

*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*

The more we get into the Beatitudes, the more I think they are above all there to tease us and set us thinking.

This week we have the line: 'blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God'.

Which is very deceptively simple. The second part of it, five simple words – in English or Greek – points us straight at one of the deepest paradoxes of our existence. It talks about 'seeing God'.

On the one hand, there is a very strong tradition that it is impossible to see God, at least in this life. But on the other hand, we talk a lot about 'seeing' God in different senses, 'seeing' God in other people, 'seeing' God at work.

It is both possible and impossible to see God and to know God.

This might sound very metaphysical and remote, but it isn't anything of the sort. For most of us I think, if we allow ourselves to go anywhere near ideas like this, we know this already. We can't really talk about it, because to do that we almost have to detach ourselves from it – and it is so much at the core of our being that we can't really do that.

And then Jesus tells us that the pure in heart will see God, just simply, just like that.

So who are the pure in heart? How do people become pure in heart? How do we become pure in heart?

Again, this is a pretty difficult one, and another paradox.

In the Net (our weekly newsletter) each week of this sermon series we are asked to think about who the people are who each Beatitude talks about.

Maybe we can think of people we consider 'pure in heart'?

But I suspect if we suggested to *them* that they were pure in heart, they would be the last people to agree. They know what is going on in their thoughts and their lives.

By definition, people who think they are 'pure in heart', are unlikely to be – but those who are will not see themselves like that at all.

So where do we go with all this?

Just a few thoughts, which might help us grapple with the ideas Jesus is challenging us with.

One is that purity is given by God. Think about all the places in the Bible that talk about this. Isaiah and the coals of fire: God purified his lips so he could prophesy. The psalms talk a lot about God cleansing and purifying.

Then there are all the miracles of Jesus where Jesus healed people who were unclean. Touching them

*should*, in Jewish thought, have made Jesus unclean, but it did the opposite: being touched by Jesus made *them* clean and healed them.

At the Last Supper Jesus washes his disciples' feet, and talks often about washing and cleansing. Jesus' ministry was a lot about washing and cleansing.

And then after Jesus' death and resurrection, Peter has that vision where God tells him not to call anything impure that God has declared pure.

Purity is not something we can earn or guarantee. It is God's gift.

You might also notice that Jesus says 'pure *in heart*'. You might think this makes it rather abstract, but it's anything but; it is about being pure at the very core of your being, and that then flows through everything you are and everything you *do*. It's not contemplative and inactive, detached from the world. It's contemplative *and* active. The reason this is so important is again it goes against the idea that purity comes from what you eat, what you do, who you associate with. It's much, much deeper than that.

And the depth of it is that it comes from a deep relationship with God. In a way, what makes today's beatitude so paradoxical is that the two parts of it are so inseparable. Being pure is given by God and about closeness to God. So to be pure in heart means already

to see and know God *that* closely. The pure in heart see God. They are pure in heart *because* they see God. They can see God *because* they are pure in heart.

And in case you're thinking this takes us off again into metaphysical and abstract paths, think again. We're Christians. This is day to day, practical, basic stuff for us. We believe that in Jesus we see and know God. God offers himself to us day by day, week by week, cleanses us, feeds us, heals us, comes close to us.

It's impossible to see God; but God turns round and shows himself to us. It's impossible for us to be pure in heart; but God turns round and washes us and purifies us. As Jesus also said: all things are possible for God. Amen.