

Christ Church, 31 July 2022.

Call to worship (based on Matt. 7:7)

We are here, **in the name of Christ Jesus.**
So ask right now, **and it shall be given to you.**
Seek right now, **and you will find.**
Knock right now, **and the door will be opened.**

Hymn Seek ye first R&S 512

Seek ye first the kingdom of God
And His righteousness;
And all these things shall be added unto you.
Alleluia...

Ask, and it shall be given unto you;
Seek, and you shall find.
Knock, and it shall be opened unto you.
Alleluia...

Man shall not live by bread alone,
But by every word
That proceeds out from the mouth of God.
Alleluia...

Karen Lafferty

Gifts

In the offering of our gifts, as well as the living of our days,
may we not grow weary of doing what is right,
but commit to speaking up for the voiceless,
healing the broken, feeding the hungry,
and all those mercies which are such a part of your heart
and hopes for all your children.
In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father,
May we seek you and find you,
may we knock and the door be opened,
for we are travellers looking for your Kingdom.
As we encounter suffering in this world,
turn our hearts, our ears, our eyes, our souls
toward Christ, who emptied himself,
and was tempted, and suffered for us, even giving his own life.
In this suffering, plant seeds of hope,
and let us never stray so far into despair,
that we forget the resurrection of Christ
and the power of the Spirit. **Amen**

Bible reading: **Matthew 7: 24-27**

Story

A man got frustrated with life. Despite all the hard work and effort, failure was all that he experienced. Feeling defeated with life, he left everything and exiled himself in the woods. There he met a hermit. The disappointed man shared his failure with the hermit. 'Give me one good reason not to quit!' he pleaded with the hermit.

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“Look,’ the hermit said, pointing toward two plants. ‘Do you see that fern and bamboo there?’

“Yes,’ the man nodded.

“When I planted the fern and the bamboo seeds, I took very good care of them. I gave them water, light, and fertiliser. Within a short period of time, the fern quickly grew from the earth,’ the hermit continued. ‘But despite the bamboo seed being watered and nurtured for years, it did not outwardly grow as much as an inch. In fact, nothing at all happened in the first year. There was no sign of growth. But, I did not give up on the bamboo seed and continued to water and nurture it. By the fifth year, a tiny sprout emerged from the earth. And within six months, the tree grew a hundred feet tall.’

‘So, did the bamboo tree lay dormant for four years only to grow exponentially in the fifth?’ the hermit asked. Baffled by the question, the man kept quiet. ‘The answer is quite obvious. The little tree was growing underground, developing a root system strong enough to support its potential for outward growth in the fifth year and beyond. Had the tree not developed a strong foundation, it would not have sustained its life as it grew.’

Matthew 7: 1-5, 7-14, 24-27

The Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount, is not only the part we may most recognise – the beatitudes, blessed are the poor in spirit and so on, but it includes all of chapters 6 and 7 of Matthew’s Gospel, with such well known phrases as you ‘are the salt of the earth’ and ‘the light of the world’. In chapter 6, true piety or righteousness, which is inconspicuous – humble and without any fuss, is contrasted with false piety motivated by showing off. Jesus gives three examples of giving gifts, praying and fasting. In chapter 7, Jesus gives us further guidelines for ethical living – don’t judge others, don’t constantly find fault with what others say and do. Ask and you shall receive – this does not mean that we will receive anything and everything we ask God for – even Jesus did not have his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane answered, but as it comes after the long list of things we are to do – forgo anger, forgive our enemies and control our criticism of others, we can only do those things by dependence on God’s grace. We are reminded that with God all things are possible. It is only through persistent asking, seeking and knocking on God’s door through prayer that we will be able to obey these impossible demands laid out by Jesus.

and the Golden Rule, observed by nearly all faiths – ‘do unto others as you would have them do to you.’ This comes right at the end of all the ethical teaching of the Sermon and so can be seen as a summary of all that has come before.

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In conclusion, Jesus says that his words, and obedience to them is obedience to the will of God. In the Sermon, Jesus has provided his followers with a solid foundation, like that of a house built on rock. And the crowds who heard him were amazed at his teaching that had 'authority' unlike the usual teaching they had received. We are all very familiar with the house built on firm foundations, on rock rather than sand, but it is good to remember that this is not simply a building analogy – the rock on which we are to build everything we do is the teaching of Jesus.

Hymn Seek ye first R&S 512 **we sing it again as a meditation**

Bible Study in small groups – see questions at the end

Prayer (based on Matt 7:21)

God of all races, nations, and religions,
You know that we cannot change others,
Nor can we change the past.
But we can change ourselves.
We can join You in changing our
common future working for Your kingdom here and now.
Help us not to say, "Lord, Lord" to the many distractions that surround us
But to hear the One God of all the earth,
And to do God's good thing for this One World. **Amen**

Hymn I have a dream – recorded by Thora in 2021, sing along, tune at R&S 492

"I have a dream", a man once said,
"where all is perfect peace;
where men and women, black and white,
stand hand in hand, and all unite
in freedom and in love."

But in this world of bitter strife
the dream can often fade;
reality seems dark as night,
we catch but glimpses of the light
Christ sheds on humankind.

Fierce persecution, war, and hate
are raging everywhere;
God calls us now to pay the price
through struggles and through sacrifice
of standing for the right.

So dream the dreams and sing the songs,
but never be content:
for thoughts and words don't ease the pain:
unless there's action, all is vain;
faith proves itself in deeds.

Lord, give us vision, make us strong,
help us to do your will;
don't let us rest until we see
your love throughout humanity
uniting us in peace.

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Prayer Stations CD 8 to start, CD 12 to indicate end

Prayers of intercession

Eternal God we ask your blessing those who are peacemakers
From all creeds and cultures
All who bring no other agenda
Than to see neighbour and stranger
Live together as one community.

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Bless those who are comforters
Shoulders to cry upon
Willing ears to listen
A present help in times
Of despair and hopelessness.

Bless those who are healers
Of physical injury
And deeper hurts
Whose touch brings relief
From trauma and pain
Who brings compassion.

Eternal God, we thank you that Jesus was often moved to compassion by the needs of those he encountered. We thank you that he reached out to the most needy of his society and provided them healing and wholeness. And so,

We pray this day for all those who face illness and because of it, stress and anxiety.
We pray that you would provide your healing touch for all of us, and especially those known to us in this congregation who are ill and in hospital at the moment.
We pray that you would be with us when we feel anxious and fearful and provide a sense of your quieting and steadying peace.
We pray that you would give us courage to face difficult decisions and difficult days and your wisdom to make the right decisions for our church and our community.
We pray that you would give us stamina and strength when we feel overwhelmed by weakness.
We pray that you would give us hope during dark days.
Be also with our world. Especially be with all of those unstable places marked by violence and hatred, and all places and people suffering due to climate change.
We pray that the world might one day know peace; not only the absence of violence, but your all encompassing *shalom*. **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

Hymn Make me a channel R&S 629

Make me a channel of your peace
Where there is hatred let me bring your love
Where there is injury, your pardon Lord
And where there is doubt true faith in You

*Oh, Master grant that I may never seek
So much to be consoled as to console
To be understood as to understand
To be loved as to love with all my soul*

Make me a channel of your peace
Where there's despair in life let me bring hope
Where there is darkness, let me bring your light
And where there's sadness bring your joy

Oh, Master grant that I may never seek...

Make me a channel of your peace
For when we give we will ourselves receive
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned
And in dying that we gain eternal life

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Blessing

Go forth from this place refreshed and empowered
to do the ministry to which God calls you:
To ask, to seek, to knock on the door of faith,
To give rather than to receive,
To forgive as we are forgiven by God,
To die to our old ways of doing things, that we may be re-born in Christ,
Building our house on rock, not sand.
And the blessing and joy of God, our Creator, Healer, and Life-Giver
go with us today and always. **Amen.**

Music at the end We seek your kingdom, video (if it works)

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Verses and questions for Bible Study:

7:1 Do not judge...Why do you see the speck in your neighbour's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?

7:7 Ask, and it will be given you; search and you will find; knock and the door will be opened.

7:12...do to others as you would have them do to you

7:14 the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

7:24 everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.

For each verse, answer these questions:

1. How does this relate to Christ Church?
2. How does this relate to our vision and mission?
3. How does this relate to the building project?
4. Did you remember that the story of the house built on rock or sand was based on these words of Jesus? And, that Matthew 7 is still part of the Sermon on the Mount?
5. How will you personally act differently after reading Matthew chapter 7? (you do not need to share this, simply reflect for yourself and at home)