

## Welcome and notices

### Call to worship

“If you find the godless world is hating you, remember it got its start hating me. If you lived on the world’s terms, the world would love you as one of its own. But since I picked you to live on God’s terms and no longer on the world’s terms, the world is going to hate you.”

John 15:18-19 (The Message)

### SONG: Must Jesus bear the cross alone?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1zxJw2fEdnQ>

Must Jesus bear the cross alone,  
And all the world go free?  
No, there’s a cross for everyone,  
And there’s a cross for me.

How happy are the saints above,  
Who once went sorrowing here!  
But now they taste unmingled love,  
And joy without a tear.

The consecrated cross I’ll bear  
Till death shall set me free;  
And then go home my crown to wear,  
For there’s a crown for me.

Upon the crystal pavement down  
At Jesus’ pierced feet,  
Joyful I’ll cast my golden crown  
And His dear Name repeat.

O precious cross! O glorious crown!  
O resurrection day!  
When Christ the Lord from heaven comes down  
And bears my soul away.

### Opening prayer

For all whose day starts with anxiety, as they leave the security of home worrying about the risk of infection; particularly those whose health or age classifies them as vulnerable, Loving God, be close, keep them safe, along with all whose tasks today include the care of the frail and elderly. And for all of us, grant wisdom to make sensible choices, not just for ourselves, but for everybody.

In the darker moments, when clouds gather and the heaviness we feel seems overwhelming, remind us of your love, carrying the weight of so much in that cross, embracing the world with arms outstretched, that we might know freedom from the chains

which now constrain us.

Bring us to your light, Lord, release our burdens and from despair bring hope.

This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, **Amen.**

### Confession

Gracious God, You have given us a world of beauty ... and we have spoilt it.

A world to feed us ... and so many go hungry.

A world of riches ... that we are unwilling to share.

A world to care for ... and we think only of ourselves.

Forgive us, Lord, for those times when your heart is saddened by our selfishness.

For those times when we have no thought for others, no cares but our own.

Enable us to see this world anew as a gift from you, to be shared and nurtured,  
and those who live upon it to be loved and cared for.

We ask this that your name may be glorified, through the beauty of this world,  
and the service of our lives.

**Amen**

Let us say together a prayer for forgiveness.

**Forgive us, Father, that we are often more willing to accept forgiveness than to forgive; more willing to accept your love, than to share it with those who have hurt us. Teach us to forgive, as you forgive us.**

**Through Jesus Christ we pray,**

**Amen**

### Assurance of pardon

Merciful Lord, you are the path of life, fullness of joy and pleasure forevermore, so we can be confident of this truth: **In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.**

**Amen.**

### Offertory prayer

All good gifts come from you, dear Lord, and from these riches we bring this offering. Help us to use it for the furtherance of your purpose in this place, and for the benefit of those in need.

In your name **Amen.**

### SONG: How long?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qdPT4EvYUHM>

We have sung our songs of victory,

We have prayed to You for rain;

We have cried for Your compassion

To renew the land again.

Now we're standing in Your presence,

More hungry than before;

Now we're on Your steps of mercy,

And we're knocking at Your door.

How long before You drench the barren land?

How long before we see Your righteous hand?

How long before Your name is lifted high?  
How long before the weeping turns to songs of joy?

Lord, we know Your heart is broken  
By the evil that You see,  
And You've stayed Your hand of judgement  
For You plan to set men free.  
But the land is still in darkness,  
And we've fled from what is right;  
We have failed the silent children  
Who will never see the light.

But I know a day is coming  
When the deaf will hear His voice,  
When the blind will see their Saviour,  
And the lame will leap for joy.  
When the widow finds a Husband  
Who will always love His bride,  
And the orphan finds a Father  
Who will never leave her side.

How long before Your glory lights the skies?  
How long before Your radiance lifts our eyes?  
How long before Your fragrance fills the air?  
How long before the earth resounds with songs of joy?

### **READINGS: Matthew 5: 10**

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (NIV)

Blessed [comforted by inner peace and God's love] are those who are persecuted for doing that which is morally right, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven [both now and forever].  
(AMP)

### **Reflection:**

[Persecution for righteousness' sake](#)

When we looked at the first beatitude, I said then that they were bookended between the first in v 3 blessed are the poor in spirit and v 10 blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, that they were inclusive. Today then we are looking at the closing bracket, if you will, of the inclusive beatitudes. I also need to be careful not to slip into the next two related verses otherwise Mike Gibbs won't have much left to say. It's not an easy one but it is one that should not take us by surprise either. It is odd though the other beatitudes are all positive attributes this has very dire negative connotations.

It is easy to discriminate and or persecute people who are different to ourselves isn't it? We all tend to prefer and associate with people who are like us. That is one of the challenges we

face as a church, we recognise we need more younger, active people in this church. However, when younger people come to church and see a predominantly elderly congregation, and I include myself in that elderly category - after all next year I can get my free bus pass!, will they see anyone they can relate to? That is the challenge we all face as the church body how we can overcome that conundrum. On the other hand, when we see people who are not like us it is easy to, push them away, disassociate ourselves from them, exclude them from what we are doing. This can even lead us to think that just because they see things differently, they are wrong. They should be stopped from doing things their way, we might seek to disadvantage them in some way. Ancient and modern history shows us just how easy it is to get into this way of thinking to take a dislike to what they are or what they are doing or what they are saying and for that to escalate. Take for example, the Nazi movement in Germany stopping Jews from owning businesses, confiscating their property, until it leads to the ultimate persecution in the final solution of extermination camps. Or of the Rwanda and the conflict between the Hutus and Tutsis, or the ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavian countries. No matter how wrong these all are they are not though the type of persecution mentioned here; Jesus was quite specific it was persecution because you demonstrated the family characteristics I spoke of last week. If you follow me, Jesus says, if you try to do the right things according to God then you are likely to be persecuted for doing so. It goes with the territory. Last week I spoke about being recognised through our actions as being part of the family of God, exhibiting the family characteristics. When we do so, then just as Christ was persecuted, we shouldn't be surprised if or more likely when we are persecuted. John Stott put it this way, persecution is the clash between two irreconcilable value-systems. I know Stott most likely had the clash between Christian and world views in mind, but this pithy, simple phrase works in a purely secular clash between two different world views also.

Persecution though is not just about largescale persecution though it also happens at a smaller scale too. It may be more low grade, insidious even less noticeable. It can happen in the workplace too. Take for example the stories of whistle-blowers, people who see something wrong occurring and speak out often at great personal cost. Take for example the HMRC solicitor Osita Mba who broke the story that the HMRC struck a "sweetheart" deal with investment bank Goldman Sachs saving them at least £20 M in interest payments. For doing the morally right thing he was suspended from his job. He said, I have paid dearly in terms of my career so far, but the peace of mind I have enjoyed is priceless. Only the truth will set you free. So, for doing the right thing morally his employer the HMRC (on our behalf) persecuted and hounded him. Osita was described one acquaintance as a committed Christian and it is tempting to think that his public interest action was derived from his deep sense of justice based on his Christian morals, ethics and beliefs for which he was persecuted.

How about the overtly Christian was the stance taken by Nadia Eweida who in 2006 fell foul of a British Airways clothing policy for wearing a cross. Resulting in BA and the UK courts losing the case for putting too much weight on BA's desire to have a corporate image and not enough on the individual's right under article 9 of the EU convention on human rights

guaranteeing freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Some 64% of a newspaper opinion poll thought the court's judgement was right in this case. No wonder some wanted to get us out from such obligations where religious freedoms must be balanced against the desires of mammon. Nor can I help myself from wondering if it had been anyone other than a Christian wanting to express their religious freedom if they would have had to go all the way to the European court of human rights to settle the case. Are we ready to take similar stances if and when our time comes? What can we do when it does? One place to start when we are on our knees, brought low by the situation is to pray. Against the persecution of a tyrant the godly have no remedy but prayer. - John Calvin.

Now you might say that not relevant that's just where Christianity meet the modern world, but that meets Stotts definition of the clash of two irreconcilable value-systems . Even way back in the 4th century standing up for what is right against the powers and authorities leads to trouble. John Chrysostom, the fourth-century Christian leader, archbishop of Constantinople, preached so strongly against sin and the abuse of power both in the church and by political leaders that eventually the Roman Emperor Arcadius to action against him. When threatened with banishment if he did not cease his uncompromising preaching. His response was, "Sire, you cannot banish me, for the world is my Father's house." "Then I will slay you," Arcadius said. "Nay, but you cannot, for my life is hid in Christ in God," came the answer. "Your treasures will be confiscated" was the next threat, to which John replied, "Sire, that cannot be, either. My treasures are in heaven, where none can break through and steal." "Then I will drive you from man, and you will have no friends left!" was the final, desperate warning. "That you cannot do, either," answered John, "for I have a Friend in heaven who has said, I will never leave you or forsake you." Chrysostom was banished, but neither his banishment nor his death disproved or diminished his claims. The things that he valued most highly not even an emperor could take from him. I recall talking about there being nothing new under the sun some time ago and this episode and the consequences of taking a moral stance against the abuse of power and positional authority by Chrysostom rings as true today as it did in back then. Perhaps that's just my conformational bias coming out but it does seem to me that those in authority do not like to be held to account by those they claim to represent.

An American theologian, John Walvoord, put it this way, The fact that the Christian church was able to endure centuries of persecution and survived centuries of neglect and opposition is difficult to explain apart from the system of theology stemming from belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God who actually died, rose, and ascended into heaven. In other words, to have survived for so long against those odds - it must be true!

William Tyndale was persecuted for having the temerity to want the bible in English, among other things. Having the bible in English was so threatening to England's powers and authorities that they made possession of an unlicensed translation punishable by death. Elsewhere in Europe the bible was available in languages other than Latin. It may seem strange to modern ears and minds that they sought to imprison the word of God in a language few spoke or were able to read, although to be fair at the time the same could

have been said against an English translation when so many could not read. Thank goodness for education so we can read the myriad of version for ourselves and through the Holy Spirit understand and dwell on the message contained therein. Tyndale was persecuted, fled to Europe, betrayed and executed there. Through all he went through he was still able to say, "For if God be on our side, what matter maketh it who be against us, be they bishops, cardinals, popes, or whatsoever names they will? And when being strangled at the stake prayed, Lord, open the King of England's eyes.

Standing up for what we believe to be right based on our understanding of Christ's message means we should not be surprised if we are persecuted, hunted, subject to hostility because of those beliefs, rather we should expect it. The blessing we receive through persecution for the right reasons indicates that the powers of darkness believes we are succeeding in furthering God's kingdom.

Charles Spurgeon said this, "God had a Son that had no fault, but He never had a son that was not found fault with. If we are sons and daughters of God, recognised as part of his family because we demonstrate the beatitudes the consequence is we shouldn't then be surprised when we are persecuted for doing that which morally right in following his teachings. We should be ready and rejoice in it as we are known for being members of his family. I am going to leave it there for Mike to pick up on that theme next week.

Lord, help us to keep our faith in a great God when we are under attack and persecuted in your name. In all the decisions we make may we always be driven by what is right, what is moral and ethical, what is consistent with your will. Lord grant us the strength and wisdom to follow you. And when we find ourselves on our knees may we turn to you in prayer.  
**Amen.**

### **Song: King of the World**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBcodu043pc&list=RDhBcodu043pc>

I try to fit you in the walls inside my mind  
I try to keep you safely in between the lines  
I try to put you in the box that I've designed  
I try to pull you down so we are eye to eye

When did I forget that you've always been  
The king of the world?  
I try to take life back right out of the hands  
Of the king of the world  
How could I make you so small  
When you're the one who holds it all  
When did I forget that you've always been

The king of the world?

Just a whisper of your voice can tame the seas  
So who am I to try to take the lead  
Still I run ahead and think I'm strong enough  
When you're the one who made me from the dust

When did I forget that you've always been  
The king of the world?  
I try to take life back right out of the hands  
Of the king of the world  
How could I make you so small  
When you're the one who holds it all  
When did I forget that you've always been  
The king of the world?

Oh, you set it all in motion  
Every single moment  
You brought it all to me  
And you're holding on to me

When did I forget that you've always been  
The king of the world?  
I try to take life back right out of the hands  
Of the king of the world  
How could I make you so small  
When you're the one who holds it all  
When did I forget you've always been  
The king of the world?  
You will always be the king of the world

### **Prayers of intercession**

Sovereign God, we worship You and we acknowledge that You know all of those who suffer in Your name.

We remember those who are imprisoned for their faith and ask that they would join with the Apostle Paul to see that even though they remain captive, their chains have furthered the gospel, not frustrated it. May they inspire and embolden their fellow believers to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.

God of all comfort, for those who are tortured both in body and mind, give them the grace to endure and to see their suffering as part of following in Christ's footsteps.

Merciful God, for those asked to pay the ultimate price; who are martyred because of their love for You, may they truly know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death.

Father God, for those who are widowed and orphaned may they know the comfort that comes from Your promised presence even when they walk through the valley. May they be strengthened by Your Spirit, enabling them to rejoice with the psalmist as they proclaim that the Lord will not abandon them in death.

Heavenly Father, we ask that You would make us ever mindful of our brothers and sisters around the world who need us to stand with them as they suffer in Your name. Teach us what it means to overcome by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of our testimony; we pray that we would not love our lives so much as to shrink from death.

Lord, hear our prayers and accept them **for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.**  
**Amen**

#### **THE LORD'S PRAYER**

Let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us:

**Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever.  
Amen.**

#### **Song: In Christ alone my hope is found**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C77pE9-V0vU>

In Christ alone my hope is found  
He is my light, my strength, my song  
This Cornerstone, this solid ground  
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm  
What heights of love, what depths of peace  
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease  
My Comforter, my All in All  
Here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone, who took on flesh  
Fullness of God in helpless babe  
This gift of love and righteousness  
Scorned by the ones He came to save  
'Til on that cross as Jesus died  
The wrath of God was satisfied  
For every sin on Him was laid  
Here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay  
Light of the world by darkness slain  
Then bursting forth in glorious day!  
Up from the grave He rose again  
And as He stands in victory  
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me  
For I am His and He is mine  
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death  
This is the power of Christ in me  
From life's first cry to final breath  
Jesus commands my destiny  
No power of hell, no scheme of man  
Can ever pluck me from His hand  
Till He returns or calls me home  
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

### **Closing prayer and blessing**

Lord, thank you that we are a family in Christ. Help us to share his love and legacy with everyone that we encounter this week. May we lavish Christ's abounding goodness upon our families, friends and colleagues. Holy Spirit, come and equip us in our workplace, guide us in our school life, and inspire us in our neighbourhood. May we be your hands and feet to the needy, your words of affirmation to the persecuted and oppressed and your arms of comfort to the lonely.

Thank you for choosing to use us to bring your kingdom here on earth.

**Amen.**

And now may the blessing of God Almighty, Father Son and Holy Spirit, be with us and all those we love, all those we care for, and all those we pray for, this day and ever more,

**Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

**In the name of Christ, Amen.**