

It's good to be here with you, finally! We know more members from the congregations, the community, the chapter and Nikki's family would have liked to have been here today. Please pass on our thanks and appreciation to those who have held back in these difficult times so that we can celebrate this service with minimized risk.

It's a little odd to have this service of Induction given that Nikki arrived here in 2017! But the legalities causing this service provide us with a wonderful opportunity to look back. I wonder what your thoughts and expectations were those three years or so ago?

I know Nikki (and you - hopefully!) see today very much as a celebration of all your ministries here together. And she has asked me to say how grateful for your support and encouragement she is, your openness and enthusiasm in mission and service to the church and the wider community.

So perhaps it's small wonder that Nikki chose the opening words from Jesus' Sermon on the **Mount**, the Beatitudes as the reading for this service.

When Moses returned from the mountain, having encountered God, he brought with him the 10 Commandments: they give us God's vision of life lived well amongst God's people, where we honour and worship God, acknowledging the one who is beyond all of us and our concerns, where we honour and respect one another and each other's relationships. The 10 Commandments.

And likened to Moses, Jesus speaks to us from the Mount of Beatitudes. Yes, speaks to **us**, us as a community, not individuals. Both the 10 Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount with the Beatitudes are visions for the wholeness of a community rooted in God's love, in the love of a God who is and remains faithful to the last, the least and the lost.

If we're honest, most of the time the Beatitudes don't make an awful lot of sense to us, because it can't be about romanticizing the plight of those whose life is a struggle. One of the great dangers of a good intention of helping them can be the 'othering', I am helping those poor sods over there, separating us from one another – when everything we learn through Covid, through the environmental issues of our day, how we are all interconnected and mutually dependent. It is only on this basis that issues of inclusion can be tackled well.

It's good to hear you have become a member of Inclusive Church - all are equally valued – this integrates with Nikki's BAME work and your mission of welcome and the community emphasis - both within and outside of the church.

What we hear in the Gospel reading from Matthew is Jesus addressing those who are sad, hungry and suffering injustice, for it is they who are told "Blessed are you".

As we listen in to Jesus uttering this promise, God's vision of wholeness for the people of God becomes apparent: a community where the meek and the merciful, the mourning and the persecuted are all included. A community where the behaviour expressed in the beatitudes can be lived and experienced, where Jesus' promises are echoed in words and with every step we take. Where people are indeed, as our Diocese says, fully alive.

I'm so encouraged by what you do to make this happen in this Benefice. Your Pastoral Ministry, with your ALM and each of you who look out and care and pray for the sick and lonely and those in need in your community.

It's so good to hear of the growth in children and youth ministry (FROGS and FROGS plus) and Open the Book in schools (although all on hold for the time being).

The growth in relationships through baptisms, weddings and funerals in the rural ministry – so often underestimated.

Your Sunday Connection (weekend email reflection) which started and has grown in lockdown to include more than your usual church congregations – there's a challenge how to build on that, how to build relationships that naturally share the joy and the value of living a life led by Jesus.

There hasn't been much occasion for fundraising with all the effort and the joys that brings but I am sure you will pick that up again when it's possible not least because you recognize it's not just about raising money (though this is really important, of course) but it's an important community bonding and social occasion which puts the church at the heart of the village community.

Honouring the faith of those on whose shoulders we stand, the witness of those who have gone before, and keeping the flame going is expressed in your faithfulness caring for the buildings and their fabric - each church has small or large projects ongoing. Amazing. Thank you.

I hear one of Nikki's strengths lies in encouraging your respective ministries, your manifold support for the church in this place. You did a great job during the vacancy and now with Nikki you are continuing and developing this.

We began with God's vision of life, in the 10 Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes in particular.

Matthew's Gospel does not present us with an abstract idea of what this is all about but presents us with Jesus who lives it and walks it, for all the beatitudes are transparent not only for the experience of people but also for the life of Jesus.

Living that life, failing a bit, succeeding a bit, and loved through it by the God who is faithful to the last, the least and the lost, to you and to me: we are blessed, you are blessed, and do hear that - for the sake of making it through that which will be difficult, and for joy, today as we celebrate the Christian life, mission and ministry of this community.

CLOSING PRAYER

*Holy Spirit,
empower us to live in the light of the gospel,
declaring it with our words,
and embodying it through our actions.
Give us love for you and love for one another.
Amen.*