



CHRISTIAN
CHURCHES
NETWORK
OF LONDON

"Light in the darkness"

PRAY LONDON November 2020

November is here, along with ever growing concerns of potentially darker times in the days and months ahead as colder weather moves us back indoors. We will continue to do battle with the ongoing COVID crisis. Pressure, unrest and division seem to be growing in our world, and we all experience more uncertainty. It feels especially unsettling or discordant with our 'normal' November habits, when we usually anticipate our traditions of family, church and community preparations for the coming Christmas season. This year, we simply do not know what to expect.

Now, isn't that a happy way to start a prayer conversation!

But wait, here is the better news. Matthew 5, the beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount, can reposition our thinking with these wonderful words of Jesus.

Pause and try to imagine Jesus, right here in London Ontario with us, speaking these blessings on you and me every day this month. It could be at a quiet place, like Springbank Park, or perhaps along the many Thames River trails, or in one of our beautiful conservation areas. Arriving, Jesus sits down and begins to pour out these words of hope, approval, and divine help over us - US!, as his friends, his followers, even total strangers - men, women, children. Blessed doesn't mean mere "happy- sappy" emotions or temporary fixes. It means being truly deeply satisfied in a trust relationship with our Creator. He speaks these blessings on us.... and we have the great privilege of then offering them back to Him as prayers of blessings on our families, fellow citizens, friends and neighbours.

Here is what he says to you and me (from The Message version of the bible):

"You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you, there is more of God and his rule."

As we pray back to you, Jesus, we boldly ask you to also bless those around us this month who are very lost, who are alone and feel like they have no hope left, and for whom despair is settling in. Remind each of these precious ones that you see them, love them, know their pain, and that you desire to fill them up with your peace. May we be compelled to find ways to demonstrate to those hurting that kind of love and peace so there is more of you.

"You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you."

Jesus, many around us also have loved ones who have passed away over the last days and months - parents, grandparents, spouses, friends - and it has been even more difficult to grieve their loss without much opportunity to connect in community for funerals and collective comfort. Some too have lost close relationships in many other ways - marriages broken up, children disconnected, cherished friendships gone. Some have lost jobs, or future opportunities, or dashed dreams. For all of these who mourn, God, please embrace them in your loving arms and give them great comfort in their souls. Help us to be agents of that comfort.

"You're blessed when you're content with just who you are—no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought."

Contentment seems really scarce these days. A number of us need your help to just get through each day right now - financially, emotionally, physically and/or socially - and the prospect for contentment seems a long way off. We should be humbled frequently by what we place our hope in, as the instability of our world grows. Help all of us not to place our own, or others' self worth or identity in the amount of possessions, titles, or successes we have, but in you alone O God. Sometimes, it seems you are all we have left. We pray especially for those without jobs, financial support, secure housing or supportive community right now - those who are struggling to just survive. Bless them enormously for yours is an upside down Kingdom where the least shall be first. May these inequalities begin to made right in this Kingdom, in this city now.

"You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat."

Honestly, God, the temptation is great to satisfy ourselves on spiritual junk food like Netflix or video games or social media, forgetting the good habits of prayer and gratitude, or neglecting filling our souls with your words or treasuring the beauty of your creation. May we all hunger for more of you each day and seek more justice in our world, especially more justice, more righteousness here in London.

"You're blessed when you care. At the moment of being 'care-full,' you find yourselves cared for"

Jesus, help us also take the initiative and effort to care for others more deeply. Pick up a phone. Send a text or a card. Make cookies or muffins as snacks for those on the street. Bless the Food banks with donations so they can in turn bless those who need food. Listen to lonely people. Attend online charitable fundraisers in the city, learn more and give to their causes where we can - they need our help desperately in times like these to care for the most vulnerable. Mercy is needed to be spread all around!

"You're blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world."

As we look ahead to Christmas, we pray you will remind us, Jesus, that you came into our world in human form in a very unsettled time of Roman occupation in history. Your life was threatened. Your own family fled in exile. Even as you were cared for by others Jesus while in exile, remind us to care well for those who have fled here to London in troubled times. Give us much wisdom to look not only at own experiences - our inside world, but also to learn from history, and look around our present global world to gain greater understanding of what can and should shape our hearts and minds, our expectations and our dailies. May we seek to be more pure in heart.

"You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family."

God, help us to remember the deep responsibility to model you wherever we are. Our kids, our neighbours, our workmates watch us and listen to us. We desire to represent your great name as Christ-followers - your patience, your gentleness, your truth-telling, your forgiveness, your compassion, your grace, your kindness, and your justice. You call us to be peacemakers - may we rise that challenge in our daily lives.

"You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom."

This is indeed a tough one. Sometimes God, people do not like what we say. Sometimes, to be honest, it may be because of how we say it! Conflict can happen when there are differing opinions and opposing world views. Give us deep discernment to know how and when to speak - and to remember that as John 3:17 says 'you so loved us that

you came into our world, not to condemn, hurt, or point an accusing finger at us, but to help put the world right again, to heal, to save and protect us, to reconcile us to you'. May we reflect your Kingdom's values with integrity, courage and grace in this unprecedented time.

Thank you, God, for blessing us with your words. And we pray that you will make us a blessing to others in this city. Just a few verses later in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus also said this:

"Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives.

By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.

An apt conclusion to this prayer prompt for each of us as His church in London this November. Better than any one that we could ever write! By opening up to others, may we be light in the darkness who will indeed prompt people to open up conversations with you God. Let's shine in the darkness ever so brightly with the Spirit of the living God alive in us, regardless of the circumstances around us. AMEN