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ORDINARY 22B

1st September 2024

A short act of worship and daily devotions

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Opening Prayers

Use the following words to help centre yourself in the moment. Say them out loud, or speak them in your mind.

Jesus, open my heart.

Prepare yourself to hear God's word in a new way.

Jesus, open my heart.

Listen for God's voice, calling you to serve others and love radically.

Jesus, open my heart.

Hold the joys, regrets and frustrations from the week, and look ahead to the opportunities next week will bring.

Jesus, open my heart.

Hold the people you share your life with, and the challenges that come with relationships and friendships.

Jesus, open my heart.

Rest a moment in the quiet.

Jesus, open my heart.

You may now wish to say the Lord's Prayer in a version or translation with which you are comfortable.

Reading: Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23 – [Click for reading](#)

Responding to the reading

In a series of verses selected from Mark's gospel as today's reading, Jesus challenges the religious leaders of the time, calling into question their emphasis on external rituals while neglecting what is truly important: the condition of the heart. This passage invites us to reflect on how we navigate the tension between external practices and internal transformation in our own spiritual journeys.

The Pharisees and some scribes are concerned that Jesus' disciples are not following the traditional hand-washing rituals. Jesus responds by quoting Isaiah: "This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." It's easy to fall into the habit of outward displays of faith—following rituals or routines—without addressing what truly matters: the state of our hearts and the integrity of our actions. Reflect on your own practices. Are there ways in which you might be more focused on tradition or appearance than on cultivating a genuine, authentic connection with God? How can you move toward greater authenticity in your discipleship?

Jesus goes on to explain to the crowd that it's not what goes into a person from the outside that defiles them, but what comes from within—their thoughts, intentions, and actions. This is an often-quoted line but looking at it in context, it is a radical statement, particularly in a religious culture that emphasised ritual purity. Jesus is saying that it's not the external

things that matter most, but the internal. This should challenge us to shift our focus from superficial judgments to deeper, inward reflection. Take a moment to consider: What thoughts, attitudes, or patterns of behaviour might be holding you back from living out your values? How can you better align your inner life with the outward expression of love, justice, and compassion?

In verses 21-23, Jesus lists the harmful things that can emerge from within, including greed, envy, arrogance, and deceit. While it's easy to point out the flaws in others or blame external influences for the brokenness we see in the world, Jesus calls us to take responsibility for our own hearts. How can you work on your own heart this week? What steps can you take to confront and transform the negative or harmful thoughts and behaviours within yourself?

This passage reminds us that discipleship isn't just about outward actions or following rituals—it's about an inward journey toward integrity, humility, and love. But the inward journey isn't enough by itself; it must also lead to outward action. When our hearts are transformed, it naturally flows into how we treat others and how we engage with the world.

As you reflect on these verses, may this passage inspire you to go deeper into your discipleship. Move beyond surface-level practices and embrace the transformative work of the heart. Challenge yourself to let go of external judgments and focus on cultivating the kind of love and compassion that naturally radiates from a heart grounded in God's grace.

This week, ask yourself:

1. What's something in my heart that needs to be addressed or transformed?
2. How can I live with greater authenticity, letting my internal values match my external actions?
3. In what ways can I balance my personal transformation with the work I do to create a more just and compassionate world?

May these questions guide you as you continue your journey of discipleship, letting your heart lead you toward deeper love, authenticity, and justice.

Responding in music

545 STF – Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart - [YouTube](#)

615 STF – Let love be real – [YouTube](#)

Responding in prayers

God of justice,
life-giving Word,
protector of orphans and widows,
hear my prayer.

Today, I pray for good news for people trapped in poverty...
By word and by action, bring life in all its fullness.

Today, I pray for liberation for those who are experiencing oppression and exclusion...
By word and by action, bring life in all its fullness.

Today I pray for strength for all who are suffering...
By word and by action, bring life in all its fullness.

Today I pray that those with power would use it to act for justice...
By word and by action, bring life in all its fullness.

Today, I pray that we who have encountered your word may become agents for your Kingdom...
By word and by action, bring life in all its fullness.

Lord God, I bring these and all my prayers in the name of Jesus Christ,
who came to reach out to those on the margins
and to be the Word of Life for all.

Amen.

Blessing

Go from here, as a justice-seeker,
Go out resourced, energised and blessed by the love of God,
Go and discover that God is out there already, waiting for you, creating space for you to flourish, and to be a part of all creation flourishing.

Amen.

Prayers and Prayer Pointers

Monday 2nd September

- Living, loving God, here at the start of a new school and church year, I offer you a time of fresh beginnings and new opportunities.
Come, Holy God, and show me how to walk in your way,
To choose the path of love, grace, hope and healing,
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Tuesday 3rd September

- Draw around the shape of your hand. Write on it the things that you're carrying that feel like burdens. Offer them to God in prayer, remembering that God carries your burdens with you.

Wednesday 4th September

- Sit silently for ten minutes and let your mind wander. Offer any thoughts and feelings to God.

Thursday 5th September

- Today is marked as the feast day of Mother Teresa and, today, we simply invite you and yours to spend a few minutes praying about the needs in your area. Teresa responded remarkable to the needs in Calcutta in her time, and helped to inspire millions around the world.
- What does that look like for you today?

Friday 6th September

- Loving, living God,
Thank you for all the ways in which you have forgiven me,
Set me free,
Enabled me to see something of your grace at work in our world.
Show me how to be an agent of that same grace in the relationships and friendships I hold in the world.
In Jesus' name I pray,
Amen.

Saturday 7th September

- Think about how God is at work in the lives of everyone. You can see God shining out from all people. Remember this with the next person you speak to, and give thanks for the glimpses of God you see in them.