



Welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church, on May 28th 2023, Pentecost Sunday at 10:45, meeting at Bethesda Chapel.

Whilst some are able to meet in person, others we know are still at home. We hope and pray that you will find this outline of our service helpful, as we seek to worship God as a Church family, wherever we are.

Our service today is led by Alec, as we continue our series on James, Faith in Action.

Alec gave a Welcome and opening reading from Psalm 96:

Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth.

Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day.

Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous deeds among all peoples.

For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods.

For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens.

Splendour and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary.

Then from Isaiah 6:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, seated on a throne; , high and exalted and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

Alec prayed:

Our loving Heavenly Father, we have come here today to worship you, the only true living God, the living God, who, in your spirit, lives in the hearts of all the children of God, and so we are these. We pray, thanking you for the freedom that we have in this place to come and worship under your authority and in your name, and in the power of your spirit, we pray for those who today who are not able to come either to this fellowship because of illness, or some other kind of unfortunate reason, and all those who throughout this country, and in many countries of the world are prohibited from meeting together to worship you, prohibited, forbidden, to come together to read, and to learn from your word. We pray that everyone who knows you in this land, and throughout the world may know the assurance of your love for them, your peace which passes all understanding and the knowledge as we have here that you are with them. We pray under your authority that you would lead this meeting, that you would open our hearts to grasp and to understand what you are saying to us, how great you are and what you are doing, to understand the vision that you have for each one of us and your church, open our ears to hear, our minds to think and allow ourselves to be renewed and transformed, be like you, to be made into your image. We have such a privilege to be here, thank you Father. Amen.

Alec introduced our Opening hymn, played by Trevor Kate and Judith. (these are the traditional words, but at Bethesda we sang a slightly updated version, omitting the thees and thous!)

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
naught be all else to me, save that thou art -
thou my best thought, by day or by night;
waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, and thou my true word;
I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord.
Thou my great Father; thine own may I be,
thou in me dwelling and I one with thee.

Be though my breastplate, my sword for the fight
be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might
be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower;
O raise thou me heavenward, great power of my power.

Riches I heed not, nor vain, empty praise;
thou mine inheritance, now and always;
thou and thou only the first in my heart,
high King of heaven, my treasure thou art.

High King of heaven, thou heavens bright sun,
grant me its joys after victory is won;
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

Ancient Irish, Eleanor Henrietta Hull, Mary Elizabeth Byrne CCLI SONG # 30639 Words and Music Public Domain, CCL No 5664

Again in Tony's absence, Alec shared the Notices, before inviting Shirley to come forward:(Alec said we were trying to invite someone to come each week to share what God was doing in their lives now, not 30 years ago)

"Last Sunday I wasn't here, because I was at Southport attending Aglow International. Some have heard about Aglow, but for those whom haven't -

This is a ministry of women (and men now who are under the name of men of Issachar) which was burst in the USA in 1967, 56 years ago. It started with four women who were hungry for more of God and he is now in over 170 nations and there are 17 million of us. I was saved through the ministry of Aglow in 1982. The

National conference at Southport was entitled the "era of the king of kings." Unfortunately, there was a last-minute cancellation of the speaker, so the National Board asked God what should they do - arrange for another speaker or what - and they felt God saying "Gather the family of Aglow"

Aglow UK has responsibility for Eastern Europe. They support them, they have planted groups, supported them spiritually and practically for a long time.. They support five countries. Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Romania and Bulgaria. A young woman and her little girl were there from Romania and she was interviewed. (Shirley also said another lady called Helena from Ukraine has spoken at a number of Aglow meetings, and when the war started she and her daughter fled, first to Moldova and then to Portugal, where she remains,

ministering in every way to other Ukrainian ladies.)

We also heard much about Israel to pray for. We support the Jews and we also pray for the Muslims. Abraham sons were Isaac and Ishmael although we know Isaac was the chosen one.

Apart from our President Nonnie, and although we had no main speaker, it turned out amazingly that a family ministered to us. The mother Jane, had come from a very dysfunctional family of years before had been invited to an aglow meeting and was loved and nurtured, spiritually and practically as she had no role models. She married, had children and it was obvious that she brought them up in the fear of the Lord and God has used her mightily sending her twice I think to Uganda.

The worship at the conference was truly anointed and one of her daughters ministered to us in song. It was certainly a family affair, as almost at the last minute, the daughters husband, James Aladoron, who has a ministry called Preston, appeared on the platform as our Saturday night speaker. I say appeared on the platform, he burst onto the platform, not only physically but full of passion for the holiness of God, and he spoke about prayer. Radical but full of truth. He said that quiet times using a devotional were fine, but he was virtually saying that it wasn't enough. And that we should sit at Jesus feet, so to speak.

Jesus, as we know, spent much time, praying to his father and we should too. I was greatly convicted by this message, knowing my lack of prayer. I am not a morning person. Just praying prayers on the go, so to speak, and in the evening switching off the telly to endeavour to pray, but sometimes feeling tired and nodding off - although there have been times when I have known the presence of God in a very real way and have lost all account of time. So knowing the times we live in and the need for fervent prayer, I am determined to sit more at Jesus feet.

(Shirley shared that she was reminded of something she had seen on her phone a while ago - girl called Ashley saying - not a prayer a day to keep the devil away, not a prayer over your food because your mum or grandma said that's what you're supposed to do, but fervent prioritised prayer. How can you have victory if you don't pray? Prayer is the key that opens the resources of heaven, so that they can be unleashed on planet Earth. And prayer is what pushes the kingdom of darkness back. That's why Jesus said 'my house should be called a house of prayer.' Not a house of good preaching, singing, great Spotlight productions and cafés. I hope you have all of that. Enjoy it. But Jesus said 'my house should be called a house of prayer' because great preaching or spotlights won't necessarily push the king of darkness back, but if 'my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.')

What a promise!"

Alec then interviewed a young man called Shay, here for the first time. Shay had sent an email to the church website asking for baptism, and Alec had met him to talk through his request and hear his story.

Shay had been part of another church, where the leaders had prayed for him, he felt that the Holy Spirit had been with them and he wanted to come closer to God. He wasn't happy with life and himself at that time, as he had been having problems with alcohol for the last 5 years. Alec asked how he had learnt of Jesus Christ and his need to be saved, and Shay said through YouTube videos, watching and listening to pastors. Alec asked how he found out how to give his life to the Lord, and again, Shay said through YouTube videos. He had prayed, sitting in his room, asking for forgiveness, and felt peace and deliverance from his addiction.

This was over a week ago. He was now reading the Bible, starting with the New Testament, and was now up to Colossians, reading from the King James Bible (Alec said we would give him a copy of the NIV which might be easier to understand). Alec had given him a copy of Marks gospel, and an introduction to Christianity explored - which prompted the response I'm interested in Jesus living in my life, not so much Christianity explored! Alec invited Janet and Jane to join them both as he prayed for Shay, and we will continue to remember him in prayer in days and weeks to come, that he will continue to be free from his addiction and will become closer to Jesus.

We joined in a time of Praise and worship:

How deep the Father's love for us, how vast beyond all measure,
that He should give His only Son to make a wretch His treasure.
How great the pain of searing loss - the Father turns His face away,
as wounds which mar the Chosen One bring many sons to glory.

Behold the man upon a cross, my sin upon His shoulders;
ashamed, I hear my mocking voice call out among the scoffers.
It was my sin that held Him there until it was accomplished;
His dying breath has brought me life - I know that it is finished.

I will not boast in anything, no gifts, no power, no wisdom;
but I will boast in Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection.
Why should I gain from His reward? I cannot give an answer;
but this I know with all my heart - His wounds have paid my ransom.

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We watched a video of a new song to most: "Revelation song" by Maranatha Music:

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, Holy, holy is He;
sing a new song to Him who sits on Heaven's mercy seat.

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, Holy, holy is He
Sing a new song to Him who sits on Heaven's mercy seat.
Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty
Who was and is and is to come
With all creation I sing praise to the King of kings
You are my everything and I will adore You

Clothed in rainbows of living colour, flashes of lightning rolls of thunder
blessing and honour, strength and glory and power be
to You the only one who's King
Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty

Filled with wonder awestruck wonder at the mention of Your name
Jesus Your name is power, breath and living water, such a marvellous mystery
Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty

and finally in this section:

Everyone needs compassion, love that's never failing, let mercy fall on me.
Everyone needs forgiveness, the kindness of a Saviour, the hope of nations.

Saviour, He can move the mountains.

My God is mighty to save, He is mighty to save.

Forever, Author of salvation,

He rose and conquered the grave, Jesus conquered the grave.

So take me as You find me, all my fears and failures, fill my life again.
I give my life to follow everything I believe in, now I surrender.

Saviour, He can move the mountains....

Shine your light and let the whole world see.

We're singing for the glory of the risen King.

Shine your light and let the whole world see.

We're singing for the glory of the risen King.

Saviour, He can move the mountains....

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Alec invited another young man, Prem, who is working as a Doctor at the hospital, to share a little with us. Originally from Nepal, he apologised for his English- which was in fact excellent, and shared that having moved to a new country, with differing culture, language and customs, he is finding that inviting Jesus into every challenging situation, whether that be at work or outside the hospital, helps to give the wisdom and peace he needs as he adjusts.

Brenda read from James 3:1-18

Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check. When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers and sisters, can a fig-tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither

can a salt spring produce fresh water.

Two kinds of wisdom

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbour bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such 'wisdom' does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

Alec then shared his Message "Wisdom from heaven"

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

The letter of James is found in the New Testament, but it is a very Old Testament book; it's a kind of proverbial book. James, thinking in Old Testament frameworks, is describing wisdom not in terms of intelligence or in terms of logic but rather in practical or moral or ethical terms. And all of that morality and practice and spiritual truth is based not so much on knowledge about God but on knowing God Himself, on having a personal relationship with the living God in Jesus Christ. If we get that wrong and we begin to think simply in theoretical terms or in abstract terms, then we will immediately go wrong. True religion is not about obtaining a bachelor's or master's degree or even a doctorate in theology, though these things may indeed be helpful, but it is about hearing the voice of God saying to you and to me, "Come, follow me. Be my disciple"; and then giving up everything and following Him.

It is basically very simple, very straightforward and uncomplicated. We do not need elaborate rituals to come to faith in Jesus Christ, we just need from our hearts to say sorry to God our Maker and Sustainer, to turn away from the mess we have made and follow Him. "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:16)

So are we following Him or not? Will we be saved or will we be condemned? It is God's grace and mercy that He speaks to us; but are we listening? Are we following Him?

Chapter 3 as Brenda read for us talks about the tongue and it also talks about wisdom from heaven. A couple of weeks ago we looked at what James wrote in 1:26-27: "Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."

James, a bit like Solomon the writer of Proverbs, seems motivated to make sure that we understand that this wisdom is there and available to ordinary people, people like you and me, like the people of East Lancashire, the people of Blackburn with Darwen, our neighbours and friends and families, that it is a wisdom which is not generally found in any humanistic university, it's not hidden away with limited access only for especially privileged people in the database of an online library, but it is a wisdom which is worked out in individual relationships and in the ebb and flow of everyday life, of applying for jobs, of working hard, of making and fulfilling medical appointments, of making purchasing decisions in Aldi and Lidl, Tesco and Morrison's or wherever and in the internet. Our faith is active every day as the Holy Spirit given to us as the guarantee so to speak of our being with God for eternity leads us and guides us into all truth where we are. Because God says I will be with you wherever you go; I will never leave you nor desert you. God is not hidden from us; He has revealed Himself to us in His wonderful creation and in sending His Son into the world to give His life that we might live. He lived a normal life

like we do but unlike us always did what God His Father told Him to do. He longs to lead us and guide us; His way is perfect, every day and in every way.

Whatever we do, we work at it with all our heart, (Col.3:23), and we know that “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” (NIV) “For the reverence and fear of God are basic to all wisdom; knowing God results in every other kind of understanding.” (TLB)

Last week I showed you for the third time the illustration with the bottle that was real containing the water of life, the truth of God in Jesus Christ and what I called the “genuine fake” which looked like and appeared identical to the real truth but had been injected with an almost infinitely small amount of a soluble, invisible, colourless and odourless, deadly poison for which there is no antidote.

Today we apply this example to wisdom. PURE wisdom is non-contaminated. Pure wisdom is real; pure wisdom is true wisdom. But there are lots of apparent substitutes. I remember as a student in Nottingham going shopping on a Friday evening in Sherwood with a mate of mine from Northern Ireland and buying at least one can of meat. I remember clearly his surprise as he looked at the can where it said “contains real meat.”

But here’s another example. Do you like eating yoghurt? Do you buy a lot of yoghurt? If we buy Greek yoghurt what do we expect to be eating? I heard that some people spend a lot of time at Morrison’s making absolutely sure that they know what it is in the food they are thinking of buying. Well Greek yoghurt is a good example of this! You look at the packaging, you read the list of contents, you think carefully about what appears to be in the product you are thinking of buying and its price.

True Greek yoghurt traditionally involves an expensive straining process which filters out excess water concentrating the yoghurt which makes it thicker and higher in protein than traditional yoghurt.

There currently is apparently at least in some countries no legal definition for Greek yoghurt so certain companies have found cheaper ways to produce yoghurts with similar texture and taste and still get away with calling it Greek, or Greek-style yoghurts. They do this mostly by adding milk protein concentrates (MPCs), whey protein concentrates (WPCs) as protein-enhancing fillers and thickeners like gelatine or modified corn-starch to traditional yoghurt.

As believers we need to be properly fed and nourished from the Word of God, for the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. I am going to quote now from John’s Gospel Chapter 6 which is just one amazing chapter with an awesome miracle and then Jesus walking on the water. Now of course you can do what many do when making so-called pure Greek yoghurt and water down the reality of what is written in John 6 to make it easier to accept so that it doesn’t cost you so much and you don’t feel you need to give your whole life to Jesus as Lord, but I wouldn’t do that because it will condemn you. In John 6 we read that after Jesus had fed over 5,000 people with five small barley loaves and two small fish the crowds following him and his disciples said, “Sir, always give us this bread.” What did Jesus say to their request? Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

True wisdom comes from God; true wisdom is found in the Word of God; all of it. Don’t be deceived, don’t be conned by those who whilst claiming to present a culturally appropriate, 21 st. century gospel message wipe out the reality of our wrongdoing against God, deny the sovereignty of God or the Godhead of Jesus Christ, cut out large chunks of the Word of God which they say have been disproved by modern science or don’t fit in with contemporary philosophical trends or whatever. The Word of God is our daily bread. Without it we will not be properly nourished, not be properly fed.

So what in reality in concrete terms is the wisdom that comes from God, which comes from heaven, like?

Please look together with me at James 3:17: “But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.”

It is once you're out in the mainstream of life and dealing with people, not least of all in a local church, that you find out just how considerate you are.

The wise individual is submissive. In other words, the wise person is willing to listen and willing to be persuaded by what is good and what is best. We should be discerning and not just accept anything and everything that is on offer. We are not going to allow ourselves to be deceived! If we compare 3:17 with 4:4 we get a clear warning. James 4:4 reads: “You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.” In another translation this reads, “Unfaithful people! Don't you know that to be the world's friend means to be God's enemy? If you want to be the world's friend, you make yourself God's enemy.” (GNT)

We are to be full of mercy. “Mercy triumphs over judgement” was how I finished the sermon on the first half of James 2

Lamentations 3: 22-23 is very familiar to many of us: “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”

The mercy of God is an all-embracing mercy. It is a mercy without respect of persons. It is mercy for everyone. Religious people sometimes find it hard to accept this but this is what the heart of God is like.

It is mercy which cuts across the barriers and boundaries that people are frequently keen to set up and maintain. I recall in Letchworth Baptist Church visiting all the members of the luncheon club for which I was responsible on a regular basis. I think I have seldom drunk so much well-prepared tea and been offered so many biscuits. But I was less impressed by being asked whether I would visit Mrs. B? But you shouldn't visit a lady like that they said. But I did. God didn't make that kind of exception so why should I? You remember this in Jesus dealing with the experts and teachers of the law, with the Pharisees—how, in the mind of many of these people, they wanted to know who their neighbours were so that they could be merciful to the ones that were described in those terms, and then that they wouldn't need to be merciful to all of the other ones. You say to yourself, “Well, that is a strange approach to things.” Well, not as strange as you might think if you think for a moment or two. We may be the kind of people who are tempted to show mercy just to the people that fit our bill or fit the framework of what we regard as acceptable behaviour. But the mercy of God is an all-embracing mercy, and it breaks down the barriers that man erects.

In the parable that Jesus told after one of the teachers of the law came to him and said, “You are a wise man. What must I do to inherit eternal life?” we read in Luke 10: 25-37 about the mercy of the Samaritan whom we frequently call the “Good Samaritan.” Maybe read that again at home later this afternoon.

Who will show mercy to the half-dead of twenty-first-century culture? Who will show mercy to the battered and the beaten? The merciful people will!

My unwillingness to display mercy to those outside my circle of reference is unavoidably a representation of my own stony heart's inability to grasp the vastness of God's mercy towards me. It is when I am reminded constantly of what I deserve before God and what He has chosen to do in Jesus that I then realise what a wonderful thing mercy is.

Are we a merciful church? Are we a forgiving community? Or do we still think that we have a just cause not to be forgiving and merciful? If so may God have mercy on us and on those who mistakenly think like that.

There is a tremendous picture of the compassion and grace and mercy of God, of that kindness which leads men and women to turn away from the mess they have made and are making and would make in their lives without God; we see this in Ephesians 2:4-5 where we read: “because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.”

Mercy is a characteristic of wisdom. Mercy enters into the difficulties in the lives of the men and women with whom we hopefully engage, into the challenges of their everyday lives, identifies with the needs and the feelings they may be struggling with, and enables us to point men and women to a God who is rich in mercy. Mercy and judgment are met in the cross. It is not mercy at the expense of judgment but is mercy in judgment. He does not count our sins against us, because he counts them against Jesus. That is mercy.

The mercy of God is an all-embracing mercy, and it breaks down the barriers that man erects.

And finally, this wisdom is defined in terms of being “impartial and sincere,” undivided in mind. It’s the wisdom that is without wavering. It’s not hesitant. You wouldn’t expect it to be. You would think that God would know his mind, wouldn’t you? When he says yes, he means yes; when he says no, he means no. And this wisdom is “impartial.” The clarity of God’s Word determines our coming and our going. Undivided in mind and untainted by hypocrisy: “Impartial and sincere.” The word in Greek is *anupókritos*. It sounds like unhypocritical, and that’s exactly right, because it is virtually a literal translation from the Greek into English: *anupókritos*, unhypocritical. In other words, God’s wisdom isn’t two-faced. God’s wisdom doesn’t play one game on a Sunday in the meeting and another game on a day-out. It’s not one way on a Friday night and another way on a Sunday night. The wisdom that comes down from heaven is untainted by hypocrisy.

Living in Jesus in the power of the Spirit is something very special. Resting our souls in the heart of God and basing our being and doing on the wisdom which comes from our loving heavenly Father is a very wise thing to do, especially in these times when everyone feels free to do what they think they really want to do but which is essentially the same as high speed in a cul-de-sac tunnel with an irremovable blindfold into a certain death. It is Jesus who in God’s mercy removes our blindfolds and open our eyes, our ears and our hearts to His working in our lives. Praise God for that.

Jesus talks about the wolves in sheep’s clothing.

Jesus talks about recognising whether people are good or bad on the basis of the fruit they show in their lives.

Jesus says not everyone who says to Him Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven and then he talks about the wise and foolish builders. You can read all about that maybe tomorrow in Matthew chapter 7.

Jesus’ words are so easy to understand when God in His mercy opens our hearts, minds and ears and we give our lives back to Him. Then He gives us His Spirit to live in us, to challenge, to encourage and to enable us to be free to follow Him.

What is wisdom?

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” The Bible shows us what true wisdom is. The book of James in particular presents us with applications of wisdom in everyday life. With his everyday approach, James taught that Christians must practice submitting to God’s wise instruction and show good fruit with peaceable behaviour and mercy toward others.

How do you show, how do you know, how do we recognise wisdom and understanding? The issue here says James, is that of practical godliness because true wisdom, like true faith, is vital, it is practical, and it is observable and visible.

The Bible is very clear that if you are a disciple of Jesus, if you are a follower of Jesus if you want to be a wise person, you need to know God personally. If you want to be a wise person, you need a Bible. If you want to be those who display understanding, then it starts with your own humility before the majesty and might of the God who has made you.

Where does the life of a civilisation go down the drain? Where does an individual life go off the rails? It is in the departure from wisdom and the taking hold of earthly perspectives.

We close with some wonderfully encouraging and true words from Proverbs 4:5-9:

“Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or turn away from them. Do not abandon or renounce wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. Cherish her, and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honour you. She will give you a garland to grace your head and present you with a glorious crown.”

Our Prayers were then led by Becky:

“Dear Heavenly Father, I want to thank you that I can just sit and talk to you any time I want, for as long as I want or need to. I want to thank you that you listen, that I don't need to feel silly or awkward, whatever I want to talk to you about, you will understand. To some people it's trivia, to me it's important, the smallest worry can become a major problem in my head. Therefore it's wonderful that I can bring these worries to you Lord ,any time ,anywhere.

As I talk to you Heavenly Father, I can thank you again for the wonderful and delightful things in our lives, like our families, parents, siblings, children grandchildren, even great grandchildren for a lot of us. We can thank you for the people we have met along the way, some have influenced our lives, some have just passed through. All of them have helped in some small way to shape us into who we have become today - our teachers at day school or Sunday school, our Brownie and guide leaders, our employers and work colleagues, our best friends, a passenger on the bus or a passerby in the park. Life is pretty wonderful Lord ,and you put those people in our lives for a reason, thank you.

Thank you also for all living creatures, for the birds and flowers and trees. Thank you for the sunshine, and the birds singing and children playing in the parks and beautiful friendships.

We thank you for our church here at Bethesda, and our pastor and church leaders. We come to you again in prayer for our church. Please Heavenly Father bring people through our doors, fill our church with singing once again, with laughter and long-lasting friendships, give us opportunities to fill our church once again, please Lord please.

We really are so blessed Lord each and every one of us, even at the very worst our lives are still blessed. We have a roof over our head, food on the table, even luxuries. We have hot and cold running water, nice beds to sleep in. We can go away on holidays. Most of us have a car. We have good public transport we can use. I know some folk are unable to travel by themselves for health issues, but there is always another friend to help. We have hospitals. I know we grumble about difficulties in getting appointments but in real emergencies the hospitals are there for us. As a family with a little one who needs a lot of attention we do know that. Please Lord we ask for help for the NHS. Thank you for the people who fundraise for these societies, thank you for the specialists and surgeons and scientists. Thank you for giving them their skills. We thank you for our teachers, lawyers, police and ambulance. We

thank you also for our postman, shop assistants. We thank you for good neighbours who run an errand for you, who will bring in your wheelie bin on a rainy day. A neighbour who will take your parcel in for you, who'll bring your nice dry washing in. who'll cut your grass or bake you a cake. We really do have riches if we just look for them, help us Lord to remember this.

As I'm bringing my prayers to a close, Father, help us to always remember our brothers and sisters around the world. The countries where there is deliberate, destruction, cruelty, poverty, beyond belief. Thank you again for the aid workers, fundraisers, hospitals and staff, however poor in these countries. Thank you that several of these countries are Christian countries, they cherish their beliefs. They faced death defiantly for their beliefs. There is so much conflict in most of these countries and yet they never lose their faith. We do continue to pray for Ukraine and Russia, and all the war-torn countries in the world, please strengthen these people and keep them safe, as safe as can be. We need an end to all this fighting and hardship. We have one God, you, Heavenly Father, you love each and everyone of us the same amount. We all love you. Help us to love one another the way you love us dear Lord, we are all your children. In Jesus name. Amen.

We sing once more, our Closing (offertory) hymn:

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious, Thy great name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
nor wanting, nor wasting, Thou rulest in might;
Thy justice like mountains high soaring above
Thy clouds which are fountains of goodness and love.

To all, life Thou givest, the great and the small;
T all life Thou livest, the True Life of all;
we blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
and wither and perish, but naught changeth Thee.

Great Father of glory; pure Father of light;
Thine angels adore Thee, all veiling their sight;
all praise we would render: O help us to see
'tis only the splendour of light hideth Thee.

Words: Walter Chalmers Smith (1824-1908) Music: ST. DENIO. Anon. Welsh hymn melody CCLI SONG # 124466 Words and Music Public Domain. CCL No 5664

After Alec shared a prayer of thanks, we joined together saying:

The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you, the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace. Amen