

### **Call to worship**

We long to know your presence and your blessing God; to know that we have found a place in your kingdom; And so we commit to being those who acknowledge our poverty of spirit, and who grieve rightly our brokenness and losses; ***For this is how we open ourselves to blessing.*** We dedicate ourselves to humility, and to a constant, never-ceasing hunger and thirst for justice; ***For this is how we open ourselves to blessing.*** We seek to always act with compassion and mercy, and to keep our hearts pure – free from destructiveness, and bound by integrity; ***For this is how we open ourselves to blessing.*** We devote ourselves to working for peace, and to constant celebration and rejoicing, even in the face of hardship, persecution, and struggle; ***For this is how we open ourselves to blessing. Gracious and Compassionate God, We offer ourselves to you again, in worship and obedience, in lives committed to the purposes and practices of your reign; For in this way, we know, we are blessed, and we are a blessing. Amen.***

### **Prayers –**

Loving God, All-good, All-true, All-powerful, Almighty, **We worship you.** Gracious God, All-loving, All-merciful, All-faithful, All-compassionate, **We Thank you.** Mighty God, Always active, Always leading, Always calling, Always knowing, **We commit ourselves to you.** Sovereign God, All in all, Now and always, We praise you, We worship you, **We lift up our hearts before you.** Father God, **We celebrate your goodness, We rejoice in your blessings, We marvel at your mercy. We thank you for your guidance, We offer our lives in response to you.** Living God, Take this service, This day, Our Church, Our lives. Use them for your purpose and your kingdom. Through Christ our Lord. **Amen**

### **Prayer of confession**

Merciful God, Once more we bring your our confession, Conscious of our many faults and failings, **Forgive us that we have been unfaithful to you.** We have had eyes only for ourselves, Seeing no further than our own small concerns, **Forgive us that we have been unfaithful to you.** We have acted with no thought of your will, And no heed to your guidance, **Forgive us that we have been unfaithful to you.** We have broken your commandments, and failed miserably to follow in the way of Christ, **Forgive us that we have been unfaithful to you.** (we pause to bring the confessions of our hearts and minds to you) Merciful God, Through your grace have mercy upon us. Renew our faith, restore us to your side, Teach us your ways. And help us to live more truly as your people, In the Name of Christ. **Amen.**

### **Readings:**

#### **Matthew 5: 1 – 12**

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him,<sup>2</sup> and he began to teach them. He said: <sup>3</sup> “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. <sup>5</sup> Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. <sup>6</sup> Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. <sup>7</sup> Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. <sup>8</sup> Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. <sup>9</sup> Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. <sup>10</sup> Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>11</sup> “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

## Sermon

This week I received a book in the post – “the Bible for Dummies”! Its part of the “for Dummies” Series which include English for Dummies, French for dummies, computers for Dummies, and piano for dummies. The secret of their success is to make intimidating subjects approachable... cutting through the technical jargon and “dumbing down” the core concepts to their absolute essentials in a non-threatening, “how to” format.

**Bless-ed are ...** You might say that this weeks Gospel from Matthew is Jesus' version of the gospel message for dummies. When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them saying: These twelve verses from Matthew's Gospel are part of the much wider Sermon on the Mount Narrative, and these particular verses are often called the Beatitudes.

The name comes from the Latin – beatitudo - which means a state of bliss, or a feeling of supreme happiness. The tone of Joyfulness in that understanding of these verses is not a temporary rush or euphoria – it is an enduring understanding, and state of togetherness, found only when you come to be in tune, fully, with the will of God. In nine simple how-to steps, Jesus lays out how we can find that harmony with God. Nothing fancy, nothing obscure, just Christianity for Dummies... a shortcut for folks intimidated by the vast canon of our beliefs. The words come not from a Church Father or a theologian, but right from the heart of Jesus, cutting through any confusion or reluctance. Jesus tells us: You want to follow me. You want to be a Christian. Here's how to do it.

*I just want to take three of those to explore a little further with you:*

**“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”** Now doesn't that fly in the face of modern wisdom? It is the rich who are inheriting the earth now, and it is money that talks, both in and out of the church. Isn't modern thinking that – we have worked hard for it, surely we should reap the rewards? This verse is quite contrary to that way of thinking!

**“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”** Those who long for inner righteousness and outer justice will see their desires fulfilled. There are few who are truly righteous, and many who think they are, are not. Here's a rather black and white test to determine whether you qualify as righteous: “If your heart doesn't ache at the injustice in the world--the poverty, the socio-economic inequality, the racism, the hate, the intolerance of one religion for another--you are falling short of the righteousness that Jesus taught and exemplified.”

**“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”** There are still Christians today, as well as people of other faiths, who are persecuted for their beliefs. I mean beaten, tortured, or killed, not just made fun of. All those who suffer for their faith, who have not committed any crimes or offenses of any sort, are blessed by God.

In this account, Jesus withdrawals to a mountain to teach all those who would follow him. And that's an important characteristic of Jesus in Matthew's story – he is a teacher, an interpreter of God's law, meeting with his disciples on the mountain like a new Moses training the twelve disciples/tribes in a new kind of righteousness. I think what Jesus is teaching his disciples, and us today, is not how to become blessed, or even to bless each other – but rather for us to recognise who is blessed by God. And the whole point of this is that the people who are blessed, are not necessarily who we think they are. Jesus is turning the world upside down, but saying ... **Bless-ed are ...**

Naming the poor, the weak, the mourning and the hungry “blessed” was deliberately shocking. Such language requires a firm belief that God's kingdom is on its way. Without this, the beatitudes are airy platitudes, or worse, condescending justifications of human misery. Belief in the coming kingdom

makes each of these statements a promise of salvation. Jesus believed he lived in the time of fulfilment. His words are urgent: “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land—soon! Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy—soon!” But Jesus teaches something different. Jesus teaches us to see how God calls blessed those who are down and out, distressed by their circumstances, passionate about promoting righteousness and working for peace, or persecuted for doing the right thing. This is an announcement, not a philosophical analysis of the world. It’s about something that’s starting to happen, not about a general truth of life. It is gospel: good news, not good advice. **Bless-ed are ...** This was a message of hope for Jesus’ first disciples. They lived in uncertain times, haunted by economic insecurity and threats of violence. This was also a message of hope for Matthew’s audience. We are probably wealthier than Jesus’ first disciples, but they likely suffered greater social and political persecution as a result. The beatitudes promise that present suffering in God’s service will lead to future joy for oneself and for Christians yet to come. So the power of the gospel this morning is that those we see in our society as weak, dispossessed, the marginal, the wounded, are in fact the ones most blessed by God, and are more likely to be destined to fulfil Gods wishes of establishing a kingdom of justice and peace, because they are not influenced by forces at work in society that steer people of God’s track!

I don’t know if you have seen the Lloyds Bank advert, where the animated characters are jumping at various stops onto the Lloyds train, and the strap line is ‘for the journey’. Well the beatitudes are all about ‘the journey’, the journey that we are all part of, but we need to look at our priorities and attitudes, and sometimes we need to stop at a station that allows us to see, that it is those places, the people are set free, the poor are raised up and the mighty are cast down from their thrones. Where those people are made important, where the oppressed are set free, God is at work, turning the world upside down, and when the World is turned upside down we are all blessed with a new opportunity to rediscover how we are bound together, to God and to all of creation.

So how does this all hang together for us, here in Dorset South and West Circuit, today, and everyday? Jesus urges his disciples – then and now – to look at those around us differently than the culture does. Rather than measure persons by their possessions, we are invited – nay, commanded – to see their character. Rather than merely take pity on their losses, we are invited to enter into them. Rather than judge their failings, we are invited to forgive and remind them that they are blessed by God and born for more than they’ve settled for. And rather than despise weakness, we are invited to see in it the truest point of meeting between God’s children. For God reveals God’s self to us most clearly and consistently at our places of deepest need. But in this passage, Jesus points us to recognize that God’s kingdom isn’t a place far away but is found whenever we honour each other as God’s children, bear each other’s burdens, bind each other’s wounds, and meet each other’s needs. To be human is to be inescapably fragile and vulnerable, and it turns out that the surprising character of God isn’t to reject these things but rather to gather them all into a divine embrace. Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, the pure in heart, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness and who are persecuted on Christ’s behalf. It’s quite a list. And we might add for our Circuit - blessed are those, who see the blessings of God in their neighbor’s need and give thanks they were privileged to meet them. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven **Amen.**

### **Prayers of intercession**

Let us offer our prayer with all God’s people through Jesus Christ our Lord who ever lives to pray for us. We pray for the needs of the **world** . . . We pray for the **Church** . . . We pray for all in any **illness, need, trouble or distress** . . . We pray for all who **make a new beginning today** . . .

God of compassion and mercy, listen to our prayer. May what we ask in Jesus Christ your Son be done according to his word, who said, 'Ask, and you will receive, seek, and you will find, knock, and the door will be opened to you.' To you, merciful God, through your Son, in the lifegiving Spirit, be glory and praise for ever. **Amen.**

### **Lord's Prayer: -**

As Jesus taught his disciples we pray together, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done; On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive those who trespass against us. And Lead us not into temptation; But deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, The power and the glory,**  
**For ever and ever. Amen.**

### **Hymn: STF 345 – And can it be**

1 And can it be that I should gain  
an interest in the Saviour's blood?  
Died he for me, who caused his pain?  
For me, who him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! How can it be  
that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

2 'Tis mystery all: the Immortal dies!  
Who can explore his strange design?  
In vain the first-born seraph tries  
to sound the depths of love divine.  
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,  
let angel minds enquire no more.

3 He left his Father's throne above —  
so free, so infinite his grace —  
emptied himself of all but love,

and bled for Adam's helpless race.  
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;  
for, O my God, it found out me!

4 Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
thine eye diffused a quickening ray —  
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,  
my chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.

5 No condemnation now I dread;  
Jesus, and all in him, is mine!  
Alive in him, my living Head,  
and clothed in righteousness divine,  
bold I approach the eternal throne,  
and claim the crown, through Christ, my own.

### **Blessing**

Loving God, Lead us out into the world, Renewed in Vigour, In Hope, In Faith,  
And in Purpose. Send us back to live and work for you, Sharing your love And living your life. And So, may  
the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Rest, and remain with you all, With those you  
Love, And those you are called to Love, Now, in the name of Christ. **Amen.**