with great compassion. And joy.

There will always be others following the broad, flashy, populist path. But for all their TV magnetism and grisly glory, they are but dust, and to dust they shall return. The blessed are becoming part of the eternal God.