

The Four Texts:

- The Greatest Commandment
- The Creed
- The Beatitudes
- The Lord's Prayer

Introduction

Our faith is based on a lot of stuff that has been handed down verbally and much of it subsequently written down for us to become what we have today as our Bible. Some of these traditions and writings are very, very familiar to us and we are going to just stop and look at 4 of them at different points in our service today – our 4 Texts.

It's a good day to do this as we are here to celebrate one of our greatest sacraments – a point in time when we see the grace of God, the undeserved love of God for us, made visible in a physical act – the sacrament of baptism. Today we welcome Reggie, his parents Jade and Scott and other family and friends to celebrate his baptism and we are going to use this unique day so that all of us can recall the roots of our faith and revisit our own baptismal vows. We are going to use 4 of the most famous Christian texts at different points throughout the service to help us, each of us, to rededicate our own lives but also to celebrate with Reggie and his family his first public steps of faith.

Text 1 - The Greatest Commandment, Deuteronomy 6 v4

This was a trick question posed to Jesus by those who were not really His fans. They wanted to trap Him into saying something blasphemous so that they

could really give Him a good going over. The Jewish people regularly declared and still do declare their faith using these words: "*Here O Israel the Lord your God is the only Lord. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength.*" And TGC is what Jesus gave in reply to those trying to catch him out.

But He also expanded the statement and brought right into the homes and lives, the families and communities of those listening to him then and *also to us*. Jesus teaches us to love our neighbour as we love ourselves.

It's more than just a set of rules which make us Christians; it's a change of heart which leads to a different way of life at home, at work, in school, at play – all the time and in all places. God is love: we love because He first loved us so we have the 2 greatest commandments.

Text 2 - The Creed

We're going to sing again in a moment and we're going to sing out what we actually believe as Christians. The creed we use is a statement of what all Christians believe. It's the one thing that unites all Christian churches (well, something has to)!

The creed is so important that it actually forms part of the baptism service itself – and we will all, regular church members and visitors alike, be asked questions based on the creed later as a part of that service, But for now we are going to sing a version of it. Please think about the words you are singing - *this is our faith*.

Text 3 - The Beatitudes

If you look up anything on the internet to do with The Beatitudes it won't be long before you come across some lofty phrase like, these sayings of Jesus are packed with meaning and worthy of study. And it's true. We probably know them or at least recognise them. I reckon some people here can recite them by heart; it's the sort of thing schools used to give prizes for, being able to recite them *but I wonder if anyone has ever been awarded a prize for living by them?*

That's something different, isn't it? Like the 2 greatest commandments, these are more than just a set of written rules.

Blessed are the poor, blessed are the meek, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the persecuted..... They don't sound so appealing, do they? The Beatitudes were a challenge (*are a challenge*) to the upright, self-righteous religious leaders of the day who thought that sticking to laws and regulations was all that God actually wanted. But their obedience was blind to real life; it caused them to ignore the poor and the weak, those in their communities who need help. The Beatitudes, like the 2 greatest commandments, *are to be lived*, not read or recited accurately or beautifully embroidered and hung up on a wall for display purposes.

The Beatitudes teach us that we must be ready to give when others take; to love when others hate; to help when others abuse; to give up your own rights in order to serve others. The Beatitudes must be taken as a whole not as a pick and choose. Jesus gave up heaven for us and is offering it to us if we only believe in Him.

Text 4 - The Lord's Prayer

I'll put money on most people here today being able to recite this prayer. So before we pray it together, let's just pause and think about what it's actually telling us and asking of us. This is not a prayer that we should pray just as a ritual. Listen to the words you're saying and let them dwell in your mind and heart.

First of all, the prayer focuses our thoughts on God – reverence; we put God in His rightful place in our lives. Allegiance, 'your kingdom come' and obedience – 'your will be done', not our own. Not that we are resigning ourselves to live ineffective lives; we have already heard that Jesus said love God and love your neighbour.

When we pray "Give us today our daily bread" we're showing that we're depending on God one day at a time. Jesus urges us not to worry about having enough food or drink or clothing. Within our request is the absolute confidence that God will provide.

And a complete life does not just depend on material things; we also need forgiveness of our sins and freedom - deliverance from temptation. This prayer is a model for the whole of our lives: earthly and spiritual; our past, our present and our future. So let's pray together: Our Father...

Blessing

May the Creator God protect us, the loving Christ encompass us, the power of the Spirit enliven us, today and always.
Amen.