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PARISH OF LOWER HUTT  
SERMON GUIDE

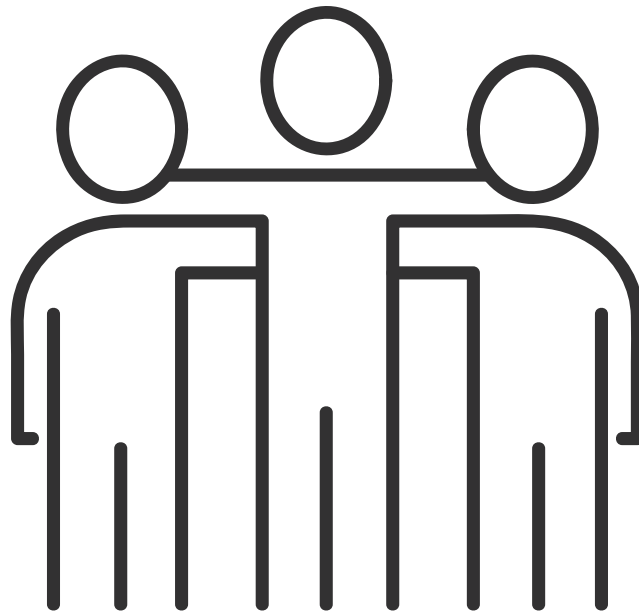


A KINGDOM OF...

AUG - NOV 2020

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# OUR CORE VALUES



TOGETHERNESS

DISCIPLESHIP

REACHING LOCAL  
COMMUNITY

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What does it mean to be a church that reaches our local communities?

To do this we are going to be looking at what the Kingdom of God looks like right up until Advent.

Most of the time we are going to be focused on what is commonly called 'The Beatitudes' with a sprinkling of other parables from the lectionary as we go through.

In my experience (Andy Spence) these stories and blessings are like a swimming pool. They are simple and if you dive in you will get wet at the shallow end. However, as you walk into the deep end you start to ask questions that will raise the water and you find deepness:

- Who is Jesus speaking to?
- What do these words mean?
- What does it mean they are blessed?
- Why does Jesus pronounce blessing on mourners and people who get beat up?
- Why does Jesus begin a big piece of teaching with these 8 blessings?

So as we all walk into the deep end of this series about the Kingdom of God, may God use them to encourage, challenge and teach us!

- Andrew Spence

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W E L C O M E



P O O R I N  
S P I R I T

WEEK ONE  
AUGUST 30TH

MATTHEW 5:3

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for  
theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

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## REFLECTION:

The Kingdom of God (referred to in Matthew's Gospel as the Kingdom of Heaven) was Jesus' favourite topic. In the sayings of Jesus in the Gospels, he spoke about this more than anything else. What did Jesus mean by this expression, and why was it so important to him?

In the Hebrew Bible, our Old Testament, God is often spoken of as a king. God is the King of Israel (e.g. 1 Sam. 12:12), King of other gods and of the whole world (e.g. Psalm 95:3-5). The people of Israel had long understood that they should live their lives in keeping with God's laws and instructions, living in God's way, as loyal members of God's kingdom.

For Jesus, the Kingdom of God was not a place. It was a way of being. Whenever God's will was being done, that was an expression of God's kingdom. Jesus showed through his life and works that God's kingdom could come on earth, but he also looked forward to a future time when the kingdom would come in its fullness, and all created beings would willingly acknowledge God's rule.

This willing acknowledgment of God is important. God's kingdom is not coercive - it's not a kingdom of regulations and requirements and sanctions for non-compliance. It is a kingdom of justice, joy, and peace, filled with God's goodness, righteousness and love. That is why the kingdom of God was so important to Jesus. It was the essence of his 'gospel' - his message of good news.

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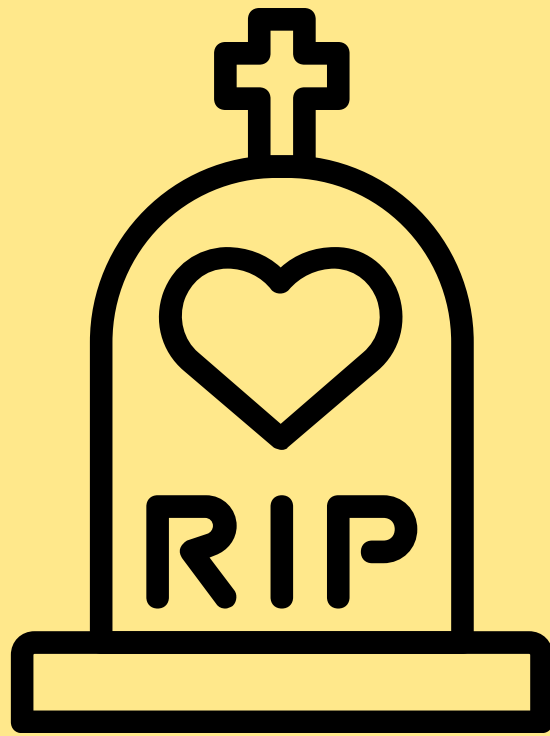
God came to humanity in Jesus to transform our hearts and our lives for good. But not everyone wanted that transformation. Many who had vested interests - the rich and powerful and privileged - wanted things to stay just the way they were. But Jesus offered the blessings of God's kingdom to the ordinary people - those who were poor, humble, mourning, badly treated. Those who had been excluded from so much found that God's kingdom was for them (Matthew 5:3). God's kingdom of justice, joy and peace is still available to each one of us, no matter who we are, through Jesus Christ. And that is really good news!

- Peter Bengé

## **Q U E S T I O N S :**

1. What does the expression 'the Kingdom of God' mean to you?
  2. What example could you give of God's kingdom at work in your own experience?
  3. What change(s) would you like to see in our church or wider community that would be signs of God's kingdom at work? What could you do to contribute to these changes?
  4. How do you nurture God's kingdom within yourself?
- 





T H O S E   W H O  
M O U R N



W E E K T W O  
S E P T E M B E R 6 T H

M A T T H E W 5 : 4

"Blessed are those who mourn, for  
they will be comforted."

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## REFLECTION:

On the surface of it, this seems a remarkable thing for Jesus to say. Most of us have experienced loss and I know for myself that feeling blessed is not exactly how I would have immediately described my feelings at such times! However, as I reflected more on this verse it occurred to me that at times of significant loss and grief, I have been able to find the gift of profound peace. It is that peace that comforts me and encourages me to 'hang in there'.

I remember when my father was diagnosed with tongue cancer. He had Alzheimer's disease, which had been progressing for several years and Mum was just starting to wonder if we might need to consider residential care for him in the upcoming year sometime. The ENT specialist was convinced he could remove all the cancer, but he would have had to remove most if not all of Dad's tongue. At that time, Dad's pleasures in life were eating, drinking tea, and telling stories (often the same one repeatedly). After much deliberation, including some time in silence to pray, one of my sisters thought to ask Dad what he wanted. "I want to keep my tongue," he said. The clarity we had all been seeking was found. During the next three months before he died, I experienced much grief, but I also found profound peace through prayer and spending time with God in God's creation.

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E te Atua aroha/Loving God,  
We thank you for the gift of your peace through  
which we find comfort.

When we are grieving, help us to be gentle on  
ourselves, allowing ourselves the time and space  
we need.

Protect us from both denying our grief and  
becoming so absorbed in it that we are unable to  
share Your love with others.

Thank you that in Your Son, Jesus Christ, we have  
the hope of resurrection and life eternal.

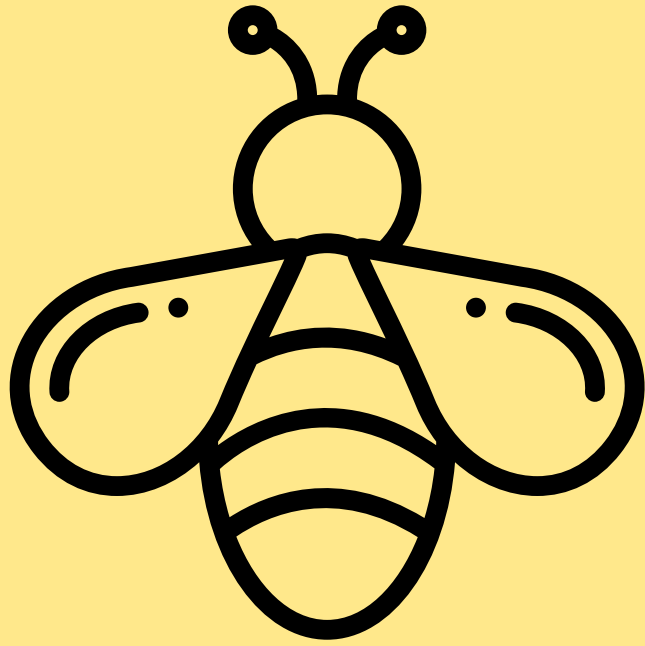
Amen

- Raewyn Berkahn

## Q U E S T I O N S :

1. What does it mean to you that in Jesus we have the hope of resurrection and life eternal?
  2. In the time of Covid-19 lockdowns we have experienced much loss. For some it is the loss of loved ones, for some the loss of a job, and for some the loss of our sense of security. Is there grief associated with a loss you are working through? Is there someone that can help you find God's peace and comfort? My prayer for you is that you seek that person.
  3. Is there someone who you know is grieving a loss of a loved one, job, security, or something else? How can you share God's love, peace and comfort with them?
  4. What is God helping you to discover this week?
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THE MEEK

WEEK THREE  
SEPTEMBER 13TH

MATTHEW 5:5

"Blessed are the meek, for they  
will inherit the earth."

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## REFLECTION:

Bees are fairly meek animals - gentle, kind, powerless in lots of ways. In fact they could be a great illustration of the church: the queen bee is in charge (Jesus) and all are helping to keep the health of the hive alive and spread the hive (us).

When we think of the meek though perhaps the English does not give us justice when it comes to the original intent. It seems that the word was meant to be for those that had no power amongst an empire.

If we read just before the Beatitudes, in Chapter 4, we see that Jesus called amongst him all the sick, suffering, demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed. These people he calls together on to the Mountain (just like Moses and Mt Sinai) and starts to proclaim what this kingdom will be like (just like Moses and the ten commandments). He says in the midst of that: Blessed are the Meek - they will inherit the earth. These people who were sick, demon-possessed, paralyzed and having seizures have no power in the empire because that system is cut throat - no sickness benefit. So these people live in the slums and are pushed to the margins.

Into that context Jesus says: You who have no power will inherit the earth. That is what Jesus' kingdom is about. Those that think they have the power, the money, and the property (literal earth) will not gain the earth as they think they are working for, instead it is the ones who have no power. No wonder later he says the first will be last and the last will be first (Matt. 20:16).

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If we were in a bee colony it would be like Jesus coming along and saying the worker bees will get all this hive in my kingdom - not the queen!

This is so surprising to hear about a bee colony. Just like Jesus' words are so surprising to the first hearers. What do you mean that the meek get to inherit the earth?! Do you mean us (these poor, suffering and ill people) will get this earth for our own?

This is not something to be obtained (I must be weak) but instead speaks of a truth that these are the first people to be called into Jesus' kingdom.

So the question for me is if these are the people who Jesus first welcomed into his kingdom, how do we treat them?

These are the people who have something that means they are Jesus' first citizens - shall we go and find out what they have?

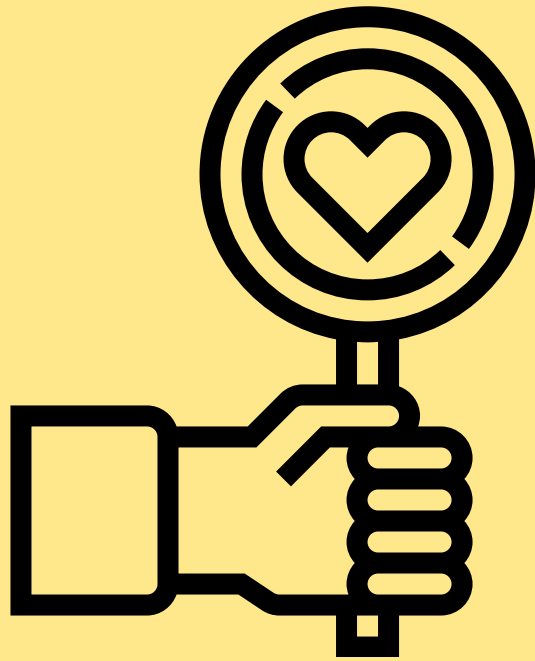
What people without power do you know?

- Andrew Spence

## QUESTIONS:

1. If you were in charge of God's kingdom who would you say is definitely in the kingdom - is it more like Rome or Jesus?
  2. What challenges you the most about the fact that Jesus pronounces the poor, and outcast in the Roman society are the first in the kingdom?
  3. Do we go to the people on the edges and connect and find out what they have that Jesus recognised?
  4. What are you recognising God is doing in your life so far in this series?
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G E N E R O S I T Y



W E E K F O U R  
S E P T E M B E R 2 0 T H

M A T T H E W 2 0 : 1 - 1 6

"So the last will be first, and the  
first will be last."

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## REFLECTION:

"That's not fair! She got more chippies than me!"  
"Why does he get a bigger bowl?"

My kids love chippies. Like really love them. When we open up a bag of chippies in our house those are often the statements I hear coming out of my little cherubs' mouths. Their human propensity for selfishness comes out and they start reacting to one another out of fear that there won't be enough for everyone to have their share. As a parent I often respond by holding the bag high in the air and saying "Stop fighting with one another! There is enough here for everyone".

In God's creation, and especially in the Biblical picture we are given of the Garden of Eden, we see a perfect example of the generosity of God. He created a world where he has showered us with his love, provision, and abundance. But what about famine, war, and poverty? How do we reconcile these things with the Biblical picture of God's abundance?

In Jesus' earthly ministry he spoke often about the Kingdom of God and how it looks nothing like our earthly examples of kingdoms. Throughout scripture we are told not to worry about earthly provisions like food, or clothing and to trust in God's provision. God's kingdom of loving generosity is all about trust. If we stop trusting that God will provide then we get selfish and look out only for ourselves. If we live into God's generosity then we begin to live more deeply into his Kingdom.

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Living into God's Kingdom through believing and trusting in the goodness of God's provision does not mean that all pain, suffering, and scarcity will cease. But it does open us up to the power of the Holy Spirit and we begin to bear witness to miracles of God's provision all around us.

- Summer Benton

## QUESTIONS:

1. What are some of the 'chippies' in our lives?  
Things that we get selfish about?
  2. How has God provided and been generous in the biblical story and the world around you?
  3. Where can we be people that are generous and giving of ourselves, time, money and talents?
  4. How are you seeing God and generosity this week?
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H U N G E R  
A N D T H I R S T

W E E K F I V E  
S E P T E M B E R 2 7 T H

M A T T H E W 5 : 6

"Blessed are those who hunger  
and thirst for righteousness, for  
they will be filled."

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## REFLECTION:

Last year I lived in Cambodia for a few months while on the Better World gap year programme. I spent quite a bit of time with an organisation called The Hard Places Community (HPC) who work in anti-trafficking. Every day Khmer staff from HPC would go out to lots of places across Phnom Penh to run kids programmes as part of their work to prevent these children going into trafficking. Once a week I went out with them to a small slum tucked away from the busy streets to witness the programme. On the tuktuk ride there almost every time, I would become extremely thirsty and I could not quench the thirst no matter how much water I drank. It was such a horrible feeling, to feel completely parched and not be able to quench the thirst. I have come to recognise this feeling as a physical thirst for Jesus, a feeling I get when my soul is so desperate to see the kingdom come that I get a physical thirst that only Jesus can quench. I would begin to pray that Jesus would shine so bright in this slum that I was going to, that there would be hope in the hopelessness.

I saw a lot of things in Cambodia that were dark and seemed like there was no hope for justice but there were also a lot of places where I saw the light of Jesus, this slum was one of them. I would go in thirsting to see righteousness and there I would be filled as I saw the kingdom come on earth. I would never leave the slum feeling thirsty because Jesus had shown me how he was working to bring wholeness and restoration. I saw Jesus shining brightly in amongst the brokenness and I believe that Jesus was showing me a glimpse of what he means when he says "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."

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- Jessica Hedge

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## QUESTIONS:

1. What sorts of things do you feel passionate about when it comes to justice?
  2. How would you start to think about righteousness? What do you think it means?
  3. Feeling hungry and thirsty are powerful images - how do you relate this to righteousness? What do you think being filled means?
  4. What places in your week are you seeing God fill your hungers and thirsts?
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THE  
MERCIFUL



WEEK SIX  
OCTOBER 4TH

MATTHEW 5:7

Blessed are the merciful, for they  
will be shown mercy.

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## REFLECTION:

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

This great saying refers to a principle that runs through the New Testament. To be forgiven we must first forgive.

So, who are the merciful?

Well it's us God, you, and I!

God showed us mercy by sending his Son to die for us, by expressing his willingness to pardon and save us; and by sending his Spirit to renew and sanctify our hearts.

Each day of our life, each hour, and each moment, we receive God's undeserved mercy. If we, then, show mercy to others it shows that we are like God.

The word mercy in Hebrew is *chesedh* - it means the ability to get right inside the other person's skin until we can see things through their eyes, think things with their mind, and feel things with their feelings.

How often we fail to do this! We make judgments in a split second, we feel sorry for people perhaps, but we often fail to see things through their minds and hearts.

I have found that you only really know a situation by discussing it with the person concerned, and listening to their story. We have all passed judgement or made comments about someone's situation without fully understanding it, or without even talking to them about it.

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Some feel that in the absence of information they will even fill in the gaps and pass on an embellished story. Rather than merciful, this often makes the matter worse, and for this we must ask for mercy, “Because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment” James 2:13

- Murray Wills

## QUESTIONS:

1. What are all the definitions of mercy that you can come up with?
2. Can you think of someone you need to forgive? Pray for that person and that situation.
3. What are ways that you show mercy to others, and how might you improve?





THE PURE  
IN HEART

WEEK SEVEN  
OCTOBER 11TH

MATTHEW 5:8

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for  
they will see God."

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## REFLECTION:

Have you ever met someone who just oozes humility, love and kindness?

A friend of mine in Christchurch is that sort of person. He is a miraculous person who has done amazing things like start 24-7 YouthWork (a nationwide youth work scheme across the country). He even bought a beach on behalf of New Zealand. If you meet him he is so humble, so kind and cares deeply about the person standing before him. When I think of this Beatitude: the pure in heart, I think of him!

Each one of these Beatitudes, comes out of the Old Testament. Jesus is not revealing a new God but returning us to the same God and the way he intended things to be. Israel was always to be pure in heart, but what did that mean?

Proverbs 22:11 says: "One who loves a pure heart and who speaks with grace will have the king for a friend." Often the following of law was seen as being pure in heart but in fact that was an outward purity - seen by others. What does Jesus say is blessed: the people who are pure inside. For those people the Proverb says, will have the king for a friend.

Purity of heart - what is that?

Psalms 51:10: "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit in me" God is the one who can purify the heart. So although we may not obey or follow God completely all the time, God can still work in us purifying the evil desires of our heart and turning our hearts back to him - therefore making them clean and pure.

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If you were to be pure in heart Jesus states you will see God. For the people He is standing in front of, little do they realise that in fact they are seeing God, in the person of Jesus.

I think back to my friend or the children around me, those who I consider to have pure hearts, I wonder if they see God all the time, everywhere.

I often am with other people and they say to me: "Do you see God at work there pulling that together?" and I think to myself - no actually. But now you point it out I can probably see that. Perhaps Jesus is asking me to continue to purify my heart so then I can see him more clearly.

So Jesus, help me to have undivided loyalty to God and to his ways. Help me to be filled with Joy, wonder and love for your kingdom purposes. Through that may I be pure in heart!  
Amen.

- Andrew Spence

## QUESTIONS:

1. What sorts of people can you think of that might fit into the category of 'pure in heart'? Do you have a friend like Andrew's?
2. How do you see God purifying your life? Working within you?
3. What is God speaking to you about this week?





HEALING



WEEK EIGHT  
OCTOBER 18TH

LUKE 10:1-9

Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'

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## REFLECTION:

St Luke was a physician and this is reflected in his careful description of the healing miracles of Jesus and the Apostles. He has become closely associated with the healing ministry and this is why the International Healing Order to which a number of us belong, is named after him.

I have refined the focus of this passage to two particular verses:

### **Verse 2:**

Jesus says:

The harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.

Almighty God, creator of all that is, chose to allow mere human beings to play a part in bringing in the Kingdom, not just then but onwards into time through to the present day and until our Lord returns once again at the end of time. Amazingly, we are invited to be co-workers in the outworking of the divine plan for humanity. This is all encompassing and we each have a part to play.

### **Verse 9:**

Jesus gives very clear instruction:

Cure the sick who are there, and say to them, "The Kingdom of God has come near to you."

So what exactly did Jesus mean by the sick and what is healing?

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Healing has a far wider meaning than the mere relief of a medical condition.

Principally, this is:

- Restoration of our relationship with God
- Reconciliation between individuals, communities and nations
- Healing of the environment
- Healing of memories
- Wholeness of body, mind and spirit

It is something in which we can all play a part; through:

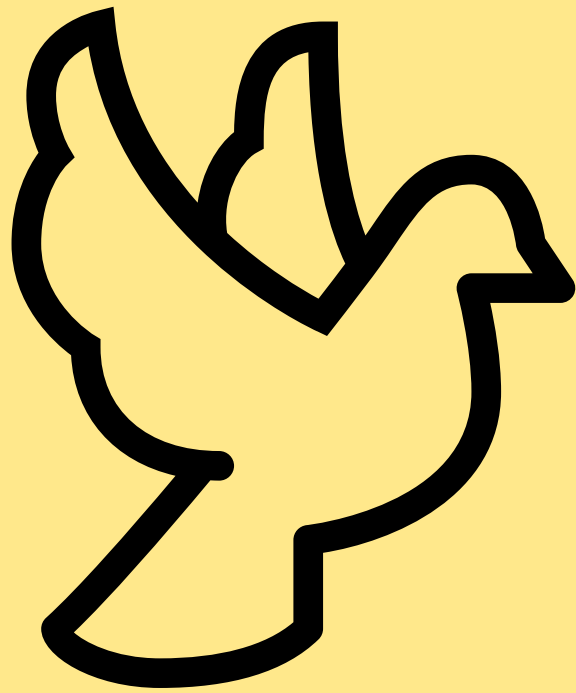
- Establishing a real relationship with God through regular Bible study and prayer
- Right living
- Our concern and care for others and our environment
- Intercessory prayer
- Following appropriate training for this
- ministry and exercising the ministry in accordance with our calling

- Rev. Chris Low

## **Q U E S T I O N S :**

1. In what ways are you a co-worker with God?
2. To which aspects of healing, listed above, are you drawn?
3. What holds you back from being actively involved in the wider healing ministry or what inspires and encourages you to serve in this way?





THE  
PEACE -  
MAKERS

W E E K N I N E  
O C T O B E R 2 5 T H

M A T T H E W 5 : 9

Blessed are the peacemakers, for  
they will be called children of  
God.

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## REFLECTION:

One of the root words of the original Greek word for peacekeepers means both to make and to do. As followers of Jesus we are invited to make and to do/be peace. Peacemakers are not a passive bunch of people waving banners, they actively participate and become involved in peaceful acts, embodying peaceful attitudes.

To be a peacemaker requires inner peace. When we make peace with ourself, we can make peace with our outer world. To quote Gandhi, the great peacemaker, "Each one has to find peace within to become the kind of person who can live at peace with others." Peace, to be real, must be unaffected by outside circumstances. Drama stifles peace.

I can recall several occasions when I was invited to mediate peace in difficult circumstances. Sadly, perhaps not surprisingly, on one such occasion I was invited to a church leaders meeting - not an Anglican church of course!! There was historical resistance on both sides to shift from entrenched opinions. My role was to try and bring about a peaceful resolution without diminishing the experience and reality of those present.

In our humanity, we tend to make meaning out of everything, consequently we inadvertently misinterpret comments and behaviour and end up hurt. This often leads to alienation and a breakdown of relationship. Once we become attached to our particular story, we justify and defend it ferociously. Peacemakers choose to acknowledge different opinions and believe relationships are more important than being right.

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Even though we are slow learners and find it difficult to embrace our humanity, our Triune God never stops loving us.

I believe peaceful outcomes are achieved when each person is invited to share their concerns without interruption, challenge, or judgement. Each voice needs to be respected as sacred and of value. This gentle process often reveals hidden frustrations and agendas. Peace begins with tolerance and respect for everyone, for every act of loving acceptance is a work of peace no matter how small. Peace does not mean unity of thought, rather a capacity to lovingly hold difference.

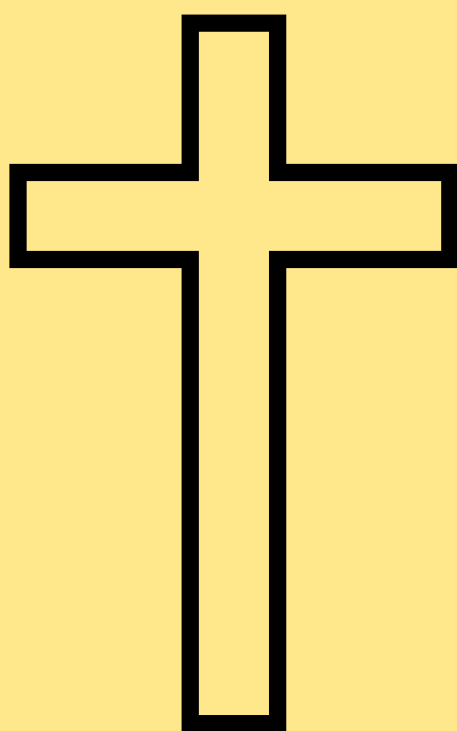
Peace is our gift to each other.

- Maureen Lamb

## QUESTIONS:

1. *'You find peace not by rearranging the circumstances of your life, but by realising who you are at the deepest level.'* - Eckhart Tolle
  - a. Who are you at your deepest level?
2. *'Peace begins with a smile. If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.'* - Mother Teresa
  - a. In what ways have you forgotten we belong to each other?
3. *'Peace may sound simple - one beautiful word - that requires everything we have, every quality, every strength, every dream, every high ideal.'* - Yehudi Menuhin
  - a. What is your understanding of peace and what is the cost of being a peacemaker?





THE  
PERSECUTED



W E E K T E N  
N O V E M B E R 1 S T

M A T T H E W 5 : 1 0

“Blessed are those who are  
persecuted for righteousness’  
sake, for theirs is the kingdom of  
heaven.

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## REFLECTION:

At first her family were proud of her. Even though she was a Christine not a Fatima she had won a place in a state university in different part of the country. Her aunts warned her that the men there seduced Christian students to get them pregnant so forcing them to convert and marry. So, she was careful in her relationships. By dressing conservatively and learning the local language she gained the respect of her fellow students. She did have trouble finding a room in a boarding house. Landladies made it plain they did not want any of her sort in their houses. And once a lecturer publicly humiliated her about her faith in front of the class. Jesus helped her through each of these situations and her faith grew.

There were no other Christians in her classes but she joined a small group of students who met each week to pray and to wrestle with what it meant to follow Jesus in this alien environment. Over time she realised that, for her, this meant staying on after graduation rather than returning to her home town where she could get a high paying job and there were Christians in every street.

Employers wanted Fatimas rather than Christines. It was also hard, as an outsider, getting customers for her small business. Her beloved parents were bewildered and angry. They had sacrificed to send her to university and now she was “throwing it away to bring Jesus to those unbelievers who didn’t deserve Jesus’ love.” What was almost as hurtful were her former schoolmates with their big houses and fine cars. “If you were really in God’s will He would bless you as He has us.”

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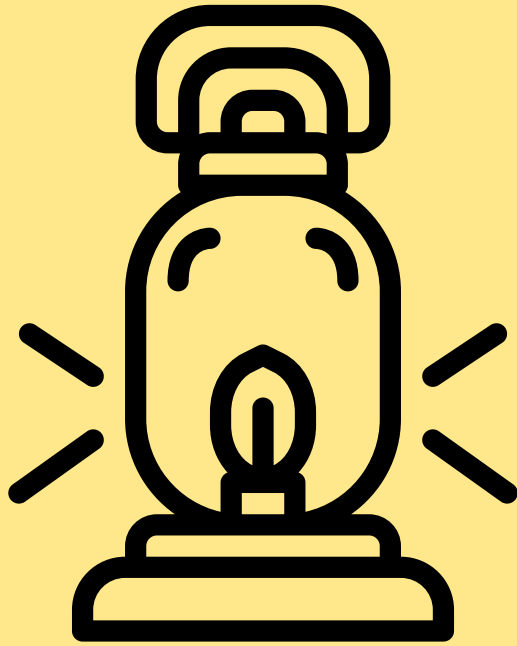
She was so glad of Jesus' reassurance:  
"Blessed are the persecuted for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

- Our Overseas Partners

## QUESTIONS:

1. We are pretty comfortable here in NZ - what sorts of persecutions do people endure here for the sake of righteousness (justice or faithfulness to God)?
2. What sorts of things do you find yourselves being afraid of or not doing because of the potential backlash either at work or with friends?
3. What do you think God is helping us to realise about his Kingdom when he expects us to be persecuted?





P R E P A R -  
A T I O N

WEEK ELEVEN  
NOVEMBER 8TH

MATTHEW 25:1-13

"...keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."

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## REFLECTION:

What an annoying story! So many questions... Where is the commitment to the common good (Acts 2, Galatians 6:2)? Where are the second chances (Zaccheus, Prodigal Son, and most of the disciples)? It is a parable that (along with others) has caused many sensitive Christians to live in terror of being finally left on the wrong side of the door, through a moment's inattention, or through the inscrutable decree of God.

But it does make a useful point about perseverance: that, basically, we'll always need at least twice as much as we think we will. In virtually all the serious and important undertakings of my life: parenting, PhD, building some kind of musical reputation: if I'd known beforehand what was going to be required, I'm not sure I'd have started at all. Anyone who's walked in the mountains will have had the experience of - after mighty exertion - reaching the top of a steep hill, only to find that it was concealing a higher climb beyond it, and steeper hills beyond...

Are we there yet?

The Christian life - any half-decent life, actually - may require from us qualities of patience, fortitude, and courage that we cannot yet imagine. What if we run dry? All we can do, maybe, is put ourselves in such a place that God is able to nourish and sustain us with what we need to continue; as the old song has it:

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Give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning,  
Give me oil in my lamp I pray.  
Give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning,  
Keep me burning till the break of day...

- Jonathan Berkahn

## Q U E S T I O N S :

1. Where do you need perseverance in your life or those around you?
2. What are some of the provisions we need as Christians to keep our 'lamp burning'?
3. Where is God prompting you - as we think about the Kingdom of God this week?





G R O W T H



WEEK TWELVE  
NOVEMBER 15TH

MATTHEW 25:14-30

"For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away."

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## REFLECTION:

When I read this story I am prompted to think of a couple of my friends one from America and one from New Zealand, both of these friends were a part of moderate (in numbers) Anglican churches from a range of different worship styles, which collected a small number from within to plant another church in their city to reach out to people around them with the good news of Christ. It is in this parable that we are being pointed to the way that three people responded when given gold to look after. Like the man in the parable going away and entrusting his servants with his wealth and seeing two of the three expand and grow the amount given, while one was nervous and too afraid of losing what he was given so went and hid it away. For me this begs the question of if we are entrusted with the kingdom here on earth are we going to be one of the first two servants or are we going to be the third? Are we going to take what we have been given and grow that the best we can or are we going to take what we have been given and sit on it and keep it to ourselves hoping that when the master comes back he is happy we have returned the little bit he gave us.

I reflect on the opening story here, and the willingness of those to take some of the committed core to reach out to more around them.

- Guy Benton

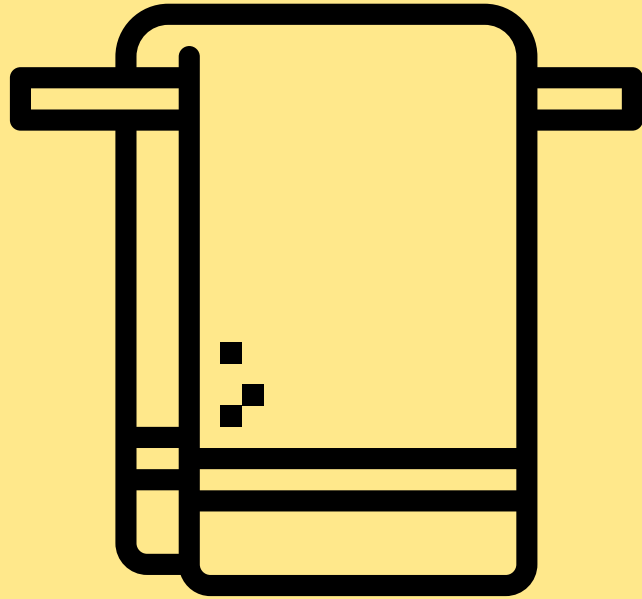
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## QUESTIONS:

1. What part of this parable/story in today's reading stands out the most for you?
  2. Which character do you resonate the most with in this parable/story?
  3. How does this parable/story reframe how we grow what we have been given in our lives here in NZ?
  4. What is God prompting you with this week?
- 





THE  
LEAST,  
LAST AND  
LOST

WEEK THIRTEEN  
NOVEMBER 22ND

MATTHEW 25:31-46

"Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one  
of the least of these who are members  
of my family, you did it to me."

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## REFLECTION:

I love living in my neighbourhood. In the last few months, I had lunch with someone I'd met at the beach walking her dog. We've shared our home for a few weeks with a young mum needing a safe spot to recover. I've prayed at the gate of one neighbour who I see often on my daily walk who suddenly shared his deepest grief and I've enjoyed cake and tea with another neighbour who always calls out from her porch. I've listened to a neighbour survive a horrific attack and we prayed together determined to not allow the destruction of our neighbourhood take away the hope we find here. I love to speak things, pray things and act in ways that reflect what I know are deeply true into my neighbours lives about their worth, their belovedness, their invitation to belong and the ongoing transformation available to us all in God's power and love.

Healthy church is not what happens on Sunday. Healthy church is what happens between Sundays. It is us noticing and joining in with what God is doing in our neighbourhoods which is always about bringing hope to despair, healing to brokenness, its small acts often that build over time to become empowering and transforming. We call them kingdom moments and we look to be part of them every day and they fuel our prayer and worship times together.

It doesn't come without a battle. We battle a lot. The battle is fought in our prayers and in our actions. We do whatever it takes to fight with our friends for the freedom they deserve as beloved children of God.

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Sometimes that's deep vulnerable conversations, sometimes its a safe bed in a warm room, often its yet another cup of tea at the table talking firstly about the small things. It's a committed prayer life together that is fuelled by daily realities. We see things that need to change and we pray and act until change happens. One man as come to our church for a few years now, he comes over to our home often. He can be grumpy and demanding. Occasionally we apply good boundaries but we try to be more on the side of the warm welcome because big picture that's what he needs most. The other day one of our team had an amazing conversation about his spiritual growth. Some things take time.

At the end of the day I want to have a Jesus life that's worth getting up for in the morning. I'm prepared to work in less paid work to make space for more neighbourly gospel work. I want to live in a way that acknowledges both that the world is literally dying and suffering and that there is beauty and hope breaking in all over the show.

- Jenny Duckworth

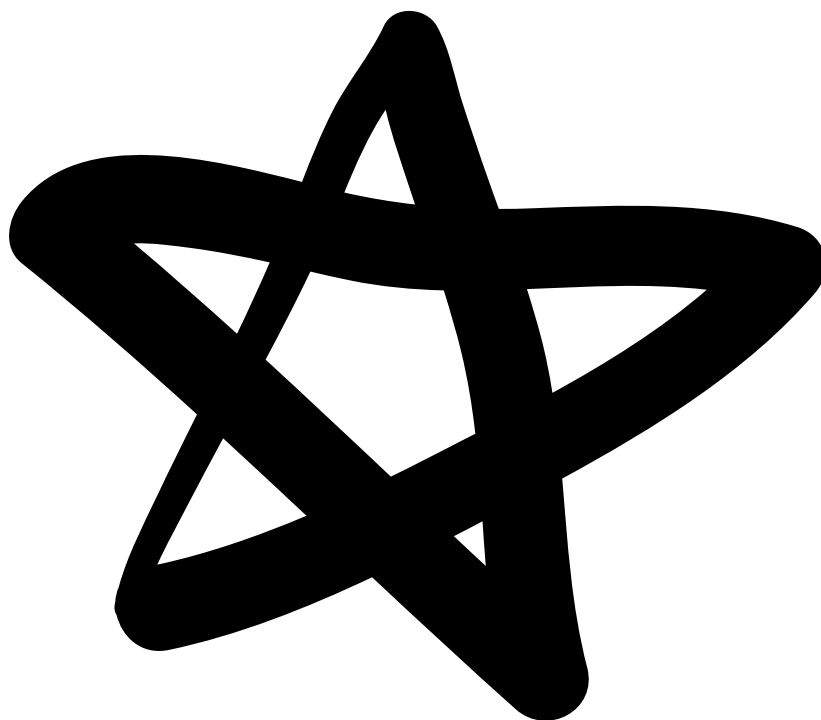
## **Q U E S T I O N S :**

1. When you read these stories about neighbourhood connections - what comes to mind? How does this make you feel?
  2. How does this compare to the picture Jesus gives us in Matthew 25 - about feeding, helping and serving people as if they were Jesus?
  3. Where do you see God's kingdom breaking in around your neighbourhood?
  4. What has this series brought up for you that you need to capture? What has changed?
- 



**P A R I S H   O F   L O W E R   H U T T**

U P   N E X T :



**A D V E N T**

S T A R T S   2 9   N O V E M B E R   2 0 2 0