

Sermon on the Mount: Embracing Change – Matthew 5:3-16

Sunday 18 October 2020

Before You Begin

Our hope is that this is a resource that will help us to engage meaningfully with God's word and invite us into a sense of worship, despite being unable to meet face-to-face. Use it in a way that feels comfortable and helpful to you.

A table of contents has been added to give you a sense of what will follow and allow you to move more easily through the worship elements.

Prepare

Have your Bible close by and some food and drink prepared for communion. It doesn't have to be bread and grape juice; it could be whatever is available (tea and a biscuit) to use in this symbolic time.

Get into a 'Sacred' Space

Be intentional. Sit somewhere. Have some visual representation of God (perhaps a small cross, your Bible, a symbol or image) or you might play some reflective music. Start with a few moments of silence and deep breathing.

Consider your environment

What will work for you in the space you have? If you have others in your house (housemates/family), consider sharing this time with them, each reading or participating as appropriate. You might simply reflect individually, in your own time and space. Afterwards, you might connect with others through technology to share your reflections, or an encouragement, with them.



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Call to Worship

Brendan Petty

We've finished our series looking at the book of James and pressing into the discipleship journey within, then a week of dwelling in Scripture and exploring how we immerse ourselves in the Bible, and now for these coming five weeks we're going to be looking at the Sermon on the Mount. It's a relatively small part of the Bible but filled with power. It's the longest uninterrupted speech in the book of Matthew and has so many clear and memorable teachings from Jesus laid out for us to hear.

We're going to begin this week with a look at change and the ways in which change can be really Good News.

Speaking of change, it's just over six months now since we were starting to question how we might be able to worship without being at the church building. How can I/we worship in my/our home? How do we do this? What things will help us to engage? I'm sure that for many of you (as with many things in faith) it's an ongoing journey with ever-present challenges and new opportunities along the way. You might like to reflect on what changes have been good, and which have left you really looking forward to the day when we can all gather together as physical people in one physical place.

I trust that as we engage today, that this document, this resource will help you in your worship.

Come, let us worship together today. We're going to start with a story about change, then a song, then lots more after that ...

Book: The Gardener and the Vine

Andrew McDonough



On a wild lonely hill, on a thin scraggly vine, lived a branch named Basil. Basil never visited anyone, and no one ever visited Basil, until the day the Gardener came.

The Gardener looked up and down the vine. "Basil!" he said. "You're exactly the branch I've been searching for!" Basil looked over his shoulder to check if there were any other branches named Basil nearby. No, the Gardener was talking to him.

"I have good news and bad news," said the Gardener. "The good news is you're going to grow lots of grapes." "Excellent!" said Basil. "And the bad news?" "I need to cut you off this scraggly vine." "Oh," said Basil. "I think you've got the wrong branch." "Trust me, Basil; I'm a good gardener."

Basil thought about the bad news. Then he thought about the good news. "OK, then," said Basil, "I'm in your hands." So the Gardener





took his snippers, "SNIP!" and placed Basil into his bag. "This is the end!" cried Basil. "No," said the Gardener, "this is just the beginning!"

Down the wild lonely hill they climbed, away from the thin scraggly vine, across the hot, hot desert, over the snowy mountains, through the jungly jungle and into a beautiful garden. And there stood a magnificent vine. "Wow!" said Basil. "Now, that's a vine."

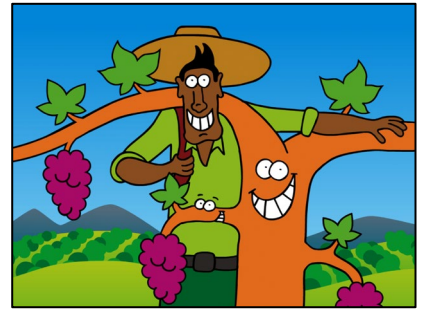
"Basil," said the Gardener, "I have good news and bad news." "The good news is you're going to grow plenty of grapes. The bad news is, I need to cut the vine." "No!" said Basil. "You can't cut this magnificent vine!" "Trust me, Basil. I'm the Gardener."



The Gardener took his snippers, SNIP! and cut deep into the vine. Then the Gardener took Basil and placed him deep into the cut in the vine. And the Gardener wrapped around and around, joining Basil and the vine. "This is the end!" cried Basil. "I'm going to die!" "No," said the Gardener, "this is a new beginning. Get ready to live!"

Then a new strength and a new life surged through Basil. "Basil," said the Gardener, "meet the vine." "Welcome, Basil," said the vine. "I have good news and great news. The good news is you're now part of me." "And the great news?" asked Basil. "We're going to produce plenty of grapes," said the vine.

And sure enough, that summer, Basil and the vine produced plenty of grapes, thanks to the Gardener.



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Song: The Stand

You stood before creation
Eternity in Your hand
You spoke the earth into motion
My soul now to stand

You stood before my failure
And carried the cross for my shame
My sin weighed upon Your shoulders
My soul now to stand

So what can I say
And what can I do
But offer this heart O God
Completely to You

So I'll walk upon salvation
Your Spirit alive in me
My life to declare Your promise
My soul now to stand

So I'll stand
With arms high and heart abandoned
In awe of the One who gave it all
I'll stand
My soul Lord to You surrendered
All I am is Yours

CCLI Song # 4705248
Joel Houston
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Bible Reading: Matthew 5:3-16 (NIV)

If you are with others perhaps take turns to read different sections

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.”

“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

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Message

Kaye Reid

Moon shot. A term sometimes used in business to describe ideas that often have huge risks associated with them but carry the power to shape history. Or more generally, something really amazing, that you really want to happen, but it's very unlikely to be possible. Like the audacious idea back in the 1960s to land people on the moon!

Some of us will already be familiar with an amazing local social enterprise created by some young school friends called "Thankyou". "Thankyou" have sold bottled water to raise funds to create access to water for people living in extreme poverty around the world. You



might have bought some of these products. "Thankyou" have sold hand wash to provide sanitation for people living in extreme poverty around the world. They tried breaking into the nappy market and didn't succeed. They

expanded from Australia to New Zealand. Only a few months ago they announced that they were going to stop selling bottled water. Their flagship product. Because they were no longer able to reconcile the elephant in the room; to provide water to the people who needed it

most, they were selling single use bottles of water and had tried everything to make these as environmentally sustainable as possible without success. So they are withdrawing from this market. Gutsy move.

But now for the moon shot. They are in the midst of launching what they hope will be a giant leap for social missions and ideas across the world.

"Thankyou" believes that during this critical time in history, together, humanity can help flip an entire system of capitalism and consumption on its head, to help close an inequality gap so big, that it should not exist.

Ideas and a vision that could be world changing. A vision of the Kingdom of God.

Recently, "Thankyou" created and launched a video called "No Small Plan ..." Use this link to watch the video if you are able: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQ4F46m1_Y4

Daniel Flynn, Co-founder of "Thankyou":

In this moment it is like we are collectively holding our breath, and in this pause I want to share an idea, one that we think could change the course of history. Before the pandemic we the world of consumers spent 63 trillion dollars on stuff. And in that same world, 736 million people were living in extreme poverty. One world, two extremes, it just doesn't feel right.



And then the pandemic hit, and things went from bad to worse. And the strangest part of it all is that while the world has been in turmoil, some people got really rich, and we know that because we are one of them. See when the pandemic started, consumers kept consuming, and we made over ten million dollars profit. Our secret, we sold hand sanitizer and hand wash. It was like a gold rush, everyone who could get in on it. But in the best of stories there's always a twist. And this story is no different, because we are "Thankyou" and we exist to bridge the gap between our worlds two extremes. This isn't about making shareholders rich, we're a social enterprise and the whole reason we make money is to get into the parts of the world that need it most. Our focus is the end of extreme poverty.

This movement started in Australia. We have over 50 products and it's because people first used their voice, like when the two big supermarkets said no to us for years, and people petitioned, they sung, danced, rapped, uploaded videos, two helicopter pilots even flew their helicopters for half an hour around the head offices for free. Both of them said yes and then us consumers used our choice and together we raised over 17 million dollars for the true heroes in this story, our partners working on the frontline serving the world's poor on their journey out of extreme poverty.

But imagine for a moment that "Thankyou" didn't just exist in Australia and New Zealand, two of the smallest countries on the planet, imagine if it existed in your country, and for that matter in every other country too. That wouldn't have been ten million that we just made in a few months, it would be literally hundreds of millions of our collective consumer dollar, so we had an idea, a local movement started this but could a global movement take this idea to the world. Now it's a nice idea, but to do it we'd be going up against the biggest product companies on the planet. When we first started "Thankyou" we had no idea about the game we were about to play. Those who we were about to play with, we think that at a human level our competitors like what we do but at a commercial level it's been the battle of our lives for over a decade going head to head with the system that has our world in a choke hold. But it's 2020 and if that's taught us anything it's that business as usual is out the window and we must forge bold new paths forward so today we are flipping the game on its head.

We've just sent an invitation to P&G and Unilever. If you don't know them, they are two of the biggest product companies on the planet and they literally run the world, they have hundreds of factories, they make products for billions of us every day. We've watched them for over a decade, and to their credit they've solved some really complex ethical and sustainability stuff. Genuinely it's impressive. So we've sent this invitation and in it is a Zoom link to a meeting two weeks from today. We've also put in a letter. A letter that outlines that you can't buy "Thankyou", no one ever can, but it's a partnership in the same way that Adidas make and distribute Kanye's brand Yeezy, or Nestle make and distribute the Starbucks coffee pod into retail stores around the world. We thought that if the system can unlock a model like this for a shoe and a coffee pot, and that same process make billions of dollars for shareholders, could the world not turn that same key for a product that breathes in profit and breathes out social impact.

This is not a story of David joining Goliath, this is a story of us, a consumer movement, finding a partner and together becoming a bigger David to take down the true Goliath, a 63 trillion dollar consumer system that makes the rich richer and leaves the poor behind. Multiple industry experts have heard our idea and said there's no chance these big two would agree to that because they buy companies, they don't partner with them in this way. That's where you come in. This is not a simple

“we take it to a few at the top” we need the many below, us consumers, to unite our voice and together flip business as usual.

Our borders are locked down. We literally can't even get out of our own country but maybe with you, this idea can. So this is a call out to the world asking you to say four words, “I'm in, are you?” Post it onto whatever platform works for you, then tag P&G, tag Unilever, so that they know you're serious, with #thankyoutothe world. Then call your Mum, call everyone, use what's in your hand to help this message go further. At “Thankyou” we've gone all in. Whilst we've sent the big two this invitation we also sent that same invitation to nine of their direct competitors, because if the big two won't help us on this mission maybe someone else will.

How will you know how this story ends? Well three weeks after the meeting we will be posting who is in onto one of the largest digital billboards in the world found in Times Square, New York City. And on that day we look forward to celebrating those brave enough to flip the system and change the world. There's one question I think you might be thinking, “what if this whole idea doesn't work?” but let me ask you another question, “what if it does work?” What if we are on the edge of a new normal, where the products we choose everyday exist to right a wrong, an inequality gap so big that it should not exist, where us, humanity, working together to do good becomes as easy as breathing in and breathing out.

This is no small plan and if you are in.

Thankyou.

Wow. That is a moon shot. A crazy, impossible, audacious idea. Who knows if it's going to work, but I'm going to get behind it too, I'm going to add my “I'm in, are you?”

What a beautiful expression of trying to flip business as usual, to close the inequality gap, and to find partners who will do this with them. You and I, as well as the big companies, each of us part of this consumer system.

The people who lead “Thankyou” have a vision for the upside down, Kingdom of God, that Jesus ‘launched’ on the Sermon on the Mount. It would have sounded like a moon shot. It might have sounded like a great idea but totally unrealistic. It might have sounded like a crazy idea and that we are better off with the status quo. That would depend on who you were listening to.

It is recorded as spoken on a mountain, which creates links for us to Israel receiving God's law on Mt Sinai in Exodus 19. But it drops these laws from our heads to our heart. It is spoken by Jesus. This is crucial because from anyone else this would be a deluded ideal, but instead it is reality that is disclosed, revealed, described for us, by the God of this universe. Yes, it is still mostly hidden within the dominant narratives of power and force, but it is destined to overcome these.

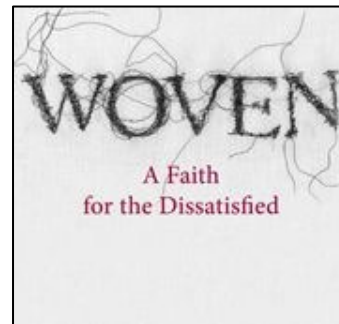
The Sermon on the Mount focuses on the character and behaviour of those who participate in God's rule. This is what the people of God, that's us, will look like in the midst of the world. A compelling but challenging vision which is counterintuitive, disruptive, and unexpected.

It overturns worldly values and expectations. These are unobtainable ideals that are out of touch with reality, except that they come from our God whose very words create and shape reality.

This is Jesus' vision of the kingdom of God. Where the misfits and persecuted, the poor in spirit, those who mourn, and the meek who follow Jesus will be rewarded with a part in the Kingdom of God.

We want to be seeking and desiring this vision. We want to be transformed by this.

Over the last few weeks Paul and I have been reading Joel McKerrrow's book *Woven*. We read a chapter at a time so we can discuss it together once we have both read that part, so we can talk about that section while we still remember it. *Woven* is about understanding how we have been constructed by our family, our church, our society, and the process of deconstructing and then ultimately reconstructing ourselves, woven together again through God's transforming grace.



In the book Joel quotes Kenda Creasey Dean:

"There is the theology I want to believe, that I think I believe ... and then there is the theology I actually practice."

We live in an uncomfortable tension between what we think we believe, what we want to believe, and the reality of our practices.

Joe Abbey-Colburn, pastoral director of Parkdale Neighbourhood Church in Toronto wrote some modern-day Beatitudes from the perspective of North American, contemporary, church culture. I think they can be adapted slightly to have a broader view of western culture generally.

*Blessed are the well off and those
...with ready answers for every spiritual question;
...they have it all.
Blessed are the comfortable;
...they shall avoid grief.
Blessed are the self-sufficient;
...they wait for nothing, they have everything they want,
...and they have it now.
Blessed are those who are not troubled by
...the injustice experienced by others;
...they are content with realistic expectations.
Blessed are the ones who gain the upper hand;
...they take full advantage of their advantages.
Blessed are those with a solid public image
...and a well-hidden agenda;*

*...they are never exposed and see people
...in a way that suits their purposes.
Blessed are those who can bully others into agreement;
...they shall be called empire builders.
Blessed are those who can point to someone else
...who is a worse person than they are,
...they will always look good by comparison.*

Blessed are you when people praise you, give you preferential treatment, and flatter you because they think you're so great. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad because it doesn't get any better than this.

This is the way our church [our society] has always made celebrities of the best and brightest.

That is quite challenging and something to reflect on as we ask ourselves “what can we learn in this series ‘Sermon on the Mount’ over the next five weeks?”

God, in his expansive wisdom, is inviting each of us through faith to re-orient our values, vision, and habits away from the appearances of holiness or being religious and to whole-heartedness toward God. We can sit under the grace of Jesus' teachings and find our defaults and actions deconstructed and beginning to be formed anew, reconstructed. This is good news for everyone.

Let's grasp the vision, and then align our lives towards that. We might need to look hard at what that could look like in our lives. And it won't be possible through our own power or intention, but through God's transformative capacity.

This will involve change. And we often associate change as a negative; a loss or something forced onto us. And naturally we resist. But on the other hand if we are looking forward to something, if we have a vision for what it can be like, if this is something that we desire, then it is so much easier to embrace change.

When Paul and I were going out together, and when we were engaged, we couldn't wait to get married. So excited and so keen. So much to look forward to. It is actually a huge change, one of the biggest changes in life, but we had such a positive vision for this, and we pursued this and planned for it, it was something we wanted. And it was as good as we had anticipated. It is funny what I remember as the highlights, apart from the obvious aspect of getting to be together for the rest of our lives. It was not having to say goodbye and go to our separate homes at night, it was being able to go food shopping whenever we wanted to, and being able to buy whatever we wanted to (oh the chips and chocolate aisle), and to not get stuff done around our home until we realised for ourselves what the consequences were, it was everything about creating our new life together.

Let us be reflecting and being challenged by this extraordinary sermon, this moon shot, with our hearts open to being impacted and transformed by words spoken 2,000 years ago that are so

relevant for us right now. To pursue a vision of the Kingdom of God which is good news for everyone.

This vision is of a different world than our dominant narrative. We need to be able to critique this and be willing to pursue a life that is counterintuitive to what we have been soaked in. We are saturated by messages through advertising, through the language of persuasion, through the agendas of businesses who market to us by whatever means works to convince us that we need to purchase their product or experience or concept of self. We are like a cup or a bucket, some kind of receptacle, that is being filled ceaselessly with these messages, this narrative, and we are so filled and shaped and influenced by these that the cup is overflowing and there isn't space for the other messages that we glimpse sometimes, the other narratives like these words, these ideas, this vision from Jesus of the Kingdom of God.

So let's change this. Let's stop the flow. Let's make some space for something else. I want to invite you to take a first step for this week. A first step to stop the flow of the dominant narrative. This week, for one week, turn off your access to news and advertising. Don't watch the news on TV, don't read the newspaper, don't listen to the news bulletin on the radio, don't watch the adverts on YouTube, don't look at the ads on your Facebook feed, use your remote to mute the ads if you are watching television.

It will be a kind of fast. An intentional choice to not give space to advertising or agendas.

If you think you need to still know what is happening in the world, then find a reputable news source and spend 5 minutes reading, not watching, the key news stories. Not the click-bait ones, the genuine information that you might need.

Stop the flow of advertising and agendas and make some space.

"I'm in, are you?"

One week. It's a start.

If you are in. Then send a text that says the words, "**I'm in**" to **0480 017 048**. This is our new church mobile number. So, you might want to save this to your contacts on your mobile as this is another way to be able to contact the church office.

We look forward to receiving your message, "I'm in" and we will help you stay accountable throughout this week.

So grab your phone, make the commitment, send the text. Do it now though. Don't wait for later.

May you be blessed this week as you pursue the Kingdom of God, and through the transforming power of Jesus, embrace the change that this calls you to.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Personal question: How can I enlarge my vision of God's kingdom? What am I feeling nudged or challenged about?
2. Group discussion question: What is a positive vision of the kingdom of God? What are the examples, big and small, that compel us?

Some interesting resources to check out:

We have pulled together a few interesting resources – some documentaries, a blog, a podcast - that you might want to check out during this week as we consider what the Kingdom of God looks like in our time.

Persuasive Culture – *The Social Dilemma*, a documentary made in 2020 available on Netflix.
<https://www.netflix.com/au/title/81254224>

Impact on the natural world - *David Attenborough: A Life on our Planet*, 2020 documentary available on Netflix.
<https://www.ourplanet.com/en/video/david-attenborough-a-life-on-our-planet-trailer/>

Deep listening to difference - *Arlie Hochschild, The Deep Stories of our Time*, On Being with Krista Tippett, 2020, podcast.
<https://onbeing.org/programs/arlie-hochschild-the-deep-stories-of-our-time/>

More on the Beatitudes - *Beyond Smugness: The Beatitudes again*, Blog by Brian Walsh, 2017
<http://empireremixed.com/2017/07/19/beyond-smugness-beatitudes/>

Communion

Have some food and drink prepared for this time

If you're able, join us at 11am Sunday through Zoom to share in communion together at rngwd.com/communion or via Facebook live rngwd.com/fbv.

If you are unable to join us, then please use the following reflection to take communion in your own way today and after, consider who you can call to have a chat as you would on a Sunday morning after a church service.

When we spend any time dwelling in Jesus' vision of the Beatitudes we are struck by the impossibility of this vision. We need to hear, and meditate on, and dwell with these words of Jesus precisely because they are so impossible.

Impossible because of the world that it turns upside down and of the disruptive vision that it describes.

If we can't imagine the impossibilities that Jesus is talking about here and choose to pursue them then,
oppression wins,
arrogance wins,
injustice wins,
cruelty wins,
deceit wins,
violence wins,
persecution wins.

If we can't imagine the impossible vision of the Kingdom of God then we are stripped of hope, we are left with a paralysing cynicism and really there is nothing left but to embrace the dominant narrative.

So that's why we gather together - to listen, to pray and to break bread. We will read again shortly these radical words of Jesus.

We gather to listen, to repeat, to recite and to pray these beatitudes, almost like a mantra. We gather to be invited, against all the evidence, into an alternative imagination, the imagination of Jesus.

And we gather around these words and around this (scattered) table, as if our life depends on it. And it does.

(Adapted from blog by Brian Walsh, <http://empireremixed.com/2017/07/19/beyond-smugness-beatitudes/>)

You are invited now into a prayer space, an imaginative prayer space, that you will be guided through.

Imaginative Prayer

Make yourself comfortable and relaxed. Close your eyes or look out your window or whatever is helpful for you to have a soft focus.

*Take some moments to be aware of your breathing, and to relax your muscles,
and rest your mind. A few deep breaths, centring yourself.
Silence other distractions around you and in your own mind,
and welcome the presence of God with you.*

Imagine now in your mind by picturing a moment or a scene that you can see, something that is a glimpse of the kingdom that Jesus describes. It might be a neighbour helping or being helped, it might be a bore hole being dug and clean water emerging, it might be Oasis takeaway soups being served at local schools with paper bags decorated with words of encouragement and jokes, it might look like homemade marmalade jam that has been shared ...

Just settle in with these images, dwell in them, what does it look like, sound like, how does it feel? Imagine Jesus meeting you there. Coming towards you to be there with you. And welcome Jesus' presence there. And see the delight of Jesus in these glimpses.

God, would you fill us with your vision for the Kingdom of God, here where we are. Give us the courage, patience and love to understand and fulfil your Kingdom. Challenge us where our practices do not align with our beliefs and help us to find ways to live into your Kingdom for us and for others.

Jesus says:

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

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

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

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

Rejoice and be glad ...

You are the salt of the earth ...

You are the light of the world ...

So let your light shine before others ... and glorify your Father in heaven.

May it be so.

Amen.

(excerpts from Matthew 5:3-16 NIV)

Gather with you the elements that you will celebrate communion with and let us share in these words anew:

*On the night in which he gave himself up for us, Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said:
"Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."*

When the supper was over, he took the cup, gave thanks, gave it to his disciples, and said: "Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

The bread of life, broken for you. The cup of Christ, poured out in love for you.
Amen.

Connect cards online

Click this link or enter it into your web browser rngwd.com/connect.

We love to know that you have been able to connect through worship today. Please click on the link (or enter it into your web browser) to our online connect cards letting us know which ways you have been able to worship, and if you want to let us know how we can praying with you.
Thank you!