

January 29, 2016

Matthew 5:1-12

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Presentation on Pilgrimage to Greenbelt Festival

Video used as part of call to worship:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQYSPMJ7y00>

Greenbelt's Website: <http://www.greenbelt.org.uk>

What is Greenbelt

Greenbelt is four day long festival held each August in England. The festival's motto is "where faith, justice, and art collide."

In 2013 my wife Jessica and I went on pilgrimage to Greenbelt along with other young United Church ministers and theological students and our church's moderator. The idea was that we were searching for inspiration and encouragement to unleash the church's passion and creativity in this time of change.

Greenbelt is huge event. In 2013 there was a little over 20,000 people in attendance, with another 1, 500 volunteers making the event happen.

At any given moment there can be over 20 different events happening at once from the early morning until late into the evening.

At Greenbelt you can listen to music of all genres, attend talks about social justice, theology, spiritual practices, new ideas about church and many other subjects. You can listen to comedians and poets. Do Yoga or dance.

There are plays, performance art and visual art, and films shown.

There are events geared towards families, children, and youth.

And you can worship a lot. In 2013 there were 63 different worship services. They ranged from Monastic orders inviting people to join them in their daily prayers to a Goth Eucharist, Jazz worship to U2Charist (that's Communion set to the band U2's Music).

Greenbelt is a gathering of people travelling from all over, from different churches and denominations, from other faiths, from no church. We saw babies in arms, children running around playing, and people into their seventies and eighties. We saw a middle aged Franciscan sister in her simple brown robes bobbing her head to Aerosmith's *Living on the Edge* during worship alongside a teenager with green spiky hair wearing torn jeans and a punk rock shirt. Greenbelt is an amazing festival for all ages. Many people go there each year.

Beatitudes

Greenbelt has a strong focus on Justice from talks on equality and social justice, to protest art, to stands selling fair trade goods.

Today we hear the beatitudes. These are more than blessings to comfort those in need but answers to the question of what does discipleship look like. In Matthew the first disciples have just been called when the Sermon on the Mount occurs in the Gospel. What does discipleship look like and

where do people experience the dominion of God being made known in their midst: Blessed are the poor, financially and spiritually, blessed are those who are grieving, those who have been silenced or made submissive, those who are hungry for righteousness and justice, the peacemakers, and those who are put down, arrested, attacked because they stand up for righteousness - for this is where the dominion of God is made known.

Our faith is an embodied faith, discipleship leads us towards standing alongside one another for justice and equality. Where is the blessing of God? It is in refugee camps and detained at airports, it is wearing a pink hat marching with people all over the world demanding a commitment to equality, it is with those who speak truth to power and call all people not to ignore the environment, the needs of the easily ignored, the easily blamed, hated, or feared, the minority, and the marginalized. It is in these Christ blessed places calling us to a discipleship of embodied love and justice.

Greenbelt, places of pilgrimage, worship, and Scripture deepen us, fill us, and lead us out to take our place in the healing of the world. Blessed are those who hunger for righteousness for they will be filled.

My Experience of Greenbelt

Walking into the Greenbelt Festival was a little overwhelming, like walking into a great big buffet and then having to decide what are you going to eat? [\(show red book\)](#) This is the catalogue of programs – and here are all the events that are happening.

Going to Greenbelt was extremely enjoyable, deep, holy, and inspiring.

There is not enough time to talk about everything I took part in and no words can really grasp how deep the experience was for me.

However, I can share a couple of highlights.

One of the highlights for me was the Worship. I loved the variety of worship and how people were combining ancient practices with new things.

Most memorable was sitting on the grass with 12, 000 other people on Sunday morning sharing worship. Near the end of the service we gathered in groups of 12 and shared communion while looking out over the sea of people and the rolling green hills.



“Beer and Hymns” was a worship service that surprised me with how powerful it was (Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RsrFCNZH9wQ>). I went because I knew it was one of the most popular services, I didn’t expect to be so deeply moved by it. Joining together in an overflowing tent just over a thousand of us sang hymns, raising our drinks for the choruses,

and worshiped together. The sermon summarized worship at Greenbelt. Here is the unabridged version: There are many ways to worship God, drinking beer and singing hymns is one of them.

The music and poetry was outstanding. One singer and song writer, Martyn Joseph, moved me when he sang these words: “I need you brave, want you brave, need you strong to sing along, you are beautiful, and I’m not wrong. Even today, this time line would be fine, enough for us to find the path ahead. And let it all roll on. But if you’re drifting away, and your falling apart, let yourself be quietly drawn by the stronger call of what you really love” (Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x9HM6wrsKrE>). I thought to myself this is the anthem for all of us who are feeling overwhelmed by the struggles of a declining church or the hardships of life. Be quietly drawn by the stronger call of what you really love.

The talks were informative, poignant, and powerful, the aid organizations at different booths were an important reminder of our faith’s striving for justice for all people. It reminded me that my faith needs to have loving and active hands and feet.

And then there was the big experience of being with so many other people sharing in faith together.

What I take away from Greenbelt.

What stuck with me after Greenbelt was the sense of joy and optimism that was shared. It wasn't a detached or head in the sand experience. But there was a real sense that in the midst of the struggles of life, the injustices, the changes happening all around us, the faith we celebrated is still relevant, life-giving, and capable of bringing blessings in this world.

Jessica and I went home having shared in a sacred place, having been inspired, empowered, challenged, and transformed for a life of creativity, faith, love, and justice. Places of pilgrimage stay with us long after we leave. We will always remember and be inspired by Greenbelt.

I would love to go back to Greenbelt, and maybe one day we will. I also hope one day to attend the North American festivals inspired by Greenbelt – Wild Goose in the United States, and Skylight which started last year in Paris Ontario.

But Greenbelt also reminds me that this place right here, Grace United Church, and every place we come together for community is a spot of pilgrimage. We have journeyed here this morning in person or through the television. Throughout the week people will gather here sharing community through groups like AA, Alanon, Guiding, Scouting, Light on Main, and many more groups. Our faith has inspired us to shape this place where all are welcomed. And it is a place where we remind one another, as Jesus did, that we are all blessed and a blessing to this world. It's a place where we are called to work towards healing, wholeness, love, and justice, where we are encouraged to go out and make a difference in our homes, our community, and our world.

May we join in the Spirit's movement, create sacred space, and go out into the world with hope and love-in-action for we are part of the Holy Story.

Amen. Let it be so.



Nativity Story puppets (with the Beatles)



Children's activity area (early



Let Us Spray graffiti prayer wall