**10th July 2022**

**Call to worship**

Let us join together to worship God,
the source of all love, compassion, and justice,
as we seek to become fit to do God’s will in the world.



**A gathering prayer**

Lord, awaken us this morning to the needs of your world,
the pains and tensions in our communities,
the dangers and hardships in the most vulnerable areas
of this warming planet.
Show us the importance of love
in all the difficult choices and decisions
we are called upon to make, big or small.
**Amen.**



**A prayer of approach**

*based on Psalm 25*

To you, O God, we offer our prayers.
In you, O God, we trust.
Teach us your ways, O Lord,
make them known to us.
**Amen.**



**A prayer of adoration**

O Lord, you are our God,
the God of Abraham, Isaac and Joseph;
the God of Moses, the Prophets and Psalmists;
the God of Priests, Levites and Samaritans;
the God of Disciples and Apostles;
the God of Jews and Gentiles;
the God of the good, the bad and the ugly.
Oh Lord, you are our God, you are my God,
and your promises to us are immense –
beyond our imagining, beyond what we deserve.
You are our God, and we adore you for all you are
and for all your ways and for all your love,
this and every day.
**Amen.**



**A prayer of confession and an Assurance of forgiveness**

**A prayer of confession**

For times when we have tried to trap you,
**God, forgive us.**
For times when we have seen a need but walked on by,
**God, forgive us.**
For times when we felt too important to get involved,
**God, forgive us.**
For times when we have been in too much of a rush,
**God, forgive us.**
For times when we have simply ignored a need,
**God, forgive us.**
For times when we have not done what is right,
**God, forgive us.**
For times when we have acted cruelly or unjustly,
**God, forgive us. God, forgive us.**
**Amen.**

**Assurance of forgiveness**

Lift from us, Lord, the burdens of guilt,
of sorrow for deeds undone,
of pain for harm and hurt caused.

Blessed be you, Lord God,
who takes away the sins of the world,
who has lightened our load,
cleansed us and forgiven us.
**Amen.**



**A prayer of thanksgiving**

Almighty God, in a world of so many choices,
with so many options,
so many routes to take and roads to follow,
we give you thanks that in all the mix of life you are there,
you are here with us and always will be.
We give you thanks that you have inspired so many people
to live their lives with love and support and generosity.
We give you thanks that you have set hearts on fire
with passion and commitment to serve you and our neighbours
in the way you would have us do.
We give thanks that we can read and share your word,
know your truth, feel your peace
and have the freedom to choose right from wrong.
For all this and so much more, we give you thanks and praise.
**Amen.**

**Luke 10.25-37**

The outgoing Health Secretary has said being at the National Parliamentary Prayer Breakfast on Tuesday inspired him to quit his role.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Sajid Javid resigned on Tuesday, July 5, saying he could no longer serve under the Prime Minister.

Speaking about that decision in the Commons on Wednesday, he said words spoken at the prayer breakfast had a big impact.

"We began our day together you [House Speaker], I, my right honourable friend, the Prime Minister and members from across his house when we broke bread together at the Parliamentary Prayer Breakfast. We listened, all of us, to the words of Rev Les Isaac, who spoke about the responsibility that comes with leadership, the responsibility to serve the interests of others above your own, and to seek common ground of your party, your community, and above all, your country.

Addressing colleagues in what was a second resignation after he prevously left the role of Chancellor, he said: "It doesn't matter what your political perspective is, in this house.

"I believe that we are all motivated by the national interest, and that the public expects us all, all of us, to maintain honesty and to maintain integrity in whatever we do. This is not an abstract matter."

Javid's resignation, along with Chancellor Rishi Sunak, came on a day which started with over 700 politicians and church leaders joining for prayer in Parliament's Westminster Hall.

Those gathered heard an address from Street Pastors founder Rev Les Isaac.

He said: "God gives his people the capacity to be compassionate, not living for themselves, but living for others, and seeking to demonstrate that compassion for the weak and the poor, and the marginalised and those who are in distress.

"At the centre of our lives is Jesus, and a desire to be like Him, and to fulfill his purpose here on Earth.

"Many men and women are quietly demonstrating service humbly and compassionately for the common good of the community, of society of, their city and their nation.

"But there's a challenge for us, whether we're politicians, whether we are church leaders, there's a challenge for us to work in a collaborative way. To work where we can work for the common good with everyone within our community."

Boris Johnson finally admitted defeat on Thursday and resigned as Prime Minister.

A number of commentators have spoken about the link between Mr Johnson’s success on the campaign trail – being simple, direct and focussed on what his listeners want to hear – and his struggles in office.[[2]](#endnote-2)

Jesus’ parable is not about how we react in a one-off situation but about the daily decisions that we all make every day about how we react to the needs of those we encounter. Loving our neighbour is an attitude that we are called to practice and grow in, rather than a task that we tick off and then forget about.

n response to a question by a lawyer – Who is my neighbour? – Jesus tells a parable about a man who needs help. Of those who had the opportunity, only a Samaritan did so; and Samaritans and Jews disliked each other intensely. By his actions, the man showed that he was not only a good Samaritan but a good neighbour. Jesus says to the lawyer, ‘Go and do likewise.’

We often think of this story in terms of the men who didn’t ‘do the right thing’ and one, the Samaritan, who did. But the overall story starts with the lawyer who asked for a deeper understanding of ‘doing the right thing’, and Jesus’ parable and its challenge to his assumptions is the answer. The story can help us to re-examine our assumptions and responses too.

The first question the lawyer asks is actually “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life.” Jesus answers “What is written?” In other words, use your own mind to discern the essence of the law. Jesus, like a good discussion leader, throws the question right back in his lap.

The lawyer had a good answer. He said: “You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart and soul and mind and strength and you shall love your neighbour as yourself.” This was a direct quote from Deuteronomy 6. It was part of the Shema, a confession regularly made in Jewish worship. Jesus says: “Excellent. You are correct.” If he were a teacher I suppose he would have said: “You get A+.” I have no complaint with this says Jesus. Do this and you shall live.

The answer itself is deeply challenging to Britain of the twenty first century. The majority of people in our society if they asked the question ‘what must I do to get the best life possible?’ would expect an answer involving, health, happiness, friends and money. God would be well off the radar. In Jesus time this was the expected answer.

In 27 years of ministry I can count on the fingers of one hand the number of people who have come to me and directly asked me the question ‘What must I do for eternal life?’

I know vicars and minsters get called ‘God botherers’. That’s because we ask those fundamental questions: Do you believe you have a creator? What is your relationship to God. What happens when you die? Are you going to meet God? If so, are you ready?

The most famous God botherer of the last century was Billy Graham.

When Billy Graham was 92 years-old, he was struggling with Parkinson's disease. In January, a month before his 93rd birthday, leaders in Charlotte, North Carolina, invited their favorite son, Billy Graham to a luncheon in his honor.

Billy initially hesitated to accept the invitation because of his struggles with Parkinson's disease. But the Charlotte leaders said, 'We don't expect a major address. Just come and let us honor you.' So he agreed.

After wonderful things were said about him, Dr. Graham stepped to the podium, looked at the crowd, and said:

"I'm reminded today of Albert Einstein, the great physicist who this month has been honored by Time magazine as the Man of the Century. Einstein was once traveling from Princeton on a train, when the conductor came down the aisle, punching the tickets of every passenger. When he came to Einstein, Einstein reached in his vest pocket. He couldn't find his ticket, so he reached in his trouser pockets.

It wasn't there. He looked in his briefcase but couldn't find it. Then he looked in the seat beside him. He still couldn't find it.

"The conductor said, “Dr. Einstein, I know who you are. We all know who you are. I'm sure you bought a ticket. Don't worry about it.” Einstein nodded appreciatively. The conductor continued down the aisle punching tickets. As he was ready to move to the next car,he turned around and saw the great physicist down on his hands and knees looking under his seat for his ticket.

"The conductor rushed back and said, 'Dr. Einstein, Dr. Einstein, don't worry, I know who you are; no problem. You don't need a ticket. I'm sure you bought one.'Einstein looked at him and said, “Young man, I too, know who I am. What I don't know is where I'm going."

Having said that Billy Graham continued, "See the suit I'm wearing? It's a brand new suit. My children, and my grandchildren are telling me I've gotten a little slovenly in my old age. I used to be a bit more fastidious. So I went out and bought a new suit for this luncheon and one more occasion. You know what that occasion is? This is the suit in which I'll be buried. But when you hear I'm dead, I don't want you to immediately remember the suit I'm wearing. I want you to remember this:

"I not only know who I am. I also know where I'm going." May your troubles be less, your blessings more, and may nothing but happiness, come through your door. "Life without God is like an unsharpened pencil - it has no point."

Most people’s lives are centred on themselves. Their happiness and their concerns. That’s not necessarily a wrong thing. We all have concerns for our wellbeing and flourishing. Concerns about our homes and our gardens, our jobs, the cost of living, our holidays: will our flights get cancelled or the trains go on strike: will we get our place in the sun. For most people these are the most important questions in life and todays priorities.

God botherers like me are here to ask the ultimate questions: What is your relationship to God. What happens when you die because that should change the way you live.

First priority questions that then affect your second priority questions.

The answer to how can I have eternal life is actually think less about yourself: Love God, love your neighbour.

And in a nutshell, there you have the answer to society’s ills: our individualised, neurotic anxious competitive society where depression is running at record levels, identity problems fill social media posts and people bang on about their rights but not their responsibilities.

The key part of the lawyer’s question is ‘what must I do to **Inherit** Eternal life’. How do you receive an inheritance? Its not by doing anything but through relationship usually. You love someone and it is reciprocated. They become your heirs. One must be an heir . no amount of doing will make you into one. Keeping the law is a way of life – not the way to life. Only when by God’s grace we are in a right relationship with god do we begin to see what the right thing is to do and how we love as God loves.

Jesus and the lawyer agreed on the first priority question: Love the Lord God with all of your heart and soul and mind and strength. Love your neighbour as you love yourself.

It’s not a priority for our godless society.

You would think that the man would be pleased and go home. But lawyers are never happy. A lawyer’s responsibility is to define the limits of liability. “But he, desiring to justify himself, asked ‘Who is my neighbour.’” In other words, where does my responsibility stop? Who exactly am I responsible for?”

At this point, instead of further defining the question, Jesus tells a story. A way of indirect teaching.

The parable of the Good Samaritan is perhaps the most well known parable of Jesus.

Eugene Peterson says parables are narrative time bombs designed to explode people into new awareness. In this case one of the pieces of shrapnel is designed to tear into the idea that the law will ever save anybody. Jesus is exposing the futility of the law as a way to inherit eternal life. After all, the Samaritan who finally reached out did so not as a result of law but of grace. The finer points of the law left the man half-dead in the ditch.

The priest and the Levite hurry past when they see the injured man, confounding our assumptions that the ‘holy’ would surely help. To stop would mean risking delay to their journey, and perhaps ritual uncleanliness, robbery, ambush or attack. To them, the risks were too high. Maybe they thought the man was a drunk – it was his own fault that he was in this state. He wasn’t deserving of their help. His own sin had brought this upon him?

It is, instead, the surprisingly spiritual Samaritan who, on balance, counts the sick man’s needs greater than the risks he faces, and stops to help. He stops to try and understand. His decision costs him, in oil and wine for the man’s wounds, and money, for the bed at the inn. We don’t know his motivation, but perhaps he simply recognised that it could easily have been him left by the roadside. Perhaps he wanted to be part of a world in which compassion was shown to all and with his eyes on that goal, knew he had to be willing to show mercy himself.

We live in a risk averse culture.

Risks and surprises are part and parcel of life, but most of us do everything we can to minimise their impact on our lives. It’s only natural to want to protect ourselves as far as possible. But focusing too narrowly on risk-reduction can prevent us from growing on our journey through life.

We do know that the Samaritans gift of mercy was appreciated by those who heard the story then, as now. If we, too, aspire to ‘Go and do likewise,’ perhaps we will have to prepare to weigh the risks to ourselves a little lower in the balance than the needs of others and get ready to confound expectations.

The Samaritan had reached out as a result of grace not as a result of the law. Grace was compassion – it didn’t calculate the risk or the cost – it just gave love. The finer points of the law and a risk calculation would have left the man in the ditch.  It leaves us all there. Grace is what lifts the man out. Grace it what lifts all of us out.

A man fell into a pit and couldn't get himself out.

A subjective person came along and said, "I feel for you down there."

An objective person came along and said, "It's logical that someone would fall down there."

A religious person said, "Only bad people fall into a pit."

A mathematician calculated how he fell into the pit.

A news reporter wanted an exclusive story on his pit.

An Inland Revenue official asked if he was paying taxes on the pit.

A self-pitying person said, "You haven't seen anything until you've seen my pit."

A charismatic Christina said, "Just confess that you're not in a pit."

An optimist said, "Things could be worse."

A pessimist said, "Things will get worse."

Jesus, seeing the man, took him by the hand and lifted him out of the pit!

God loves us before we love God the scriptures tell us. (1 John 4.19). Being a Christian is not about keeping the law – about being a good person. I wish I had a pound for every time I talk with families about the funeral for their loved one and they tell me that that the deceased never hurt anyone, always tried to do good – as if I can put a good word in for them with the almighty. The essence of being a Christian is to know that you are loved. God loves you and calls you into relationship – so you can be a co heir in Christ to eternal life..

Frederick Buechner in his book: The Magnificent Defeat writes this:

*The love for equals is a human thing--of friend for friend, brother for brother. It is to love what is loving and lovely. The world smiles.*

*The love for the less fortunate is a beautiful thing--the love for those who suffer, for those who are poor, the sick, the failures, the unlovely. This is compassion, and it touches the heart of the world.*

*The love for the more fortunate is a rare thing--to love those who succeed where we fail, to rejoice without envy with those who rejoice, the love of the poor for the rich, of the black man for the white man. The world is always bewildered by its saints.*

*And then there is the love for the enemy--love for the one who does not love you but mocks, threatens, and inflicts pain. The tortured's love for the torturer. This is God's love. It conquers the world.*

If God had not been gracious with us, we'd all still be dead.

There’s an unwritten shock in the parable of Jesus, a shock only heard by people living in the context of the story, a shock lost on us,. Jesus was speaking to an audience who hated Samaritans, He was asking them to do much more than follow a moral example.

Living in God’s kingdom requires such a radical transformation that one must not only accept one’s enemies (indeed, love them), but one must even be prepared to receive aid from the enemy – a most humbling gesture. Giving aid takes work, but receiving aid takes great humility.”

From whom would it be difficult for you to receive compassion? What can we learn from our “enemies”? Which is easier for us, to give help or to receive it.

”Mercy ‘blesseth him that gives and him that takes’, according to Portia in Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*. Is this true in our experience? Does mercy sometimes benefit both the recipient and the one who offers it?

Imagine what it might be like to live in a society where no one showed mercy — where even the Samaritan walked by. Would you want to live there? Then allow this to act as a challenge to do differently!

One such person doing the work of love expressed in compassion is Sister Helen Prejean. Her story was told in the movie Dead Man Walking. A young man was convicted of the brutal murder of a young woman and her boyfriend and sentenced to death. Sister Helen makes the death row journey with him, serving as a spiritual counsellor. She walks with him to the place of execution, and she says to him before he enters the death chamber, “Matthew, when they do this thing to you, look at me. I want the last face you see in this world to be the face of love. So you look at me. I’ll be the face of love for you.”

Love and compassion does not ask, “What does the person deserve?” It asks, “What does this person need?”

Every day you and I are confronted with opportunities to help others, to express God’s love in acts of compassion. I challenge each of us to seize those opportunities and not let them slip away. More specifically, I challenge each of us to one act of love and compassion this week. One act on behalf of another person who needs your help. I also challenge you to keep your eyes open for larger acts of love and compassion in which we as a faith community can take part.

Luke in his gospel suggest that instinctive boundary crossing compassion characterises those fit for the kingdom of God.

It’s not always clear what it means to be Christian. I would suggest to you that it takes both belief and behaviour, belief that so captures the heart and mind that it issues forth in Christlike behaviour. I use the word “believe” as William Sloane Coffin defines it. To believe he says is “to give one’s heart to” something or someone.

Being a Christian means you believe that you are God’s beloved in whom God takes delight. You believe that love expressed through compassion is this world’s greatest hope.

You tell your spouse to stay in bed and you’ll go feed the baby. You sit in the school cafeteria with someone who has no friends. You bring someone food. You visit for a while. You pay someone’s bills. You clean someone’s house. You give stuff away to people who need it. You sit with someone who is dying so that they’re not alone.

Walking in the way of Jesus is to walk in the way of love and compassion. We have been exploring this in the 9 Beats course. The Way of Jesus. And walking is something you DO. “DO this, Jesus said, “love God and love your neighbour, including your enemy. DO this, and you will live.” Go and do likewise.



**Prayers of intercession**

O Lord our God, we turn our minds, our thoughts, our prayers to those in need, our neighbours near and far. We know the right thing to do is to pray for those in need, help us now as we pray to be willing to offer a hand of help and friendship wherever we can to those for whom we pray.

O Lord our God, we pray for them;
**Our neighbours near and far.**

For the traumatised through random shootings, un-provoked attacks, senseless, seemingly purposeless acts of maiming and murder, leaving scars physical and emotional that will last a lifetime.
For the emergency services that react to such events and pick up the pieces of carnage, mentally and physically.

O Lord our God, we pray for them;
**Our neighbours near and far.**

For our far away neighbours in Australia seeing drastic effects of climate change with epic flooding in Sydney.
For India and Pakistan, for Afghanistan, all countries seeing chaotic weather patterns.
Homes, businesses, infrastructures and livelihoods washed away along with hopes and dreams of security.

O Lord our God, we pray for them;
**Our neighbours near and far.**

For our neighbours in Ethiopia, Sudan, Nicaragua and Sri Lanka all facing economic and political crises, living lives and existences we cannot even begin to imagine.

O Lord our God, we pray for them;
**Our neighbours near and far.**

For countries and peoples still fighting the yo-yoing effects of Covid, for slow roll out of vaccines in some places, to wasted vaccines in other places, from lack of understanding, from fake news, from fear and ignorance and some people simply ignoring good advice for the good of others.

O Lord our God, we pray for them;
**Our neighbours near and far.**

For young people coming to the end of summer term and all the changes and chances and challenges that will involve. New schools, new classes, new friends, new teachers and for some the stress of waiting for exam results that will determine their next steps. For all those leaving education and stepping out into the world with its uncertainty and their own uncertainty.

O Lord our God, we pray for them;
**Our neighbours near and far.**

For parents as they let their youngsters ‘go’ to experience life for themselves, for the challenges and changes this brings to the dynamics of family life.

O Lord our God, we pray for them;
**Our neighbours near and far.**

For the increasing number of people worldwide facing uncertainties over finances and housing with conflicts between eating and heating. May those with too much and more than they can ever need be willing to make sacrifices for those with far too little to meet even basic needs.

O Lord our God, we pray for them;
**Our neighbours near and far.**

For those for who life today is a real struggle, for those who do not know, for whatever reason,, what the right thing to do is.

O Lord our God, we pray for them;
**Our neighbours near and far.**

O Lord our God accept our prayers, our yearnings and our hopes for others.
**Amen.**



**A sending out prayer**

Lord, help us to look for the good in our neighbours.
Help us to recognise that neighbourliness goes two ways.
Make us gracious as well as generous,
receptive to the ideas and perspectives,
as well as the needs, of others,
remembering that as we meet them, we meet you.
**Amen.**

1. <https://premierchristian.news/en/news/article/sajid-javid-says-words-at-national-prayer-breakfast-inspired-resignation-decision?utm_source=Premier%20Christian%20Media&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=13311319_daily%20news%2007%20July%202022&dm_i=16DQ,7XB2V,KCOFX7,WEYTD,1> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2022/120-july-august-2022-c/proper-10/the-week-in-focus> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)