

Blessed are the Meek

Readings: Isaiah chapter 2, verses 1-4; Matthew chapter 5, verses 1-11

You might think that I am off my rocker choosing this text for Remembrance Sunday. And especially after the American Presidential election this week. The last thing you would call Donald Trump is a meek man! But he has inherited leadership of the strongest nation on earth.

Part of the difficulty is that words change their meaning. We associate meekness with weakness but Jesus never said, "Blessed are the weak". When we speak of meekness the immediate picture that comes to mind is of a pasty-faced individual, someone who is pretty spineless and lets everyone walk all over him without having the guts to stand up and fight. But that's weakness, not meekness.

Moses was a strong character. He had the moral and physical courage to confront the Egyptian Pharaoh and led a group of slaves out of Egypt. He dealt with their rebelliousness for 40 years in the Wilderness — yet the Bible designates Moses as a meek man!

Nor could anyone say that Jesus was a weak man. I blame the hymn writer for implanting in the minds of impressionable children the picture of a "gentle Jesus meek and mild" Jesus confronted the powers that be with courage and conviction and their response was to have him crucified. Meekness does not equate with weakness.

So we have got to find another word. And I suggest humble. At one stroke the word humble does away with the selfish pride, the assertiveness, the arrogance, the will to power, the pomposity and the grandiose opinions of themselves that so many leaders have — and ordinary people too.

We could go on for a long time with definitions but instead I offer you the example of the humblest man I have ever known. His name was *Ken Mew*. He was born in poverty in Liverpool. During the last war he was one of the glider pilots who landed behind German lines on D-Day. After the war he emigrated to Rhodesia, became a "high-up" in the Anglo-American Corporation then gave it all up to found a multi-racial Adult Education college that in itself was a courageous act. The Rhodesian Government at the time was opposed to all multi-racial activities. Then came the UDI of Ian Smith and Rhodesia became a pariah. I was seconded for 2 years as Vice-Principal of the college and saw at first hand the inner strength of the man. The College became the meeting ground for British Government and Rhodesian Government officials in an effort to negotiate a settlement. I sat in on meetings where Ken fearlessly told both sides what he thought was wrong with them. He was pilloried by both sides as a consequence! But he stood his ground fearlessly.

Then one day Ken got a phone call from an alcoholic man living close to the college. We went together to visit him in his filthy flat and, after an hour Ken said "Let us say a prayer together". We knelt beside his bed. Ken took his hand and we said a prayer. The same man who three hours earlier had spoken in forthright terms to a British Government Minister! Now kneeling and holding the hand of an alcoholic and saying a prayer. — That's meekness for you.

Now to the difficult bit. What does it mean to say the meek will inherit the earth? All the evidence is that it is the strong and powerful that rule. On one occasion The Pope reprimanded Hitler for his abuse of power and Hitler's reply was short and sweet. "How many battalions has the Pope got?"

I have spent hours searching the commentaries for answers and without boring you with the detailed evidence the best answer seems to be that "inherit the earth" is a parallel statement to "receiving the Kingdom". Never forgetting that Jesus taught us to pray "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth...". Which is to say that whoever does the Will of God receives the Kingdom.

The New Testament speaks of the Kingdom as being here, yet still to come. It is here wherever peace is established and justice done, wherever the outcasts are welcome. It is not yet here wherever pride and bigotry and hatred are found, where justice is denied, discrimination persists and conflict results.

So **Martin Luther King** was a meek man and, as a result of his work with the Civil Rights movement the face of America was transformed.

Mahatma Gandhi was a meek man and as a result of his efforts the nation of India became proudly independent.

Nelson Mandela was a meek man and he saw through the birth of a nation without bloodshed.

And there was once a man who grew up in a peasant home and trained as a carpenter and then became an itinerant preacher. He once said, "Come to me all who are heavy laden I will give you rest. For I am meek and lowly of heart". His name was Jesus, and more than any other man He changed the world forever.

Today is Remembrance Sunday and we remember all those who have died in countless conflicts all over the world in the cause of justice and peace. And our responsibility is to to enlist in that on-going conflict and to give ourselves that in us and through us and by us God's Kingdom may come. Nor can we rest content until the Kingdom of this world becomes the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ.