



Opening Prayer for Ordinary Time

God of adventure and growth,
open our hearts, ready our minds
and fire our imaginations,
so that as we gather together before you,
and ponder the life-giving stories of Jesus,
we might discover more of your goodness,
and be swept up by the Holy Spirit
as she nurtures, disturbs and inspires us
on our journey into fullness of life. **Amen**

'Starter for Ten' Discussion Question

Have you ever shied away from helping someone you knew needed help? What influenced your decision-making?

Prayers of Thanks and Praise

You are invited to take quiet time to bring your thanksgiving prayers to God, and to offer your praises.

Psalm of the Week – Psalm 146 (Singing the Faith 837)

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul!
I will praise the Lord as long as I live;

I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals,
in whom there is no help.

**When their breath departs, they return to the earth;
on that very day their plans perish.**

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord their God,

who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them;

who keeps faith for ever;

who executes justice for the oppressed;

who gives food to the hungry.

The Lord sets the prisoners free;

the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.

The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;

the Lord loves the righteous.

The Lord watches over the strangers;

he upholds the orphan and the widow,

but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

The Lord will reign for ever,

your God, O Zion, for all generations.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;

as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever.

Amen

Reading Luke 16:19 – 31

Sermon – Part One: Lazarus

My name is Lazarus, and this is my story. I'd worked with my master for a number of years, managing his estates, and acting as steward in his household. To say he was not an easy man to work for is quite the understatement, but the pay was reasonable, and I was grateful

to have a job with what I thought was a degree of security. However, as time went on, the long hours and constant demands were putting more and more strain on both my mental health and my marriage. I was seriously considering looking for another position but with utility bills and food costs swallowing up increasingly larger proportions of our income, we really couldn't afford for me to be out of work. In the end, the strain of having to watch every single penny and living in a freezing cold home became too much. My relationship fell apart and with just my wages coming in, I got myself in an unmanageable level of debt. When I could no longer keep up with the rent, I was evicted, and had nowhere to go. I slept on friends' sofas for a while, but after a few weeks I was bedding down in shop doorways and quiet alleys. After so many years of service, I thought my boss would understand when he found out I was homeless, but he sacked me instead. What a way to thank someone, eh?

So, here I am, sat outside the gates of his mansion. I know that he's seen me when he has driven past in his Bentley because of the look he always gives me before putting the windows up, like I am nothing more to him than the dirt on the bottom of his shoes. It's hard not to be resentful when someone who wears designer outfits worth more than I used to earn in an entire year and throws lavish dinner parties every night apparently cannot spare a few quid to help someone in need. I'm so hungry most days and I'd give anything to eat even just some of the leftovers from one of his parties. It has taken a massive toll on my mental health, and is also starting to affect me physically. The ultimate indignity was waking up, and finding a stray dog licking my sores. Politicians talk about the cost-of-living crisis, but have not the faintest idea what it is like to lose everything – even self-respect.

I have no idea how much longer I will be able to survive like this and it is only my faith which keeps me going. You know, he used to treat me like a slave, and that probably should have been a warning sign, but I did not see it. Just goes to show there is more to being a decent

human being than having plenty of money in the bank, or rich mates and fancy clothes. My only real hope is that I know God has not and will never forget me, even if everyone else has...

Sermon – Part Two: A Rich Man

You find me in rather trying circumstances, to say the least. When I didn't listen to my doctors and take their warnings about my drinking seriously, I suppose it was only a matter of time... I know some think that I got where I did by hoarding my wealth, but I was always rather more than generous to my parish church; I figured that it was a kind of insurance policy, you know? Imagine my shock when I found that I would be spending eternity in this hell. What I would not give for a simple drink of water now! It is true that, when the business took off, I took great care to surround myself with the finer things in life. After all, I created my wealth; why should I not have nice clothes and give the best parties? My parents worked really hard to give my brothers and me the best possible education money could buy, and we were brought up knowing we were the cream of the crop. Father invested a few thousand in the business to get me started, it is true, but that's what all good parents do, right? After a few years, I brought Lazarus onto the team to keep the estates running smoothly and to look after the household management, because I did not have time to do that, and be off making deals around the world. Things were good, and I was happy and secure enough not to need to worry about trivialities like the cost of living going up. If people like Lazarus couldn't budget properly, and got in a mess, why would I want them working for me?

I vividly remember seeing Lazarus with Abraham across the chasm, and telling the latter to send him to quench my thirst. I was shocked, and not a little angry, when Abraham refused. Apparently, suffering was my reward for not helping out Lazarus in life, and there was no way to bridge the gap between us. Frantic thoughts rushed through

my head, but at that time, it never occurred to me to think of Lazarus differently from how I had before. You see, I was brought up to think that I was superior to people like him, and even in the midst of these hardships in this awful place, I didn't see him as anything more than a servant. After a few moments, it occurred to me that if there wasn't anything I could do for myself, then at least I could get Lazarus to warn my brothers so they could avoid the same dreadful fate. This did not work either, as apparently we should have each learnt enough from Moses and the Prophets to not be condemned like this, and even a resurrection appearance would not make the difference. So, here I am, in this hell. I can only hope that the others see the light and turn away from selfish ways before it is too late...

Prayers of Renewal

God of relationship,
you bring renewal in tired places,
and set us free to follow you into a hope-filled future.
Let us therefore bring to God those things in need of renewal:

We bring to you those things for which we are sorry:
Restore us and heal us.

We bring to you the times we've failed to love one another:
Restore us and heal us.

We bring to you the burdens we carry and sorrows we bear:
Restore us and heal us.

We bring to you the wounds and fractures in our community:
Restore us and heal us.

We bring to you the injustices and oppression in our world:
Restore us and heal us.

God of new beginnings, of love stronger than even death,
you set us free from the past, to flourish in the future.

Thank you that you forgive us, restore us,
and breathe new life into us. **Amen**

Prayers of Intercession

God of freedom and hope,
you came to bring good news to the poor.
We pray for all those who struggle to make ends meet,
for those having to choose between food and heating,
and those who are worried about what the future holds.
God of endless love, **hear our prayer.**

God of freedom and hope,
you came to bring release to the captives.
We pray for prisoners of conscience throughout the world,
for those living under oppressive regimes and dictatorships,
and the work of human rights organisations and advocates.
God of endless love, **hear our prayer.**

God of freedom and hope,
you came to bring recovery of sight to the blind.
We pray for everyone who struggles to trust they are loved,
for those blinded by affluence, self-interest or greed,
and all those who have lost sight of you in the midst of life.
God of endless love, **hear our prayer.**

God of freedom and hope,
you came to bring freedom to the oppressed.
We pray for those experiencing isolation and loneliness,
for all victims and survivors of abuse of any kind,
and those struggling with ill health in body, mind or spirit.
God of endless love, **hear our prayer.**

Lord's Prayer and Blessing