

Call to Worship and Invocation:

God’s purpose was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to the eternal purpose that He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In Him and through faith in Him, we may enter God’s presence with boldness and confidence.

Our Father who is in heaven, mighty is your Name. You alone can redeem and order our unruly wills and feelings; grant to us your chosen people that we may love the things that you command and desire that which you promise to us, that amongst the many changes going on in the world, our hearts may be surely fixed where true joys are found; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

We ask this day that because you have formed us into one communion, the Body of your son, our brothers and sisters who are unkindly dealt with in countries hostile to your commands and the Gospel of your Son, should be greatly encouraged as they feel and know the truth of the Return of Christ to bring justice and mercy and righteousness to the whole earth. In Jesus name, Amen.

Hymn, All is well, William Clayton

1. Come, come, ye saints, no toil nor labour fear; but with joy wend your way.
Though hard to you this journey may appear, grace shall be as your day.
'Tis better far for us to strive, our useless cares from us to drive;
Do this, and joy your hearts will swell: All is well! all is well!
2. Why should we mourn or think our lot is hard? 'Tis not so; all is right.
Why should we think to earn a great reward, if we now shun the fight?
Gird up your loins; fresh courage take; our God will never us forsake;
And soon we'll have this tale to tell: All is well! all is well!
3. We'll find the place which God for us prepared, far away in the west,
Where none shall come to hurt or make afraid; there the saints will be blessed.
We'll make the air with music ring, shout praises to our God and King;
Above the rest these words we'll tell: All is well! al is well!
4. And should we die before our journey's through, happy day! all is well!
We then are free from toil and sorrow, too; with the just we shall dwell!
But if our lives are spared again to see the saints their rest obtain,
O how we'll make this chorus swell: All is well! all is well!

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Scriptures:

- Psalm 42.

This is a personal prayer included in Scripture for the sake of any who are depressed and fearful. If this is you today, speak it in your own circumstance to God who desires you to come to him as your Father.

- John 12.23-32.

Jesus went into deep troubles of soul but determined to press ahead in submission to His Father's will. We can ,because of him follow in the steps he lays out for us one at a time.

- 2 Corinthians 4

This whole chapter is testimony to faith in ‘momentary troubles’

Hymn; He who would valiant be, John Bunyan

1. He who would valiant be 'gainst all disaster,
let him in constancy follow the Master.
There's no discouragement shall make him once relent
his first avowed intent to be a pilgrim.
2. Who so beset him round with dismal stories,
do but themselves confound - his strength the more is.
No foes shall stay his might, though he with giants fight;
he will make good his right to be a pilgrim.
3. Since, Lord, thou dost defend us with thy Spirit,
we know we at the end shall life inherit.
Then fancies flee away! I'll fear not what men say,
I'll labour night and day to be a pilgrim.

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Sermon; Why? The question of the Downcast soul.

Depression is like a bee sting. For some, it hurts, but it wears off. But for others, it swells, chokes and in rare cases can be fatal.

But the hell of depression is its cause; we just can't make it out. Why? Why am I feeling like this? What have I done-or not done-to be like this? Maybe if I go shopping or just have a break, I will wake up tomorrow feeling better. Drugs, smokes and some vino help for a moment. Some, thankfully, are supported in strong relationships.

But the grey clouds are there the next day and the next. And for some, it just goes on and on. Medication lessens the pain, but that seems to wear off as the months, even years, go by.

Like a great cloud of blackness that rolls in, we weren't expecting. And it has one active ingredient in just about every case in every individual. Hopelessness. That is the big one. There are others; first cousins that aren't nice- dark clouds of anxiety, foreboding (something bad is going to happen), voices-compulsive ones, listlessness and above all, no purpose.

Where does it all come from? Some say a lack of certain brain chemicals. Some time ago, there were about 200 million pages on the internet about depression. A lot more by now. So, who knows!

Years ago, I had a taste of this sting. It went on for months. And I was a pastor, expected to deliver Sunday sermons of hope and uplift. Around that time, an

elderly pastor with rich experience through war, suffering, wounding and gradual restoration happened through town and kindly paused to call on me. It wasn't long before I was pouring my heart out. How we need these pastors, these gems of wisdom, today.

In the end, he just looked at me with kindly, understanding eyes and said just ten words that sent hope into my heart and a foundation for building a stronger, durable character in this young minister's soul. His words opened understanding not only of how to navigate awful dark feelings, but helped lay a foundation for the next several years of ministry when I would be presented with people in an urban sub-cultural mission for many of whom depression was the prison of their minds and lives. I had known something of what they needed to know.

Those pastoral words were simple and clear and still etched in my mind: “Ian, it has to be like this, by very definition”

Those words opened the door to meet people and ideas I had passed by. The psalmist who cried out, *“Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me?”* and the same man in another of his poems, *“Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why the unease within me?”* I discovered the rich company of fellow travellers in these Psalms. But with others too; Job and Jeremiah expressed the same in their contexts. And also the deeply troubled couple on the road to Emmausⁱ. And then I came to a Psalm which hitherto was almost meaningless to me: Psalm Seventy Seven. Read that one, and it resonates with a neurotic helplessness. Not only of the average person, but also of a man who had known, perhaps boasted of health and happiness in days gone by. But now, terror and hopelessness.

He is bankrupt of anything useful or heartening. Except for a memory of how it was. But here it is a part of sacred literature for the benefit of humankind. How apt that Apostle Paul recognised the power of scripture by saying; *“everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope”*ⁱⁱ.

And this is the next signpost of hope for the despairing souls. We come to the words of Jesus himself and perhaps the most important set of words the ears of embattled humans have heard. The Beatitudesⁱⁱⁱ.

And the very first one, the Beatitude, which is the starting point for a life of health and usefulness in the greater arena of relationship with our Creator the lover of our souls. Our heavenly Father.

The first Beatitude. “Blessed are the poor in spirit” How can this be, poverty of spirit, of being, be a blessing? Read it with care. The inner essence of one's character and personhood, bereft and helpless. There are two words in the Bible for poor. One is for the manual labourer who ekes out enough income to keep himself alive, but with no surplus. Nothing beyond the barest of survivable essentials for a man. The other word is more scarifying; it means to have nothing. Nothing at all, and to be completely dependent upon the grace of another. Even upon the mercy of others. That is the word used by Jesus here.

And this opens up truth far away from the comfort-seeking, self -enhancing, convenience above-everything-else attitudes shouted at us in advertisements, celebrity worship and the regular clinging to personal comfort and control going on all around us.

This is a soul in the focus and plan of the great over-ruling love of a Heavenly Father. The Potter and the Clay. This is the one who created you, taking your hand and leading you through everything in the best life you could know. The One who knew your unformed being and purposed you before Creation^{iv}. Check the next seven Beatitudes and look at your future, not only here but into everlasting life.

But that is not all. The Beatitudes are full of future tenses. The future belongs to Jesus, and he is holding out his hand to carry you through with him.

So what should we think in these moments of inexplicable despair and depression?

We should trust ourselves to the Doctor of our souls, Jesus. We should let him lead us into health in His time. If we are paralysed in motivation, we might rest and be content to say thank you to Him for at least just one thing we can think of that is good. And wait.

Remember, these ‘despairings’ are building block points in our lives for certain things to be broken up that better things can be built within and for us into the future.

The poet, Lord Tennyson, knew something of this reconstruction when he wrote his cry, “Ah for a man to arise in me, that the man I am may cease to be!” The thing about this is that we are not our makers. We just guess when it comes to the meaning and purpose of our lives. But the One who made us and loves you more than any other is doing his work in you. Go with him, get to know him, talk with him. He is there and he knows you. Take heart!

The despairing Psalmist referred to above talked to himself about the truth of God “hope in God”. He pastored his own soul with the reality of Hope.

Prayer:

Hear my cry to you as you heard the Psalmist and gave me their example in Scripture to strengthen me in hope. Forgive me for looking to other comforts for help and failing to recognise your true and gracious plan for my life. I am so grateful that you sometimes take me off my own hands, even when it is painful to show and teach me truths that are necessary for me to be good in character and strong in hope. I love you, my dear Father in heaven and eagerly accept your ways for my life.

Hymn, A mighty fortress is our God, by M. Luther

1. A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing:
Our helper He, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great, and, armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.
2. Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing

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Were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God's own choosing.
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He;
Lord Sab-a-oth His name, from age to age the same,
And He must win the battle.

3. And though this world with devils filled should threaten to undo us;
We will not fear for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us.
The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure, for lo! his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.

4. That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours, through Him who with us sideth.
Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also:
The body they may kill: God's truth abideth still,
His Kingdom is for ever!

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Benediction:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

This service was prepared by Rev Ian Clarkson for HopeNet SA

ⁱ These accounts can be followed in the following references: Psalm 42 and 43, Job 22.29, Lamentations 3.20, Luke 24.17, 2Corinthians 7.6. Psalm 77 and 88 detail more extensively the suffering and sanctifying opportunities (even purposes) of depression suffering.

ⁱⁱ Roman 15.4

ⁱⁱⁱ Matthew Chapter 5.

^{iv} Psalm 139, Ephesians 1.4