

Sunday 16th February 2025; Benefice Holy Communion with Baptism, Oswaldkirk

What matters most?

That was the key question during Dying Matters Week last May in the hospital when groups gathered to focus on talking about death. That question has stayed with me ever since and in all sorts of ways we are confronted with that question every day of our lives.

Most people would answer it by saying – what matters most is what makes me happy! Which could be anything!

Today's gospel doesn't align well with the values of our society where people think they have a constitutional right to "the pursuit of happiness," or personal programs for happiness. It's a hard gospel to hear for anyone who has been taught or come to believe that happiness is the primary goal based on personal wealth or achievements in life. The message from Jesus as he preaches his sermon on the mount turns this attitude upside down.

Today's gospel raises questions about being poor rather than rich, hungry rather than full, weeping rather than laughing and being hated, excluded, reviled, and defamed, rather than thought well of. Not exactly the means of happiness you might think.

But it depends on what we understand by happiness, or what matters most.

I am not suggesting that Jesus and the gospel are opposed to our happiness but perhaps Jesus is talking about something deeper and more lasting than happiness, about being blessed. Happiness is circumstantial, and dependent upon what is or is not happening and how we are feeling. But blessing is different. Blessing is when God sees you and wants to bless you. There isn't anything you can do to change that, nothing you do can make God love you less, and nothing you do can make God love you more. God won't give up on you. God's blessing is there for you whether you've been a Christian all your life, or you're a non-believer. All every person needs to do is simply accept

the blessing. Jesus explains that His Father wants to make you whole and bless you. This doesn't necessarily mean you won't struggle, when Jesus says, "Blessed are you who are poor, yours is the kingdom of God," he is not suggesting that poverty itself is a blessed state. Rather, he is affirming that the poor are blessed because they accept that God stands with them. By first listing some other beatitudes and then following with the four woes, Jesus is highlighting the ups and downs of life we all experience and endure. Together, the Beatitudes and woes create a spiritual foundation, which brings hope and guides us towards a deeper relationship with both God and our neighbour.

When life is going well, it is important not to lose sight of those who are less fortunate. And when we face struggles, we should remember the blessings we do have such as our families, friends. Jesus calls us to live with balance: in difficult times, we should focus on the good in our lives, and in times of abundance, we must keep things in perspective and not forget those in need.

What matters most is knowing that you can live through whatever struggle life brings you, knowing Christ is with you and you are blessed.

Today at her baptism Isla is publicly announcing what matters most, that she is accepting and receiving God's blessing for her. She is stating she is accepting she is on a journey with God at the centre of her life and even when that seems unclear or lost, which will happen, God's blessing on her will never waver or change as it never does with any of us.

Isla joins us today as a child in God's family, the Church, and we welcome her as a member of a community that knows what matters most, being loved and blessed by God.

Thanks be to God. Amen.