



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

Think of a time when you have felt like you have come to the end of your own resources. What helped sustain you?

Prayers of Thanks and Praise

You're invited to take some quiet time to bring your own thanks and praises to God. At the end, the following is said:

Faithful and ever-present God,
receive our thanks and praises.
Amen

Psalm of the Week – Psalm 145:8 – 14

The Lord is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
The Lord is good to all,
and his compassion is over all that he has made.
All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord,
and all your faithful shall bless you.
They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom,
and tell of your power to make known your mighty deeds
and the glorious splendour of your kingdom.
Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and your dominion endures throughout all generations.
The Lord is faithful in all his words,
and gracious in all his deeds.
The Lord upholds all who are falling,
and raises up all who are bowed down.
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now and shall be forever.
Amen

Prayers of Renewal

God of rest and refreshment,
we bring to you those things in our own lives
and within the life of our broken and messy world
in need of renewal and restoration at this time:

For the words and actions for which we're sorry,
grant us your forgiveness.

For the burdens we carry and the sorrows we bear,
bring us your comfort.

For the struggles we may experience to trust we are loved,
offer us your assurance.

For the injustice and oppression which blights our world,
inspire us to respond courageously.

For the failings and disunity of your Church,
make us ready to change.

Silence is kept for a few moments...

God of rest and refreshment,
thank you that you forgive, restore us,
and send us out to be bearers of hope and justice,
and to bring new life through our words and actions. **Amen**

Reading Matthew 11:16 – 19, 25 – 30

Sermon

Jesus said, “Come to me, all you that are weary, and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). This is one of the most famous of his sayings, and its words are full of comfort. We all find ourselves carrying heavy burdens upon our shoulders at times, and particularly as we continue to grapple with the impact of a global pandemic and the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, many of us are more than a little weary. It might therefore seem surprising that it emerges on the back of his challenging both those individuals who had turned to John the Baptist in the wilderness but without really knowing what they were seeking (11:7 – 19), and the various cities where his older cousin’s message of repentance had not been heeded (11:20 – 24). In short, this promise of rest for tired souls comes hot upon the heels of his pointing out that although each of the cousins offered differing pathways to God, neither of them had been taken seriously enough, and both had been criticised for equal and opposite reasons. Jesus’

teaching has, it seems, resonated not with those wise and intelligent folk who thought they understood God’s path, but with those he calls infants (11:25), who were taking their first faltering steps on the road of faith. It is they who would, by God’s grace (11:26), be able to take upon themselves the yoke of Christ (11:29 – 30).

Now, in order to make sense of this, we need to connect what we’re looking at here with the story of Moses. Matthew views Jesus as the successor to the great figure of the exodus story, who led the people of God out of oppression in Egypt, and prepared them over decades to enter the land of Canaan. In Exodus 33:12 – 23, there’s a curious exchange between God and the man who received the Law on Sinai in which we see Moses’s longing to know God as fully as he himself is known, even if all he is allowed to see is God passing him by. The extent of mutual knowing and being known between the Father and the Son (11:27) clearly surpasses this, and God’s offer of rest made to Moses (Exodus 33:14) is now open to all through Jesus’ invitation to come to him (11:28). When he declares himself to be “gentle and humble of heart” to those who would take his yoke upon themselves and learn from him (11:29), there is a direct echo of the key qualities that Moses was found to have (Numbers 12:3). Moreover, language of ‘yoking oneself’ refers to placing oneself under the Mosaic Law.

So, taking this together reveals how Matthew wants us to picture an image of Jesus picking up the baton from Moses, and inviting others to join him in the race towards the love of God. If we can stretch this imagery a little further, we might envisage ourselves as being given a rucksack to carry that contains the commitment we have taken on our shoulders, and then being joyfully surprised to discover that we are not now weighed down by the heavy burden of the oral laws the Pharisees and others placed on the Jewish people, but are actually freer to move than ever before. When we talk about that abundance or fullness of life Jesus came to share (John 10:10), this is what we mean; a freedom to live and move and have our being, knowing that

even when we are weary and carrying heavy burdens, we are never abandoned to bear the weight alone. We can always share sources of concern or stress or pain with God, because Jesus lived and died, loved to the uttermost, and rose again to new life, so we can be free of the burdens of sin and shame that hold us down.

The most profound example I can give of this dynamic working itself out in my own life takes me back to my early twenties. My childhood had been scarred by growing up with a mother suffering from mental ill health and a father unable to cope with the family being somewhat less than the perfect image he aspired towards. Add to that being a young carer for both my mother and severely ill autistic brother, and it was not a happy mix. As children, we do not have that perspective we can gain in later life which allows us to see the flaws in the adults around us. Thus, like many growing up within a dysfunctional home environment, I internalised that, and so believed for a long time that I was basically a bad person. It was partly through the skilled efforts of an excellent therapist that I began to piece things together and to move toward forgiveness. However, it was the discovery that God's love is truly real, and here for me, which allowed me to lay down the heavy burden I had lugged about for so long, and gradually discover how to move more freely. Looking back, there were a few significant steps along the way which make no sense if they were not the Spirit powerfully at work, and while it was hard, I eventually found my rest in Christ. May you too reach that point where you can lay down your burdens, and find rest in God's arms. Amen

Prayers of Intercession

God of rest and refreshment,
we bring our prayers for the world you have created to you,
trusting in the power of your love to renew and make whole.
Sustaining God, **hear our prayer.**

For all people surviving in places of war and conflict,
we pray for sanctuary, peace and the courage to keep going.
Sustaining God, **hear our prayer.**

For all people living in regions blighted by natural disasters,
we pray for timely aid, safety and the strength to rebuild.
Sustaining God, **hear our prayer.**

For all people exercising power and authority over others,
we pray for wisdom, compassion and selfless service.
Sustaining God, **hear our prayer.**

For all people without a safe home in which to live and rest,
we pray for good housing, freedom from abuse and hope.
Sustaining God, **hear our prayer.**

For all people who cannot find peace due to mental ill health,
we pray for security, calm and the support needed to recover.
Sustaining God, **hear our prayer.**

For all people seeking to share the good news of God's love,
we pray for commitment, resilience and integrity of living.
Sustaining God, **hear our prayer.**

For all people facing illness, anxiety or loneliness today,
we pray for healing, comfort and meaningful connection.
Sustaining God, **hear our prayer.**

In a time of quiet, we offer our own personal prayers...

Lord's Prayer

Blessing