

Did you notice it? Notice what? That little bit above the porch before you came in? What might have been in there? We'll see later.

Today is All Saints Day when we celebrate men and women in whose lives the Church as a whole has seen the grace of God powerfully at work. It's an opportunity to give thanks for that grace, and for how it shapes a human life; it's a time to be encouraged by the example of the saints and to remember that holiness can grow under ordinary circumstances, as well as the extraordinary crises, of human lives.

Saints? What's all that about? I wonder about that gap above the porch – did it have a statue in it? If so, of who? Bit tight to fit in St Peter and St Paul, the Saints this church is dedicated to.

We've been thinking about St Paul's letters to the churches in Thessalonica and Philippi lately, haven't we. Did you remember how they start? If I was writing a letter to you all here I'd write From John to all the saints in Cudham Church. What saints? I wouldn't be writing to the statue of St Peter and St Paul but to all of you because that's how St Paul describes all of you as God's holy people in other words - Saints – So, just think in your mind for a minute – you are St Diane, St Norman, St Rach, St Michael (?or should that be Marks and Spencers!)

Back to the porch again – I wonder if there's ever been anything there – someone once told me a story – there's never been anyone there – you're meant to look at that space where a statue might be and think – this could be me! God's holy one.... The bible tells us we are to become what we already are... Let's have a look at our bible reading. These sayings of Jesus are sometimes called by a strange word – the beatitudes – it's not there in the bible and it's nothing to do with attitude, it's simply the latin word for the word that Jesus repeats – blessed (blessed!)

We might talk about someone being blessed with good health or a sense of humour. We say 'bless' in an approving way when a small child says or does something cute. And we used to say 'Bless you' when someone sneezes – now we say 'keep away'!

What does that word mean – different versions of the bible translate it as happy, privileged, fortunate or even wonderful news - the word the bible uses is the Greek word Makarios! At the time of Jesus it meant the rich and powerful who knew nothing about the cares and worries of the ordinary people, a bit like those who don't quite understand why children need to be fed during school holidays!

Jesus changes this description of Makarios – doesn't exactly sound happy, though, did it?

Just try pulling a happy face now.... Difficult behind a mask, isn't it! Turn around so everyone can see...

What is Jesus talking about then?

Linking blessed or makarios with poor in spirit, mourning, meekness, persecution and hungering and thirsting for righteousness turns the meaning on its head. Blessedness, according to Jesus, is about embracing values and attitudes that are the opposite of those we usually think of as bringing us happiness and prosperity.

In the beatitudes being blessed is both for now and in the future. Did you hear them - The pure in heart will see God and the meek will inherit the earth. But the pure in heart and those persecuted for righteousness sake already possess the kingdom of heaven. Jesus is talking about the now as well as the not yet of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus is giving his followers eyes to see that the future is certain, and how he can transform the present.

If it was left to you, which of these 'blessednesses' would you choose – poor in spirit, merciful, peacemaker? That's not what it's about at all, though.

The eight blessings do not describe eight different people, - some who are merciful, some who are poor in spirit or some who are peacemakers - They are not eight different classes of people, but the gifting of God to each of us - the blessed person, the one who has found **real life**.

I like to know how things work – I take things apart and put them together again. One of my projects this half term was to fix a portable speaker – it was great fun, unscrewing it all, removing a corroded battery (?then I realised it was a lead/acid one, so the corrosion was sulphuric acid!) putting a new battery in, screwing it all together again – we're planning to test drive it on Remembrance Sunday so we can all hear the service outside. How do the beatitudes work? Can we take them apart and put them together? Here goes - Each beatitude begins with an announcement of God's blessing. Jesus then describes a characteristic- something that his listeners are asked to imitate or nurture in themselves, such as poverty of spirit or meekness of heart.

Then there is a promise. This is what you and me living by this characteristic will receive. For the first and last beatitude this is the kingdom of heaven itself. For the other beatitudes some part of the kingdom is given; to those who mourn spiritually, the strength to persevere, to those who are pure in heart, the sight of God; to those who are merciful, mercy for themselves.

But where's the test drive – as with many things in the Bible – it's Jesus himself - Let's take as an example; 'Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted'. When we look at Jesus' own life and ministry there are times when he cries out to God with sadness and anguish. It's not about personal sadness when someone we love dies but a whole attitude of lamentation and crying out to God; when we see and experience the injustices and sorrows of the world, something we might want to reflect on at the moment.

So, saints of God here at Cudham – St Noah, Theo, Barbara and Sue...

All of the beatitudes, the blessed sayings of Jesus about happiness are for all of us. I said it wasn't about attitude – maybe I was wrong – these are the most important, subversive, revolutionary words of Jesus in the Bible. Just like the wise man who built his house upon the rock in Matthew 7 the Beatitudes are the foundations upon which we can build our Christian lives and transform the world.

Try them, read them, ask God by his Holy Spirit to grow them in you.