**29th January 2023**

**Call to worship**

Let us be encouraged in our walk with God.
When we are faced with challenges,
when the way before us is dark,
when we are not sure what to do,
let us be assured that God is ready to bless us,
and to bring us through it all.
So come now to praise and to pray.



**A gathering prayer**

Lord, we come before you today,
knowing that you do not choose us
because we are clever or strong or powerful.
Rather, you call us to rely on your wisdom,
to fight in your strength,
and to boast that you are always there for us.
Help us to walk humbly with you
each step of the way before us.
And in our worship today,
give us fresh insight and renewed commitment
for that journey of faith.
In Jesus’ name we pray.
**Amen.**



**A prayer of approach**

Source of all wisdom,
source of all goodness,
we come into your presence today
to worship you.
May we choose justice, love kindness,
and walk humbly with you, our God.
**Amen.**



**A prayer of adoration**

Creator God,
source of all life and all wisdom:
**we adore you and boast in your love.**

Christ crucified,
who walked humbly on this earth:
**we adore you and boast in your love.**

Holy Spirit,
who leads and guides our steps:
**we adore you and boast in your love.**

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we adore you.
**Amen.**



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

**A prayer of confession**

Living Lord Jesus,
when we choose to live arrogantly,
let us choose to live meekly;
when we choose to be strong,
let us see strength in weakness and allow you to work in us;
when we only see darkness,
show us your light and give us hope;
when we would go it alone and rise above others,
let us choose unity;
when we favour popularity and success,
let us choose humility;
when we aspire to power,
let us choose servanthood and love.
We are sorry when we choose the opposite of your desires for us.
Forgive us and help us.
May we always choose kindness, humility, justice and love.
May we always choose to be like you.
**Amen.**

**Assurance of forgiveness**

God of justice and mercy, full of compassion,
you have gracefully forgiven us, allowing us to start again.
We are free through your cross.
We are forgiven in you and have new life.
**Amen.**



**A prayer of praise and thanksgiving**

God of peace, justice, mercy and love,
thank you that in you we inherit the earth.
Thank you that we are your children.
Thank you that as we mourn, we are comforted.
Thank you that as we seek for righteousness, we are filled.
Thank you that in you we receive your mercy.
Thank you that we can see you through our changed hearts.
Thank you that in your upside-down kingdom,
we find rest, peace, comfort and assurance of your presence.
Thank you, Lord, that in life’s darker times, we are never alone –
You are always by our side.
**Amen.**

**Focus Scripture: Matthew 5:1–12**

When people wish you ‘happy birthday’ I often wonder what they are wishing you. What would make you happy? Fill in the personal question. On a trip to Ipswich yesterday on my birthday to see my football team play in the FA Cup the obvious wish was that Burnley won. The next best was that they didn’t get beat. So a 0-0 draw wasn’t a disaster. Not a disaster birthday? A fairly happy birthday?

Over these next couple of weeks we will be giving thanks for four dear church members. Ron Heathman, Kathryn Palmer, Walt Stewart and Peggy Tresise, all were committed members of this church - we could accurately call them church stalwarts. We are here today because of their work and witness yesterday. In a distracted age where relationships are casual, where people avoid commitments in their pursuit of freedom and being themselves, these people came from another age. Three of them were in their nineties having lived full and fulfilled lives.

Fulfilled in the sense that they seemed to have happy lives. They knew something of the secret of happiness. Im sure their faith and their involvement in church had something to do with that.

Peggy Tresise wrote these words in the book we published celebrating this church’s bicentenary in 2009:

*What does the Tabernacle mean to me?*

*It is a place where I can worship my God with other like-minded people. Here I can:*

*Be inspired and challenged.*

*Study the Bible and join in discussions.*

*Share in prayer.*

*Be encouraged in times of difficulty.*

*Be reminded, in the nicest possible way, of my shortcomings.*

*It is a place of comfort and support in times of grieving and stress. A hug and a kiss are specially valued when one’s husband has died! It is a place where one can share in celebrations and joy for the good things in one’s life and in other people’s lives.*

*The Tab has been the basis of a kaleidoscope of family experiences. My children were dedicated here – my eldest son baptised with the laying on of hands. It was good to se him take a service, with the help of his future wife. Here, Hugh and I renewed our wedding vows, 50 years after we were married and here I shared with family and friends a moving thanksgiving service to say goodbye when he died 4 months later.*

*Through the Tab – there have been wider links with the local churches and through the World Church and Mission Committee, a window onto the joys and sorrows and needs of the whole world wide church. A reminder that I am a part of a family throughout the world. I cannot imagine life without the Tab.*

We can’t imagine church life without Peggy, Kathryn, Ron and the Walt. May God grant us courage and determination to keep what they held as precious, alive and flourishing.

As you reflect on lives well lived I always want to see what we can gleam for those who have gone before us. Can they inspire us. Can we learn something from their lives.

May their lives challenge us to see why church matters. Why following Jesus with a group of other people – being committed in fellowship - brings a happy and fulfilled life and makes a difference to our community

Jesus talks about a happiness that is not a worldly happiness.

There was an article I came across entitled: "How Do You Measure Up As A Man? The article stated that some extensive research had been conducted on the 21st century standards for measuring a man.

1. His ability to make money (That lets me out already).

 2. The cost, style, and age of his car.

3. (This is my favourite) How much hair he has.

4. His strength and size.

5. The job he holds and how successful he is at it.

6. What sports he likes.

7. How many clubs he belongs to.

8. His aggressiveness and reliability.

Jesus Christ set down nine principles for the measure of a person. His standards stand in stark contrast to the aforementioned. There would appear to be a wide gulf between the popular image of the successful person and what God sees as the successful person.

Here's what happened: Jesus had just started his ministry and was gaining in popularity. Large crowds were gathering., Jesus delivered a sermon to a multitude. Jesus understood that they were all on the same quest. They were all after the same thing. They all wanted happiness. Well, we are just like them aren't we? Isn't that what we want for ourselves. Isn't that what we ultimately want for our children:

Happiness.+

The problem is that we really don't grasp the true nature of happiness, and because of that it so often seems to elude us. You see, we think that happiness deals with our outer circumstances. We think that the truly happy person is one who has achieved outer success.

But on this special day Jesus shared with disciples and, indeed, with all of history, that the concept of happiness is what’s on the inside....These are spiritual qualities and characteristics which he then goes on to illustrate in the rest of the sermon how character then shows itself in conduct. What people are should lead to what people do.

Jesus tells us that the law of love can best be fulfilled, not through rules, but through relationships and supremely our relationship with God. Our dependence on God and our seeking after God’s ways and being more open to the love and mercy of God, whom we have seen in Jesus Christ, will shape our character which will then shape our conduct. Your inner spiritual orientation – who you are facing – who/what you are dearly seeking or longing to love is vital – vital to the whole of your life and the key to your happiness.

The beatitudes start with blessed are the poor in spirit. I think this is key to all that is to follow in the Beatitudes, indeed the whole of the Sermon on the Mount.

I like the note in the Life Application Bible:

"You cannot mourn without appreciating how insufficient you are to handle life in your own strength.

You cannot be meek unless you know you have needed gentleness yourself.

You cannot hunger and thirst for righteousness if you proudly think of yourself as already righteous.

You cannot be merciful without recognizing your own need for mercy.

You cannot be pure in heart if your heart is full of pride.

You cannot be a peacemaker if you believe that you are always right.

You cannot identify with Christ in the face of negative reactions from others without dying to yourself and renouncing your own rights."

All of these beatitudes are rooted in humility, being poor in spirit.

The beatitude challenges those who forget their need of God and begin scaling the slippery heights of ambition or careening down the canyons of their own insecurities. The quality of being ‘poor in spirit’ is the well spring of active faith.

The poor in spirit are those who regardless of economic or social status manifest humble dependence on God’s grace. They know their need. They are not God – they need God. That is the fundamental orientation in life – who are you looking to? Where are your riches?

Saint Teresa once dreamt she saw a woman running, carrying a flaming torch in one hand, and a pall of water in the other. When Teresa asked the woman where she was going, she answered ‘I am going to quench the fires of hell and burn down the mansions of heaven so that people will love God for God’s own sake, not because they fear punishment or seek reward.

We looked at the beatitudes last summer when we did the 9 Beats programme: looking at the Way of Jesus: this basic teaching on what it meant to follow in the way of Jesus. About 20-30 of you dropped in for some of the sessions. Let me just remind you:

***Beat One.*** *Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Poverty means not having enough. Not enough time, not enough energy, not enough money, without the resources we need to make it on our own. This beat invites us to own our poverty and live with open hands, to seek the path that prays, “Lead us in the way of trust.” *(Open hands)*

***Beat Two.*** *Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted.*

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. This beat invites us to face pain and wait for comfort, to seek the path that prays, “Lead us in the way of lament.” *(Head in hands)*

***Beat Three.*** *Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.*

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. This beat invites us to see our true selves and bow to the dignity of all, to seek the path that prays, “Lead us in the way of humility.” *(Palm flat on heart)*

***Beat Four.*** *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied.*

We look out on a world that we know doesn’t work, and we wonder if it can be any different. This beat invites us to ache for change and step into action, to seek the path that prays, “Lead us in the way of justice.” *(Clenched fists crossed)*

***Beat Five.*** *Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy.*

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. This beat invites us to stop judging and look with compassion, to seek the path that prays, “Lead us in the way of compassion.” *(Make heart with hands)*

***Beat Six.*** *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*

Over time there has come to be a divide between what is in our hearts and what we were willing to show to others. This beat invites us to choose goodness and show our real selves, to seek the path that prays, “Lead us in the way of right motive.” *(Jazz hands)*

***Beat Seven.*** *Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called the children of God.*

It’s so easy to feel insecure about who we are. We often try to build a sense of self by identifying with a particular group. My family. My country. My ethnic or cultural group. People who like the same things I do and believe the same things I do. We can get into a mentality of us versus them, with so much defensive energy. Reality is that we all belong together, there are no sides, we are all beloved daughters and sons. This beat invites us to make peace and reach past difference, to seek the path that prays, “Lead us in the way of peacemaking.” *(Stretch out and clasp hands together)*

***Beat Eight.*** *Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

We hope that doing good brings us blessing. But what about when doing good leads to pain and negative consequences? Reality is that suffering is a necessary and inevitable part of the cosmic struggle between good and evil. When we 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. This beat invites us to embrace suffering and keep doing good, to seek the path that prays, “Lead us in the way of surrender.” *(Hands crossed, ready for arrest)*

***Beat Nine.*** *Blessed are you when people insult you persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad for great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

At the end of the beatitudes we come to a counterintuitive paradox. Life comes through death. In order to save your life, you have to lose it. This beat invites us to have hope and live fearlessly, to seek the path that prays, “Lead us in the way of radical love.” *(Arms outstretched, in posture of a cross)*

As we explore the Sermon on the Mount further we will be judged by its impossible ethic and ideal. For this is nothing less than following the way of Jesus. Yet throughout it all is the meekness, the poverty in spirit, the humility that knows we can never do this in our own strength. Happiness is not something you can achieve. It is not a goal in self. It is a by product. It seems that God has so constructed the world that the search for happiness will always be self defeating, precisely because it is the search for our own happiness.

Those who invest in others, take courage in the face of injustice, are with the weak and needy, pursue God and not self, they are blessed. Search for your own happiness will always be self defeating because it is a search for your own happiness. Seek the happiness of others – seek the happiness of God – you have more chance of experiencing happiness yourself.

There was a little puppy that noticed that whenever he was happy, his tail wagged, so he thought he had discovered the secret of happiness. One day he shared the secret of happiness with an older dog. He said ‘I have learned that the best thing for a dog is to be happy, and that happiness is in my tail. So I am going to be chase my tail; and when I catch it, I shall have happiness.

The old dog replied, ‘I too believe that happiness is a marvellous thing for a dog, and that happiness is in my tail. But I have noticed that whenever I chase my tail, it keeps running away from me. But when I go about my business it follows me wherever I go.

Many of us are like the little puppy chasing our tail – trying to find true happiness that is always out of our reach. What we need to do is learn that if we just go about our business and trust in the Lord, happiness will follow us wherever we go.

May you be blessed.

As we celebrate the lives of these church stalwarts over these next few weeks may their witness speak to us about they way of Jesus and what it means to be happy, to find happiness and be blessed.





**Prayers of intercession**

In humility and need, we gather our prayers for others.

God of justice and mercy,
**hear our prayers.**

Headline news shocks us with so much cruelty, tragedy and suffering that we barely know where to begin in our praying for those in need, but you, O God, do hear us.

God of justice and mercy,
**hear our prayers.**

For those who do not know you, who do not know the depths of your love and care, who live with poverty of spirit and understanding, confusion and denial of you. For them all, may your Spirit speak to them and may the deeds and the words and the actions of how we live, shine with your Spirt for them. For those who know you but know they fall short of what you call them to be, give them encouragement to strive more and learn more and believe more.

God of justice and mercy,
**hear our prayers.**

We pray for those who mourn, who have had their lives changed, turned upside down by the death of family friends or neighbours. In their grief may we and you be a comfort to them. A strength in times of trouble, a light to lead the way in their darkness.

God of justice and mercy,
**hear our prayers.**

We pray for those whose arrogance, pride and vanity stop them from seeing the truth about themselves and the needs of others. For those who do not know what humility is and where it might lead them.

God of justice and mercy,
**hear our prayers.**

We pray for those who daily, no matter what the cost to themselves, speak out your words of truth, who live lives reflecting your glory, who each day step-out to help and heal and care and show your love even in face of danger.

God of justice and mercy,
**hear our prayers.**

We pray for those who find it within them to forgive others who really repent, those who forgive for the good of others and society, those who show mercy and compassion.

God of justice and mercy,
**hear our prayers.**

We pray for those who work for peace, who strive for peace, who yearn for peace. Those who engage at the highest levels of state seeking peace and those who stand on the battlefield yearning for conflict to end and peace to be restored. For those caught in the middle, who fell helpless and hopeless in the face of war and aggression.

God of justice and mercy,
**hear our prayers.**

For those peoples whose tragedies, injustice, crisis and suffering make the news headlines today.

God of justice and mercy,
**hear our prayers.**

For our families, our friends, our neighbours, those we know and love and care for who need our prayers especially this day.

God of justice and mercy,
**hear our prayers.**

Hear our words, O God, and hear the yearnings of our hearts that we may walk humbly with you sharing love and generosity wherever we go.
In the name and for the sake of Jesus.
**Amen.**



**A prayer for all ages together**

Thank you, God,
that whether it is dark
*(cover eyes)*
or light
*(open eyes wide)*
we can still grow.
*(reach hands up high)*
Thank you that when things are difficult
*(look at the ground)*
and going very well
*(jump up)*
you bless us and help us.
*(hug yourself)*
**Amen.**



**A sending out prayer**

Lord, you bless us in so many ways.
You love us just as we are.
And you also want us to grow closer to you.
Show us how we can bless others
by putting them and you before ourselves.
May we walk humbly with you every day.
**Amen.**