The Beautitudes in Luke 6 (as in Matthew 5) are still actual today. Only a few examples last week show how relevant these words remain with recent developments on world stage;
- I heard that all Palestinian prisoners swapped with Israeli hostages received a t-shirt when leaving with the text; ‘We never forget, we never forgive’.

- At the Munich Conference, the European delegates were furious about a peace plan without them playing the first fiddle.

Both cases just happened a few days ago and one might ask; how can peace and forgiveness ever be found?

It seems we’ve not gone far away from the age of feuds or vendetta of the Mafia:
Such vendetta’s began when one party perceives itself to have been attacked, insulted, injured, or otherwise wronged by another. Intense feelings of resentment trigger an initial retribution, which causes the other party to feel greatly aggrieved and vengeful. The dispute is subsequently fuelled by a long-running cycle of retaliatory violence. This continual cycle of provocation and retaliation usually makes it extremely difficult to end peacefully.

It’s a very old cultural phenomenon, long before the mafia existed. Already in Genesis 4:23 we read: ‘Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say: I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. If Cain’s revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech’s is seventy-sevenfold.’

The law as given in Leviticus 24 saying an eye for an eye and a teeth for a teeth was already a law to stop excessive retribution.

So, we’ve gone from Lamech as an example of an excessive violent and murderers attitude, to the law saying only comparable retribution, to the words of Jesus in the Beatitudes.

John Stott once wrote a book on the Beatitudes and he wrote in the first line of his prologue; ‘The Beatitudes are the best well known of all Jesus’ sayings, but also the least understood and certainly the most disobeyed.’

It’s easy to make a sermon about the Beatitudes, because John Stott wrote it all out for me.
In the gospels we learn how Jesus began to preach the coming of the Kingdom of God, all throughout Judea and it all the synagogues. In all His preaching Jesus calls for a metanoia; a complete change of our human thinking, and a focus on the justice of the Kingdom of God.
For Stott the Beatitudes show a glimpse of how human and social life will look like when it will be lived under the rule of Grace established by God.

In both Matthew 5 as here in Luke 6, it says; Blessed are the poor.

Quite a few years it opened up for me the question of who Jesus meant with, when He mentioned the poor. Does He mean the poor as having no money or any goods? Or, when He speaks in Matthew 5 about the poor in spirit are they different from the poor in Luke 6?

We have to be very careful with whom we regard as the poor. As we see the poor as the ones without goods or money and go by hungry, we can easily end up with a social gospel in which we’re only called to give away all what we have and share it with the poor.

In the Hebrew, the original language of the OT, are different words for poor, but in the far majority  the poor in the OT are not poor as having no money, but poor in reference to all who are humble, needy, oppressed, afflicted, or anything which emphasizes the use of force leading to humiliation. Such poor in the OT are on the same level as those who are alien, orphan or widow and anybody else who was disadvantaged.

Another mention of poor is e.g in the Psalms; like 9, 10, 14. The poor mentioned here are the people who stand against those who do not fear God.

The poor are not the poor as having no money or goods, but are those who are humiliated because of their faith and trust in God. The rich, nobles and powerful might have gone astray and worshipping other gods, but the faithful ones, the POOR, will be God's inheritance. God dwells with the lowly and faithful of heart awaiting His deliverance and remaining trustful to His promises.

When we look to Deut. 8:1-3, we notice that a humbled Israel in the dessert is going to take possession of the promised land. They are granted by God to receive and enjoy their blessings, because He is their Redeemer.

It are the humble and those who know they need God, who display their reverence for God and they understand their place in creation.

Humility in the OT is not described in terms of lowliness, but of selflessness, which is an essential root of all Godly wisdom. It are essential concomitants for faith and trust in God.

When Jesus mentions the poor, He refers to those who remain loyal to God, even if everyone else around them worship other gods or themselves. For Jesus the poor are them that are humble in heart. As with the Israelites, it are the humble in heart who took possession of the promised land.

Going back to the beginning. It’s impossible for humankind to establish the Kingdom of God by their own hands and on their own terms. It are they lowly in heart, the faithful and the righteous who are the living standards of God’s Kingdom, because God can work through them to make it known to the world.

Hans Taling