**4th September 2022**

**Call to worship**

*based on Psalm 66*

We gather together to worship.
We gather together to share our stories.
We gather together to hear God’s story.
We have come because we love and want to love more.



**A gathering prayer**

Faithful God, we gather from our scattered lives,
to be renewed by your Holy Spirit.
Open our hearts and minds
to listen for your voice
as you reach out to us today.
**Amen.**



**A prayer of approach**

God of perfect wisdom,
we approach you
acknowledging your holy love
and your perfect intent for our lives.
We gather to discern,
to hear your voice,
to recognise your Spirit’s leading.
Give us ears to listen, we pray.
**Amen.**



**A prayer of adoration**

Lord of light and goodness,
we worship you, beautiful one.
We delight in your ways,
and we long to know you more deeply,
to give you all our praise.
**Amen.**



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

**A prayer of confession**

O God, for the times
when we have closed our eyes to what is good for us,
behaved in ways that dishonour who we were made to be
and ignored the value you have given us –
forgive us for these choices,
for treating others and ourselves badly
and, in doing so, mistreating you.
Restore us to peace and clarity,
help us to re-assess where we are going;
open our minds to new ways of thinking
and our hearts to your gentle leading.
Where we have rushed ahead, unprepared,
grant us renewed wisdom,
a healthy view of ourselves
and a place to pause to right ourselves,
so that we can be ready to follow you.
In Jesus’ name.
**Amen.**

**Assurance of forgiveness**

Saviour, we know you hear us;
you assure us of your love.
Your arms are open to us –
our wounded hearts, confused thoughts and stumbling steps.
Thank you for being ready to embrace us,
to set us upright where we have fallen.
Help us to go forward in freedom and faith.
**Amen.**



**A prayer of praise and thanksgiving**

Thank you, O God, for your guidance and love,
for your presence embedded in our lives
through your Holy Spirit.
Thank you that you offer us counsel.
We thank you for your blessings
and for the hope you give us.
Thank you for choosing to walk beside us
and for being with us
on every pathway and all terrain,
as we go through our lives.
**Amen.**

**Committing to follow Jesus.**

**Where been this summer?**

**Shells from a beach.**

**The scallop shell is a symbol of pilgrimage. Invite everyone to collect a shell and write their name on it as a sign that they want to follow Jesus.**

**Luke 14.25-33**

As we come to the end of the school holidays relationships ma be frayed in many family households. Parents secretly looking forward to getting the kids back to school and into a routine. The kids kicking off about seeing their free time disappear.

‘Many a parent has heard their child scream at them ‘I hate you’

The words cut like a knife. The child you love so much and have sacrificed for in so many ways now hates you.

“I hate you, mom! I wish you were dead!”

“You are the worst dad ever!”

“I can’t wait to get the f— out of this house! I hate it here!”

These words leave parents feeling a combination of hurt, anger, and resentment. Parents will naturally think to themselves:

*“Don’t you appreciate all that I have done for you? How dare you speak to me that way!”*

I read an article by a family counsellor *[[1]](#endnote-1)* who said they usually don’t mean it. Kids often spout off hurtful words like these when they have a problem they don’t know how to solve, whether they’re angry, stressed, or dealing with feelings about something bad that happened that day. Pushing your buttons and getting a strong emotional reaction from you helps to make up for those feelings of discomfort. And they may be trying to get what they want.

While an emotional reaction is a very natural thing, it often leads to more trouble doesn’t it.

Your natural reaction might be to say something like:

*“Well, I hate you too!”*

Or,

*“Well, I wish I never had you! What do you think about that?!”*

Saying something hurtful in response sends your child the message that you are not in control. It also models ineffective problem solving for your child. In other words, it shows your child that the way to handle verbal attacks is to launch a verbal counterattack.

Best to stay calm. You can’t reason with someone who is being emotional and unreasonable. Best be brief and direct

*I’m sorry you feel that way, but you’re still responsible for cleaning your room.”*

*“Talking to me that way isn’t going to get you out of doing your homework.”*

*“Maybe you do hate living here, but you still have to be home on time.”*

Best of luck with that those!

But here’s the argument that will throw you.

*‘I hate you because Jesus told me to!’*

Now how you going to answer that parent?

Luke 14. 25: *If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple*.

Jesus is once again on the road, drawing large crowds (v.25), but this time with the emphasis on the cost of following Jesus. Three times Jesus repeats ‘cannot be my disciple’

This verse just quoted, the next verse:

*And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.*

And the last one verse 33: *In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.*

It is as if his aim is to put off the casual enquirer. No you don’t really want to follow me. You going to renounce your family? You going to take the difficult path that may involve suffering, carrying your cross, instead of the easy route to success and popularity? You going to renounce your stuff, your wealth, your possessions?

What is going on here?

For the last few months we have been looking at the 9 Beats, the 9 Beatitudes, the attitudes of being disciples of Jesus. Following Jesus is not just saying I believe in Jesus and I book my ticket for heaven then sit back and do what I like. From the earliest time the followers of Jesus were known as the Way. Because they followed the way of Jesus – the attitudes of Jesus to life and to others and to God. There was a discipline in doing that- a discipleship, a spiritual formation, a development of character, a Christ like character.

It calls us to grow in self awareness, knowing who we are and how we react. Which is why the Enneagram is a really useful tool for understanding who we are and how we can prayerfully develop in Christ like ways.

We have looked at NINE POSTURES FOR LIFE corresponding to the nine Beatitudes.

We have thought that our first instinct to poverty is anxiety and possessiveness but the way of Jesus is toown our poverty and live with open hands and to trust god for provision for our daily bread.

When we face the brokenness in our world and inside ourselves it’s so easy to numb out, to look for something to distract us from the pain. The way of Jesus invites us to face pain and wait for comfort

Somehow we got the impression that life is a competition. It’s you against me and you’re either better than me or I’m better than you. The way of Jesus invites us to see our true selves and bow to the dignity of all.

Rather than passively give up we are challenged to change the world around us and seek justice

But our sense of justice makes us want people to pay, to get what their actions deserve. Eye for eye and tooth for tooth. So when we fail we shame and punish ourselves, and when other people fail us we are tempted to sit in judgment and resentment. The way of Jesus invites us to stop judging and look with compassion.

Rather than hide behind masks we are challenged to show our true selves and seek God’s work in changing our hearts.

We often try to build a sense of self by identifying with a particular group. My family. My country. My ethnic or cultural group. We can get into a mentality of us versus them, with so much defensive energy. The way of Jesus is that we all belong together, there are no sides, we are all beloved daughters and sons of God so let us to make peace and reach past difference.

Suffering is a necessary and inevitable part of the cosmic struggle between good and evil. The way of Jesus is to choose to love our enemies and bless those who curse us, we cast our vote for goodness and love; and in the end, love will finally win.

Life comes through death. In order to save your life, you have to lose it. The way of Jesus invites us to have hope and live fearlessly.

Most of that doesn’t come naturally. Hence the challenge and cost of discipleship and following the way of Jesus.

Picking up on his previous table talk about dinner guests (see v.12f), Jesus tells his would-be followers that being a disciple means family loyalties take second place. ‘Hate’ (v.26) in this context is not about how we feel but who we take our lead from. In a culture where family ties were stronger and parental authority lasted longer than it does in today’s western world, Jesus scandalously claimed an allegiance that took precedence over family.

We know even today that family ties often subvert listening to others, empathizing with others needs because we need to stay loyal to the family, to take sides. That families cover things up for fear of bringing shame on the good family name. If you are a disciple of Jesus you are called to do the right thing, not keep it in the family.

We are to ‘hate’ our life (v.26; cf 9.23-25). We are to take up our cross (v.27; cf 9.23). Again, this picks up on Jesus’ earlier dinner conversation where the guests were too interested in wealth and possessions, in status and position in society (vv.7-11; cf 12.13-34). A disciple must leave these behind and strike out behind a master who is going to Jerusalem to shoulder a cross. That’s not to say these things aren’t important, they are just not all important. Following the way of Jesus is.

Jesus then tells two parables (vv.28-33) that urge his hearers to weigh the cost before deciding to follow. He did not want people to come after him who hadn’t first thought it through carefully. The first concerns a tower builder. Has he the money and materials to complete what he’s started? If not, he will be open to ridicule by his neighbours. He should sit down and cost out his enterprise in advance.

In the second, a king is on the brink of war. Surely he will weigh up the consequences of going to battle against an enemy with twice the military muscle, before rushing headlong into battle that could result in humiliating defeat?

The Russian assault on Ukraine was originally stated as being a short-term offensive, seeking to uproot the Ukrainian government and install leadership that would support Russian interests. This seemed plausible given the size of Russia’s army and President Putin’s reputation for decisive/ruthless action. It is now nearly 200 days of this conflict and Ukrainian forces are pushing back the Russian troops. The cost of this conflict has been huge in terms of human lives lost, families torn apart but also in terms of Russia’s standing in the world and progress towards Putin’s goals. The Russian troops were not as prepared or as well-equipped as their leaders had thought and the political fallout of the failure to secure victory has been difficult to manage. When we read Jesus’ parable of the king setting out for war without first counting his soldiers against those of his enemy the parallel is clear.

I have just come back from holiday and I spent some days in canterbury and on the way we went to see Biggin hill airfield and the RAF Museum there. It was a vital airfield in the Battle of Britain. My dad was in the RAF ground crew during the war. It was moving to see the dedication and sacrifice made for the many by the few as Churchill famously described the RAF during the pivotal battle for control of the air at this time of year in 1940.

It was Hitler’s first defeat and arguably changed the course of world history.

We live in a world still stalked by the remnants of an alien power – the power of evil that lurks in each of our hearts and plays itself out in the destruction of our planet, the abuse of the vulnerable and the ordinary petty ways in which we hurt each other day after day. We see that power at work in the attitudes and values in our society were only the thin, the pretty and the wealthy count, that your value is directly related to your popularity or measure of fame, that we are locked in a competitive race for money, influence and power that determines whether we are winners or losers, that happiness comes from consuming stuff, which depends on having enough cash to get what you want.

The good news that Jesus brings is that you don’t have to live like that. There is another path, another way which is much more liberating and creative. There is a new world coming that we see hints of here and now but that isn’t here completely yet. The winds of winter blow but the spring and summer are coming. But to believe like this and to keep believing it is hard to do on your own. That is why we need the Church to be our resistance movement, to be disciplined, to be disciples, to be committed to the Way of Jesus

We are of course fickle and weak: a real mixed bag. *Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?*Is the question from Jesus. Salt was used to preserve food from going off in the times of Jesus: He wants his disciples to make a positive difference in society, to stop society going off. It’s a big calling. Are you up for it? That is Jesus’ basic challenge in this passage*.*

As Christians, we are living in hostile territory and Jesus’ words are not promising us an easy life. If we have chosen to follow Jesus, have we done so understanding that His way is one of hardship and sacrifice, not one of quick wins and comfort? He does promise life in all its fulness. Eternal life. But he’s not sugar coating it.

John Bell’s hymn ‘Will you come and follow me’ is too well known. It goes to that lovely Scottish folk tune of Kelvingrove. We sang it as the last hymn at Matt Welsh’s funeral here in December last year and as we come to place Matt’s ashes in our Garden of Rest I thought it would be appropriate to sing it again.

Matt was a thoughtful follower of Jesus in a quiet, understated and undemonstrative way. Matt demonstrated his willingness to follow Jesus in his life, treating all as equals and overcoming the sectarianism of his upbringing. His love of Open Door and his dedication to their work was testament to his willingness to treat all people the same.

But the words of the hymn are too well known and often we need to pause and reflect on what we are singing.

Will you come and follow me
 if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don’t know
and never be the same?

Will you let my love be shown,

will you let my name be known,

will you let my life be grown

in you and you in me?

Will you leave your self behind
if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind
and never be the same?

Will you risk the hostile stare

should your life attract or scare,

will you let me answer prayer

in you and you in me?

Will you love the ‘you’ you hide
if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside
and never be the same?

Will you use the faith you’ve found

to reshape the world around

through my sight and touch and sound

in you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true
when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you
and never be the same.
In your company I’ll go
where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I’ll move and live and grow
in you and you in me.

**Prayers of intercession**

Loving Lord your compassion knows no bounds and you care for every part of the globe; we pray for those suffering as a result of floods especially the people of Pakistan:

* those whose homes are under water
* those who have lost loved ones
* villages isolated as a result of the destruction of bridges and roads
* those who have been evacuated and who know live in overcrowded makeshift camps
* those who have lost fields and crops.

Give wisdom to the government as it seeks to implement a recovery programme and give generosity to other nations that they may support its endeavours.

You call us to bear our crosses, give those who need it:
**strength to bear their crosses and wisdom to know the way forward**

Loving Lord you are the Prince of Peace, we pray for an end to all violence and warfare throughout the world. We hold before you:

* those who are suffering as a result of war and civil war
* those who have lost loved ones
* those who have been injured
* those who have lost homes and livelihoods
* those who are fearful.

We especially ask for your comfort and strength for the peoples of Ukraine and Iraq.

You call us to bear our crosses, give those who need it:
**strength to bear their crosses and wisdom to know the way forward**

Loving Lord you share our joy and our pain. We pray for those who have recently received examination results; those who are rejoicing at a clear way forward; those who are processing thoughts for their future. We pray for their families and those who offer counsel and advice. We hold before you children starting school; those going into new classes and new schools; those beginning college and university; those looking for work and those beginning new jobs.

You call us to bear our crosses, give those who need it:
**strength to bear their crosses and wisdom to know the way forward**

Loving Lord you teach us to love one another, we pray for those who have been victims of violent crime; for families of murder victims; for those who seek to support them; for the police and justice system. We pray for those traumatised by what they have witnessed; those who struggle to find hope for the future; those who keep asking ‘Whats the point?’

You call us to bear our crosses, give those who need it:
**strength to bear their crosses and wisdom to know the way forward**

Loving Lord, grant to all who are struggling the knowledge of your encouraging presence, the aid of your strength and the power of your peace. In Jesus’name we pray. **Amen.**

**Counting the cost.**

* **This prayer time is an opportunity to be quiet and to reflect. After each silence, someone (briefed in advance) says, ‘Jesus said, “If you want to be my disciple you must carry the cross.”’**
* **Invite people to be still and quiet, and to think how costly it has been for them to be a Christian. Have they been bullied or ridiculed, overlooked for a job, pushed out or sacked? Has it all been easy? Keep a time of silence.**
* **Next, invite people to pray for Christians who suffer because they follow Jesus.**
* **Ask everyone to think about their own life in the week ahead: What will be happening? Will there be any significant decisions to make? In whatever they will be doing – at school, work, home, leisure activities, etc. – how will they show that they are following Jesus? Keep a time of silence.**

**A prayer for all ages together**

Lord Jesus,
help me to follow you always.
When I have a choice to make,
help me to know what is the wise one.
Show me when my choices
could hurt other people, or the world.
Give me the courage always
to choose your way of love.
**Amen.**

**A sending out prayer**

Lord Jesus, we want to follow you,
but we are pulled in many directions.
As we go from this place,
help us to root ourselves in your word.
Give us the courage to speak truth to injustice,
that your kingdom may come
and your will be done.
**Amen.**

1. https://www.empoweringparents.com/article/i-hate-you-mom-i-wish-you-were-dead-when-kids-say-hurtful-things/ [↑](#endnote-ref-1)