

Sunday 1st November

All Saint's Day

Revelation 7: 9 – 17; Psalm 34: 1 – 10; 1 John 3: 1 – 3; Matthew 5: 1 – 12



As a child I went through a stage when it seemed that I spent more of my life upside down than the right way up – cartwheels, walking on my hands, handstands against the wall in the playground at school, even handstands in the swimming pool. I think my poor Mum despaired of me. Life looked very different from an upside-down position.

Life has looked very different for us over these last few months as well when many of the things we have relied on seem to have been swept away and our world turned upside-down by the virus. Not all of the changes have been bad though. Many people have reconnected with things they had lost, just this week there was a report from booksellers reporting an upsurge in people buying books, online at first and later by going into bookshops when they re-opened. We know that gardening became very popular and so many people in the first days of lockdown heard birdsong for the first time in years because of the lack of traffic noise.

What we now call The Beatitudes seem to take a very upside-down view of the world, some of these sayings are hard to understand and others appear to be impossible, how will the meek inherit the earth for example? The first saying

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Mtt 5 v 3

is one that I found quite hard to interpret – until I read it in The Message version

You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

that makes sense to me because so often I try to keep going – either in my own strength, or, stubbornly, on my own path – only turning to God when I have nowhere else to go.

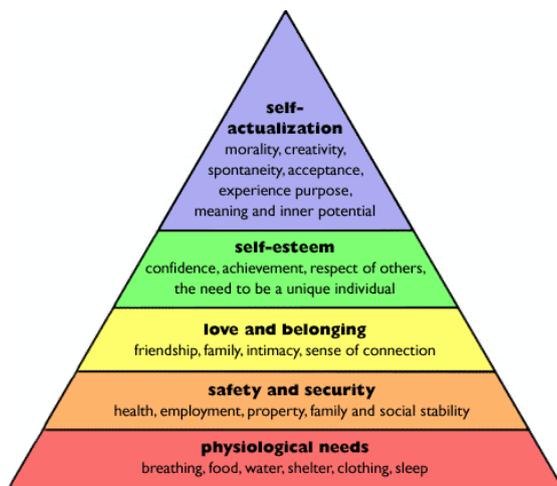
Tom Wright suggests that the Beatitudes are

... an announcement, not a philosophical analysis of the world. It's about something that is starting to happen not about a general truth of life.

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Jesus is here, that means the kingdom of heaven is here and the kingdom of heaven has a different perspective to the one that we are used to in our world.

This year our world has been stripped back to the essentials, during lockdown we were only allowed to leave our homes when it was absolutely necessary. At first that was for food and exercise, then people began talking about the need to consider our mental health and well-being, as time has gone on this has become a dominant theme – I notice a distinct lack of talk about spiritual well-being though. It has been interesting to see what people consider to be 'essential'.



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is fairly well-known now, it gives five categories of need. The basic, most essential needs we have are at the base of the triangle, our physiological needs and our need for safety. The next two categories are about our psychological needs which are important but come after our physical needs. The final category, at the top of the triangle is self-fulfilment, the things we need to grow and develop. Maslow was a

humanist so the lack of a spiritual need is not surprising although he does include churches and religion within the section labelled 'love and belonging'.

My feeling is that what people deem 'essential' probably depends on where they lie within the hierarchy of needs. If your physical needs are met and you feel safe you are more likely to feel that visits to the gym, pub or theatre are essential to your well-being than someone who has lost their job and is wondering how they feed their family.

Maybe we should put a circle around that triangle of needs to represent God, our need for him, and his care for us. Jesus was an itinerant teacher who had 'nowhere to lay his head' (Mtt 8 v 20), he didn't have most of what we consider basic needs but he put his trust totally in God to provide for him.

Many of the people we call saints did the same thing, some left their homes to go where God sent them. Some gave up considerable wealth, others ended up giving their lives. All of them in some way lived their lives showing us a glimpse of the kingdom of heaven.

Most of us would not claim to be saints but as we live our stripped back lives at the moment perhaps we can look for the opportunities to turn things upside down, to show mercy, to be peacemakers, to become 'those who hunger and thirst for righteousness' (Mtt 5 v6). Remembering that we are God's children and that those who have gone before us are cheering us on

since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. ²We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith.

Hebs 12 v 1 – 2a



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