**7th August 2022**

**Call to worship**

As we come into God’s presence,
let us open our hands and hearts,
let us invite God to fill us with the treasure of his Spirit –
the treasure of his compassion for others,
and the treasure of his unconditional love for us.

**A gathering prayer**

God of all,
we thank you for being here with us.
We thank you that in your presence
we find heavenly riches beyond any earthy treasure.
As we come to worship,
help us to seek and find the treasure of your kingdom,
so we can live our earthly lives holding treasure
that will transform us – right here and right now.
**Amen**

**A prayer of approach**

We put our hope in the Lord;
the Lord is our protector and our help,
the root of our gladness
and in the Lord we trust.
May your constant love be with us, Lord,
as we put our hope in you.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of adoration**

Right here, right now, we worship you,
God of wealth and treasure, and we adore you.
Together, we come before you
to share the riches of your glory;
to feel and see and hear and know
that you are in our midst.
You are not seated high on some heavenly throne.
You are not ensconced in castle or palace.
You are not protected by guards and walls.
You, Lord God, are in our midst – alive, living and being among us.
We worship and adore you, here and now, no appointment needed.
**Amen.**

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

**A prayer of confession**

We strive in life for things to make us comfortable,
for things that give us pleasure.
We save in life, if we are able, for rainy days and stormy times.
We work to make life better, always hoping it will make us happier.
We burden ourselves with so much so-called ‘treasure’
that we cannot often see the wood for the trees.
We work to give enjoyment, but we struggle along the way.
Forgive us, Lord, and help us in a moment of reflection
to see the damage that our ‘treasures’ can cause
if they become the centre of our living.
Forgive us in our busy-ness to store up treasure here on earth,
if we lose sight of the treasure that is you in the here and now.
Forgive us if in our busy-ness we fail to share your treasure
with family, friend, foe and neighbour.
**Amen.**

**Assurance of forgiveness**

God, in his love for us,
offers us, each of us, every one of us, forgiveness for our sins, things done and undone, things spoken and unspoken.
God in his love for us offers assurance that our sins –
yes, even ours – are forgiven.
So, let us go this day sharing the treasure that is
God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of praise and thanksgiving**

Our hearts overflow with praise and thanksgiving as we realise
that God is not ‘out there’, distant and seated high above us,
but is here with us in this moment, not distant but close.

Our hearts overflow as God’s being infuses ours,
as God’s love warms us, shelters and comforts us,
as God’s Spirt gives us strength and hope, passion and purpose.

Our hearts overflow as we know we need not fear God,
that God’s treasure is closer than we can feel
and deeper than we can know,
wider than we can see and more real than we can imagine.

Our hearts overflow to know that the place we have searched for is this place,
and that the time we have been searching for is here and now.
Our hearts overflow with praise and thanksgiving.
**Amen.**

A time-honoured classroom activity is to invite children to make a treasure map. You may well have done this yourself. Such a map almost always consists of a wobbly outline denoting the shape of a desert island, and is probably surrounded by shark-infested waters. The island will have mountainous areas, thick forests and beaches strewn with palm trees. But somewhere in this complex geography will be a small ‘X’. And we all know what the ‘X’ means. It marks the spot where the treasure is buried. Find the place marked, get digging and, if you are lucky, you will uncover a chest of untold riches.

The idea of buried treasure has captured imaginations for many years. One of the most famous stories must be Robert Louis Stevenson’s Treasure Island. In this story, young Jim Hawkins finds a map in a dead man’s chest and takes a role as a ship’s cabin boy in a thrilling search for the pirate gold hiding under the ‘X’ on his map. Enid Blyton’s ‘Famous Five’ also have an encounter with a cargo of gold ingots. In this tale, the intrepid gang deal with ruined castles, hidden dungeons, shipwrecks and storms as they hunt for the treasure stashed on Kirrin Island. Even very contemporary stories use the treasure hunt as a major plot device. Amy, in Gillian Flynn’s novel Gone Girl, sets up little treasure hunts for her husband on their anniversary, a seemingly romantic tradition that turns very sinister when Amy disappears and she becomes the treasure he is hunting for. On a lighter note, the film Paddington 2 makes use of a hunt for treasure that takes the bear, his family and his nemesis, Phoenix Buchanan, on a search of London looking for a lost fortune.

If something is highly prized, the human impulse is to work very hard to find it. Think about the times when you have lost something precious. For those items there is no handy treasure map with an ‘X’ to tell you where you left it but, when it’s valuable or important to you, you will search as hard as possible to try and find it.

In other words, whatever – or perhaps whoever – we value has high priority in our life. Whatever we deem to be our treasure naturally occupies our thoughts, fills our senses and often guides our behaviour and how we choose to spend our time. The challenge embedded in the Gospel reading is for us to see that the most precious treasure of all, the valuables marked by ‘X’ in the universal map of life, are the riches we gain from doing the work of God’s kingdom. Real treasure is found when we draw close to Jesus, and this treasure has a beauty and value that eclipses anything else. And the exciting news is that this treasure is not buried or hidden, it’s available right here, right now. The treasure is not in a hidden box but in a relationship with Jesus – and everyone is invited to share it.

**Luke 12.22-34**

**SERMON**

It’s a nervous thing watching football. You score first and think we can relax a bit. And then the Germans go and equalize and start to dominate play and your hope of victory hangs in the balance. Then in extra time a toe poke is enough to give you the lead again. When the final whistle goes you haven’t got any nails left because you’ve bitten them off.

Last Sunday England finally won a major tournament at football for the firsts time since 1966. For 56 years the men have been singing about it coming home, footballs coming home. But it took the women to get the job done. Nerve wracking, but they got there in the end. Well done to the Lionesses.

These are anxious times though. The pressure on everybody's finances is projected to continue increasing and will lead to real anguish and suffering for many. Inflation is still rising, and a recession is predicted by the end of the year. Anxious times.

In our Bible passage today, Jesus addresses the question of worry and anxiety:

*“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. 23For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. 24Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! 25Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life[*[*b*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=luke+12&version=NIV#fen-NIV-25485b)*]? 26Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest*?

Isn’t this a bit insensitive of Jesus? The worst thing you can say to an anxious person is ‘don’t worry’. Doesn’t Jesus know about the pressures of modern life.

The modern western world is built on anxiety. You see this in the faces of people hurrying to work. The world thrives on people setting higher and higher goals for themselves and each other, so they can worry all day and all year about whether they will reach them. If they do, they will set new ones. If they don’t, they will feel they’ve failed.

Social media, Instagram encourages comparisons, of looks and lifestyles, all leading to worry about keeping up, looking good, being accepted or missing out or missing the grade. And grades will be a defining moment in the next couple of weeks when A levels and GCSE results come in.

I was watching a recording of an interview between Nicky Gumbel and John Mark Comer[[1]](#endnote-1), a leading church minister in the States who is seen as a commentator on culture. Comer was asked what he sees as the difference between Generation Z and Generation Y, or Millennials. (In everyday language the difference in mindset between today’s teenagers and the 25 to 40 year olds).

He said that both share a certain amount of angst about life, but millennials are more angry: they missed out on good secure jobs, good pensions and cheap housing that the boomer generation have enjoyed (boomer generation are those roughly aged between 40 and 70 -the post war boom in birth rates due to the peaceful stable conditions after the war).

Generation z, today’s teenagers and under 25s, in Comer’s view, are more anxious. Issues that were more on the periphery before, such as mental health, identity, justice etc have become central. He believed that these issues were portals for the gospel because the political world was not answering peoples needs about anxiety, identity and justice in the way that people ache for.

I think Comer is being optimistic, because I sense young people see the church as not standing for freedom and fairness. Gen Z, apparently, reject sexual labels and believe individual sexuality should be expressed as and when they feel it appropriate. This is what is described as the “Age of Authenticity”, where the narrative of culture loudly asserts: “If you desire it, you should have it.” Which of course feeds in more anxiety because most people don’t ‘have it all and don’t get their desires’.

In the age of authenticity, nothing that is external –whether it is a parent, peer group, the law or the scripture – is given more authority than that which is internal, because in the age of authenticity you are your desires– and thus freedom to fulfil your desires is no longer a mere pursuit of personal pleasure, it is a moral obligation. Truth is relative, and fulfilment comes primarily through discovering “who we really are” and having the freedom to authentically express that inner reality without hindrance.

Where I think we can , as Christians, speak into the quest for authenticity is that being authentic is knowing you are created, you have a creator, who loves diversity and variety in life, we see that all around us, and this creator loves you and cares for you. It is the deepest question of all about authenticity. The question of meaning and purpose. Is there anyone there or are we just a random fluke in a vast uncaring universe?

How you answer that, who you turn to, determines how you may cope with anxiety.

Many people use anti-depressants to cope with anxiety. Recently, a study showing depression isn't caused by low levels of the "happy hormone" serotonin has become one of the most widely shared medical articles.[[2]](#endnote-2)

It has provoked a wave of misleading claims about antidepressant drugs.

[This research](https://www.nature.com/articles/s41380-022-01661-0?utm_medium=affiliate&utm_source=commission_junction&utm_campaign=CONR_PF018_ECOM_GL_PHSS_ALWYS_DEEPLINK&utm_content=textlink&utm_term=PID100094349&CJEVENT=963aad7f0ccb11ed8065b3550a180512) doesn't show the drugs aren't effective. But the main areas of serotonin research provide no consistent evidence of there being an association between serotonin and depression, and no support for the hypothesis that depression is caused by lowered serotonin activity or concentrations.

But some made a leap from saying antidepressants don't work by fixing a chemical imbalance, to saying they don't work at all.

And doctors fear, in the confusion, people might stop taking their medication abruptly and risk serious withdrawal effects.

The findings help to rule out one possible way the drugs might work - by correcting a deficiency.

Dr Michael Bloomfield said, "Many of us know that taking paracetamol can be helpful for headaches and I don't think anyone believes that headaches are caused by not enough paracetamol in the brain,".

Since last autumn, UK doctors have been told they should offer therapy, exercise, mindfulness or meditation to people with less severe cases of depression first, before trying medication. For those with sever forms of depression medical treatment will still be advised.

Some have claimed this study shows depression was never an illness in people's brains but a reaction to their environments.

"Of course it's both," Dr Mark Horowitz, one of the paper's author, says.

"Your genetics affects your sensitivity to stress," for example.

But people having an understandable response to difficult circumstances might be better helped with "relationship counselling, financial advice, or a change of jobs" than medication.

From a biblical perspective, what is Jesus saying about worry and anxiety that may speak into the concerns of people today.

First of all, Jesus addresses worry. He doesn’t ignore it. Jesus is understanding and sympathetic. He doesn’t dismiss anxieties as unimportant. They may seem petty to some people, but they are big to those who suffer from them. Jesus cares.

Remember that many of Jesus first hearers only had just enough to live on and there was always the prospect that one day they wouldn’t even have that. Most of them would have perhaps one spare garment, but no more. As with many in todays non western world, one disaster -the family breadwinner being sick or injured for example – could mean instant destitution. No welfare state and benefits to fall back on. And it was to people like that, not to people worried about affording nice cars and foreign holidays, that Jesus gave his clear and striking advice about not worrying about food and clothes.

I’m sure the tone in which Jesus said these words would have avoided adding to the pressure his listeners felt they were under by making them feel guilty for being anxious. Jesus was assuring them that anxiety is a normal human reaction to difficulties and stress, which can be positive and helpful. It’s not having anxious thoughts that is the problem it’s what we do with them when we have them.

He was encouraging them to use their feelings of anxiety as reminders to turn to God, prompting them to pray or to hand the issue over to God, each time they arose.

*Consider the ravens, consider the lilies*. This is advice about being in the moment.

Which is the central insight of the practice of Mindfulness

Mindfulness can be described as being *more fully aware of your own experience in the present moment in a non-judgmental way*.

We are bigger than our thoughts and feelings; they are discrete events in our minds. We can observe our thoughts and feelings and decentre from them. They are part of us, but they are not us.

If we are totally identified with our thoughts and see them as a direct readout of reality, then we become the victim of our thoughts and not the witness of them. We react automatically to our thoughts rather than respond compassionately. But instead of looking at life *from* our thoughts, we can look *at* our thoughts.

Contemplative practices are a doorway to present moment awareness. Consider the lilies, the birds of the air etc. Those practices allow us to decentre from our anxious thoughts.

*It is said that there are two Different ways the brain works:*

Doing mode – rational, logic, analytical, problem solving, questioning.

Being mode – awareness, wonder, look at big picture

We can become locked into a cycle of suffering and distress when we try to eliminate feelings and become enmeshed in over thinking. We have excess worry, we are trying to solve problems all the time, we are overloaded with anxious thoughts. Negative feelings persist when the mind’s problem-solving Doing Mode volunteers to help – but in the wrong context – and ends up compounding difficulties. If you are trying to correct an emotion by thought - it is not going to happen.

The solution is to relate to the world differently – ‘Consider the Lilies’ – become more aware of the bigger picture (in the Christian context – that we are loved and protected by God our heavenly father – so why worry!).

Switch to the Being Mode. Step outside of the minds natural tendency to over think, over analyse and over judge but instead trust. God has got you.

The Doing mode solves problems without a doubt. But you can be exhausted in doing so and feel guity when trying not to be exhausted.

Being mode tries not to avoid negative thoughts and feelings but acknowledges sadness, fear, worry etc. but notices them with compassion instead of judgement. Compassion dissipates the power of negative feelings.

Doing mode locks you into achieving and succeeding and pursuing career and life goals but this can often exclude wellbeing and enjoyment. Being mode restores the balance.

Mindfulness does not negate the brain’s natural desire to solve problems, but it simply gives time and space to choose best ways of solving them. Some problems best dealt with emotionally - finding the solution that ‘feels best’. Some are best solved ‘logically’. Some are best left alone for now.

Moving from doing to being can be a move from worry to peace. Become more aware of the goodness of God at work in and around you. Move from living on autopilot, driven by hidden fears and habits and avoiding real relationship with God and others to being mindful of God’s creation, your part in God’s creation and God’s care for you. Which hopefully encourages you to re connect with your creator and trust in your creator, the one who is alongside you, outside of you and within you. The source and goal of all life. You are held and loved.

It hopefully enables you to get a healthier perspective on the things that worry you.

Jesus tells his disciples not to be afraid for God is offering the kingdom. Treasure is in heaven rather than on earth, because ‘where your treasure is, there will be your heart also’ (v.34).

The Gospel reading makes an astute connection between treasure and our emotions, between what we value and the values that drive us. The challenge is to understand what real treasure is. Real treasure comes from God. This is treasure that will last forever. Yet, it can be found right here, right now; and we find it by looking at what God is doing all around us and joining in the work of his kingdom.

*Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom*

**Prayers of intercession**

Lord, at the start of this new week, we pause to thank you for the treasure we have in our lives: family members… friends… places… activities… favourite food… all of which bring colour, beauty and joy to our lives. We thank you for all these people, places and things which you have given us.

Lord of the treasure store:
**help us to seek for your treasure.**

Lord, we thank you for the treasure of sport as many celebrate the victory of the English women’s football team. As the Commonwealth Games continue, we pray for all those participating and we lift Christian athletes to you and ask that they may be witnesses of your treasure. We thank you for the treasure of our bodies and all we can do with them: eyes to see your beauty, ears to listen to music and words, the ability to play, make, feel and do. Help us to use our bodies for your glory this week: perhaps by being creative or helping others in some way…

Lord of the treasure store:
**help us to seek for your treasure.**

Lord God, we thank you for this season of holidays. We thank you for the beauty of the world around us and, for many, the opportunity to stop and stand and stare for a while. We ask that, whether we are going on holiday or not, this may be a week when we can take the opportunity to be still and know that you are God. We pray for all the Christian camps, house parties and missions that happen over the summer, asking that young people will respond to the treasure of who you are. We pray for all those whose holidays are being spoilt by train strikes, airport delays and long queues of traffic. Whatever our circumstances this week:

Lord of the treasure store:
**help us to seek for your treasure.**

Lord God, we know that not everyone in the world is experiencing times of treasure right now. We lift to you those who have had to flee their homes due to war or natural disasters. We remember those who live in refugee camps or take their lives into their hands by trying to cross the Channel to the UK. We pray for all who are ill, particularly those known to us… and we lift to you those who are sad and sorrowful at this time, particularly the high-profile cases of those who have lost children to injury or sudden death this week…

Lord, in the midst of their pain, difficulty and despair, may they somehow find the treasure that is you. Help us to be treasure-bringers to those who need your comfort.

Lord of the treasure store:
**help us to seek for your treasure.**

Lord, we are aware that, for so many of us, earthly treasure seems in short supply right now. We pray for those who are struggling to make ends meet as the cost of living soars. We remember children who may go hungry during the school holidays. We thank you for our foodbanks and all they can do to help, even though we wish that we had no need for them. Help us to keep our eyes and ears open to those who need our love and support at this time.

Lord of the treasure store:
**help us to seek for your treasure.**

Heavenly Father, we offer the week ahead to you now. We know that your treasure doesn’t come to us, we need to seek it out. Give us vision and wisdom this week to look for your treasure and set our hearts there. Help us to be treasure seekers and treasure bringers this week, as we share what we have found with those around us.

We ask all these things in the name of our great Treasure, Jesus Christ.
**Amen.**

**A prayer for all ages together**

Loving God,
thank you that we can be part of your work on earth.
Thank you that we don’t have to wait but can join in right now.
Thank you that we can find and share your heavenly treasure.
Thank you that your treasure lasts for ever.
**Amen.**

**A sending out prayer**

Lord, go with us.
Help us to seek your treasure.
Help us to look for all you’re doing right now.
Help us – by our example as much as by our words –
to share your treasure and your life-giving story
with the people we meet this week.
**Amen.**

1. <https://hope.alpha.org/lc22> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-62286093> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)