It had been a busy few days for God.

Six in fact.

First there was that important moment right at the start when everything was a bit of a mess, so God turned the light on. Not exactly sure about what he saw, but by all accounts, it was a mess, so the first few days, God worked away at creating order out of the mess.

Must have been something like a teenage boy’s bedroom.

Once all that was done, night, day, dry land, sea etc. all in its place the fun business of creating things could get underway.

The first thing God did was create vegetables. Of all the things God could have created in those first days, God concentrated on carrots and what have you.

The next day God arranged the stars and the moon to his liking, then got down the business of making sharks and seagulls, then on the day after that the land based creatures got their turn. Genesis is a bit light on detail at this point but I presume insects got a look in somewhere.

Lastly but not least, God created humanity. We got our turn in the lime light, and sadly we have been hogging it ever since.

But it is the next day that I want to concentrate on for a moment.

The seventh day, the day of rest after the busyness of the week, what would the world have been like.

We each might have our own image. I imagine some sort of arcadian paradise, a perfect world newly minted, bright fresh.

We could imagine could we not that this world would not be a violent world, not a world of greed, or injustice, or oppression. Not a world of relentless competition, or lusting for power, a harmonious world, beautiful in its new newness.

The people, well our imaginations should do the work here, respectful, spiritual, gentle, merciful….

When humanity through its wrongheadedness and wretchedness destroyed this world, maybe by being who we are, people created with the ability to choose, and we choose some pretty stupid things.

But the world of the Sabbath was lost.

Attempts were made to recreate it, and we know this, through legalism, through regulation, through observing ritual, the Hebrew people tried to recreate that first day or to put it another way the observance of the Sabbath is an attempt to recreate that first day. What the ritual and regulation did in the end was kill and stifle the goodness of that day, make it a work rather that a thing of joy.

Not always mind, sometimes it worked.

To go back to that world the world of the first Sabbath, the heart needs to change, to create that beautiful first day. The day the world breathed the fresh air of that first day. The heart needs to change.

This is what the beatitudes are about, taken individually, or as a whole, they bring us back, bring humanity back to the wonder of that first day of Gods goodness and blessing.

Reading the story of Creation as told in the first chapter of Genesis, I was struck by this. Genesis means beginning, start. And one message of that story amongst many is the message of goodness and blessing, God saw the world created as good, God blessed that which God made. So the first word spoken to humanity is one of blessing, the first encounter of God with the world is bathed in goodness, switch to this Sermon on the mount, placed as it is in the first Gospel of the new testament, and it is the first major teaching of our Lord recorded, so as you read the NT, this then is the first encounter with the teaching of Jesus.

What does it open with, but words of blessing, Words of promise, words that evoke in my reading and understanding the blessing and goodness of that first week, and of that day of rest at the end of the week.

But to my mind the beatitudes are a more realistic expression of that longing for that fist Sabbath. The beatitudes are not based on legalism, but on grace, they are not unrealistic either, but acknowledge suffering and hurt.

If we look at them, and sorry this is not going to be an in-depth analysis of each, because believe me that could be possible, with about as many different approaches to them as angels on the head of a pin, what we see a working guide to being a person of faith, and a shout against the values and concerns of the world.

To be poor in spirit is a move away from self-centeredness, and an acknowledgment of interconnectedness, being meek to not be easily angered, to hunger and thirst for righteousness is about longing deeply for a world made just and right, not through aggressive action but through dogged persistence, to be merciful is to live out in the world bringing mercy, to be pure in heart is to divest yourself of those things that block us from seeing God, to be a peacemaker is to live a life of nonviolence, and active reconciliation.

These are broad brush stokes, and I missed mourning, because mourning is to acknowledge the shadow side of life to know that it does not always go right.

Yet if we take these beatitudes and on the one hand see them as working compass points for our lives, directions that we should take, then we can also turn them over and see in them a working description of that world of the Sabbath, the world at the end of creation, that embodied all the goodness of creation.

Do they not describe a world of beauty, gentleness, peace and joy, a world of good relationships, not authoritarian, not triumphant, but a world a celebration and grace?

So, the beatitudes describe a Christian world, a world quite frankly at odds with the dominant culture about it, no wonder then that the last two delineate that to live these fully will result in opposition from the world, or at least you will be misunderstood.

I want to go back to where we started:

That great day, the danger is that nostalgia, even for something we never knew could rule us here, but surely what should guide us is not nostalgia, but hope and purpose that with these blessings these beatitudes give us the foot print, the markers for a world that is possible, a world that Jesus laid out for his disciples, that is us to live our lives by, and in our living, create this world.

May we be poor in spirit, may we mourn, may we be meek, may we hunger and thirst for righteousness, may we be merciful, may we be pure in heart, may we be peacemakers.

Amen.