



 **DIOCESE OF OXFORD**
Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire



EXPLORING THE BEATITUDES

A three-session course for small groups
in the Diocese of Oxford





The Diocese of Oxford is the Church of England in Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes.

Together, we are the Church, called and sent by God as disciples of Jesus Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit. We are a living, growing network of more than a thousand congregations, chaplaincies and schools.

Together, we are called to be more Christ-like: to be the Church of the Beatitudes: contemplative, compassionate and courageous for the sake of God's world.

Together, we work with God and with others for the common good in every place in one of the great crossroads of the world.

Together, we are called to proclaim the Christian faith afresh in this generation with joy and hope and love.

Together, we are called to dream dreams and see visions of what could be and see those visions come to birth.

www.oxford.anglican.org/commonvision



Contents

The Beatitudes 3

A Christ-like Church 4

The Sessions:

A Contemplative Church 8

A Compassionate Church 16

A Courageous Church 24

Opening Prayers 32







THE BEATITUDES

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

'Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

'Blessed are they who mourn,
for they shall be comforted.

'Blessed are the meek,
for they shall inherit the earth.

'Blessed are they who hunger and thirst
for righteousness,
for they shall be satisfied.

'Blessed are the merciful,
for they shall obtain mercy.

'Blessed are the pure of heart,
for they shall see God.

'Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they shall be called children of God.

'Blessed are they who are persecuted
for the sake of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'

Matthew 5.1-10





A CHRIST-LIKE CHURCH

In my first year as Bishop I visited every deanery in the Diocese of Oxford and met with over 3,000 people. We spoke together about our call to be a more Christ-like Church in the coming years for the sake of God's world.

In my second year as Bishop I have invited every church and community in the diocese to listen deeply to the Beatitudes over the course of the year and set this text at the heart of our common life, as we explore what it means to be more contemplative, more compassionate and more courageous as a Church.

I've chosen this text because through it God has spoken to me and to many others about what kind of Church and community we need to be at this time in the Christian story. It is a spring and a well of fresh vision.

There are many ways to dwell in the Beatitudes and to listen to God through these profound and shaping words. This short guide is designed to help small groups of Christians explore the Beatitudes together over three sessions at any time of the year.

The Beatitudes

Matthew's Gospel groups the sayings of Jesus together into five sections (some people think this is like the five books of Moses). The first and the longest of these sections is the Sermon on the Mount: Matthew 5-7.

At the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew sets the Beatitudes: eight short sayings all beginning with the word "Blessed". The Latin word for blessed is "beatus" – hence "Beatitudes". These are almost the first words Jesus speaks in the Gospel.

The Beatitudes are not addressed to the crowds. They are addressed to the disciples (a very important word for Matthew).





The disciples are the first community called together by Jesus and sent out in loving service to the world.

Joy and Hope

The Beatitudes are a manifesto for the Church. They are words of joy. The first word of each is "Blessed", which is sometimes translated "Happy" or "Fulfilled" or "Complete". This is good news for all the earth.

The Beatitudes are also words of hope. Each of them is a promise. We need to learn again to speak of the life of the Church in the language of joy and hope and confidence, as Jesus does.

The Church and the Kingdom

The Beatitudes are words addressed to the Church, but for the sake of the world. Jesus came to proclaim: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is come near". The kingdom of heaven (or the kingdom of God in the other Gospels) describes God's purpose for the world: peace, justice, sustainability and love. We are not called to be a Christ-like Church for our own sake but for the sake of the world and God's mission to the world. As the Church we are a sign and instrument of God's kingdom on earth. This wider perspective of the kingdom runs through the Beatitudes. At such a critical time in the history of humanity, we are called to be the best Church we can be for the sake of God's world.

Three questions

I invite you to ask three questions as you read the Beatitudes together:

What do these verses tell us about Jesus Christ? These eight short sayings are a beautiful self-portrait of the character of Christ, which is explored on every page of the Gospels. To be a Christ-like Church we need first to be captured by a fresh vision of Jesus Christ.







What do these verses tell us about the Church? The Beatitudes are not addressed to you (singular) but to you (plural). No individual has all these qualities other than the person who speaks them in the Gospel. But these are to be the qualities of Jesus' people, the Church, in every generation.

What do these verses tell us about what it means to be human? Jesus' life is a model and example to people in every generation of what it means to live a fulfilled and blessed life. These eight sayings are good news for a world which is searching for a new vision of what it means to live well.

Three qualities

As we have prayed and pondered what these Beatitudes mean for the Diocese of Oxford, we have focussed on three qualities rooted in these eight sayings which are the focus of these three studies:

• Contemplative • Compassionate • Courageous

We will be asking what it means to be a contemplative, compassionate and courageous Church in this place at this time.

Dreaming dreams and seeing visions

As we read these words together and catch a fresh vision of Jesus Christ, I hope we will also dream dreams and catch a fresh vision for every local church and school and chaplaincy.

I also hope that we will develop a fresh vision, ways forward and priorities for the Diocese of Oxford in this next period of our life together. Please feed in your reflections, ideas and visions in the various gatherings through the year and through the diocesan website: www.oxford.anglican.org/commonvision.

Practical notes for leaders

You will find some guidelines on how to use this material at www.oxford.anglican.org/commonvision.

