

Order of Service 26/7/20 Pentecost 8A

Prelude: Peter Blair guitar

If God is for us, who is against us? (Romans 8:31)

Welcome and Call to Worship

(Kirsty)

Welcome to worship. Today we will be reminded of the breadth and depth of God's love for us as we listen to some well known parables and reflect on Paul's words to the Romans.

We are recording most of this service in our homes today to protect those who are at risk in this challenging time.

Let us call on the Spirit to be present as we gather to worship the God who is for us, Jesus who speaks to us through story, and the Spirit of new beginnings.'

Light Candle

SONG: 'Gathered here in the mystery of this hour' NCH 742

*Gathered here in the mystery of this hour.
Gathered here in one strong body.
Gathered here in the struggle and the power.
Spirit draw near.*

SONG: [Gathered here](#), By Phil Porter ©1990, from [New Century Hymnal](#), Pilgrim Press. Reproduced with permission under ONE LICENCE # 604502

Acknowledgement of Country

Benjamin Qi-En Hon

We acknowledge and respect the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, the traditional custodians of this land since time immemorial.

We are learning that the land is not ours to own, but to look after; and that if we listen, we may hear in it the calling of the eternal Spirit.

***Responding to this call,
we commit ourselves
to work for justice, reconciliation,
and care of the earth.***

Prayer of Adoration

(Kirsty and Meg)

Meg: [Matthew 13:31-32](#)

Jesus put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

Kirsty: Let us pray:

God of creation,

We look with wonder upon the world around us:

the seeds, the plants, the shrubs,

the bush and the lofty trees with branches that tower over us.

Jesus the story teller,
You paint a picture of the Kingdom which is full of possibilities
where the small and vulnerable can grow and shelter,
And remind us that life can spring from something that seems insignificant
and become something wonderful.

Spirit of new beginnings,
You open our eyes to new possibilities
In you we see our past, present and future,
In you we see possibilities we never dreamed of.

Amen

SONG: The Great Love of God TiS 164

- 1. The great love of God is revealed in the Son,
who came to this earth to redeem every one.*
- 2. That love, like a stream flowing clear to the sea,
makes clean every heart that from sin would be free.*
- 3. It binds the whole world, every barrier it breaks,
the hills it lays low, and the mountains it shakes.*
- 4. It's yours, it is ours, O how lavishly giv'n!
the pearl of great price, and the treasure of heav'n.*

SONG: [The great love of God](#), by Daniel Tahmbyrajah Niles, from [Together in Song](#), Harper Collins Religious,
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Prayer of Confession

(Kirsty and Meg)

Meg: [Matthew 13:44-46](#)

Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Let us pray:

Kirsty:

Loving and generous God

We acknowledge the times

When we have not recognised the beauty that is around us,

When we have not seen the value of what is in front of us.

Forgive us.

We remember when we have focussed on the wrong things

When we have looked for treasure that does not exist

When we have held on to things instead of letting go.

Forgive us.

We recognise there are times

When we have made poor decisions

When we have acted hastily

When we have not been prepared to change.

Forgive us.

Amen

Word of Grace

(Kirsty)

God is for us, and
nothing can separate us from the love of God.
And so we may declare with confidence:
Our sin is forgiven. **Thanks be to God.**

With the Children

(Dave & Clara)

Jacob is on the way back to Haran when he meets Rachel. He works for Rachel's father for seven years so that he can marry her and is then tricked into marrying Leah, her older sister.

Hebrew Scriptures – Genesis 29:15-32a

(Bridie Turner)

Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah's eyes were lovely, and Rachel was graceful and beautiful. Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me." So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed." So Laban gathered together all the people of the place, and made a feast. But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her. (Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her maid.) When morning came, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?" Laban said, "This is not done in our country—giving the younger before the firstborn. Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years." Jacob did so, and completed her week; then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife. (Laban gave his maid Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her maid.) So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah. He served Laban for another seven years.

When the Lord saw that Leah was unloved, he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren. Leah conceived and bore a son, and she named him Reuben

SONG: Alive in Me

*Ch Spirit of the Father
Spirit of our Brother
Spirit of the Living One
Alive, in me
Spirit of the Mother
Tender-hearted Lover
Wisdom to discover
Alive, in me*

*Vs 1 You are the Breath that breathes through all
The pulse of life and the sacred call
Deep seed of Good that grows divine
Clear light of Truth that yearns to shine*

*Vs 2 You stir a song every soul can sing
Spread words of love on the angels' wings
Bring hope to birth at dark of night
Give us the strength to stand for right*

*Vs 3 Quieten our minds so that we may hear
The voice of Love that will heal our fears
Nurture within, your work begun
Transforming power to make us one*

SONG: *Alive in me*, © Sheree Anderson, 2006, from *Tune In*,
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Epistle

(Meg Orton)

Romans 8:26-39

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written,

"For your sake we are being killed all day long;
we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered."

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Reflection – a wordless prayer

(Ian and Peter)

Ian

"We know that all things work together for good for those who love God" writes Paul to the Romans in today's epistle reading. At least that's what he says in our misleading translation which suggests that if we love God everything will be alright, sufferings will be healed, injustices will be righted and the virus will just disappear. Because God has it all under control. I'll give you a better translation of that verse in a moment. But first, do we expect God to sort things out for us if we love God enough, if we have enough faith? And if we don't expect that, then what does our faith say? What is God up to in this pandemic? Where is the mustard seed of the kingdom sprouting in our lockdown? Where is the hidden treasure, the rising yeast, of God's loving way among us? A bit too well hidden perhaps?

I'm bringing you this reflection from our hall today with Peter. In a way this is a sad space – it is all set up for Olive Way which was supposed to reopen a few weeks ago – many volunteers worked hard to prepare it. And we know that there are people in this community who are lonely and isolated and hungry and would benefit from the hospitality that we offer here. But now the hall just stands empty and will for who knows how long.

Why is this happening to us? What is God doing to fix it... if anything? And the answer is that God is hard at work here and now, loving this pandemic ravaged world, but loving it in the way that Jesus shows to us. Loving it from the bottom up, through the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, those hungry and thirsty for justice. Loving it not by taking command but by kneeling

down to wash the feet of the poor. Loving it not with lightning bolts of healing power, but with the frail and fragile hearts, hands and feet of those who love God – our hearts, hands and feet.

Because according to New Testament scholar Tom Wright in this engaging little book “God and the Pandemic”, Romans 8:28 should be translated: “In everything God works for good, with and through those who love God.” So, the theological question becomes not What is God doing? – but, what can we do with God? What is God’s spirit of love doing in and through us? What, where and how are we called to love for the good of all whom God loves?

What is the answer? What can we do? What can you do? In a moment Peter is going to share some stories of things that we are doing as a church, but first, let’s acknowledge that our personal answers to that question may be a wordless cry of helplessness. And that this wordless cry is in fact the first thing the Spirit does in us. For, writes Paul to the Romans, *the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words...* The first thing we are called to do, in response to the agony of this time, as those who love God, is to pray – but to pray without words, to sigh in the Spirit expressing our grief, our lament, our helplessness.

I like to think of this empty hall as a prayer – a prayer of longing, a silent cry to be filled, an aching lament that what is here to be offered cannot yet be received. Let’s join that prayer, sighing in the Spirit (sigh), waiting and listening together in the emptiness to find the hidden treasure, to find what it is that God the heart-searcher would have us do to love the world right now.

Peter

Hi there

Whilst the doors to the Olive Way may be closed, there are still things happening.

The Olive Way has been working with the Salvation Army to help provide hot take-away meals during the week. In addition myself and Val and continued to meet OW people at the Salvos to keep in touch. Along with some of our regular OW volunteers we have been contacting participants by phone to check on how they are travelling.

One project which we have implemented has involved collecting and distributing mobile phones. This came from a desire to maintain social connection for participants – a value that is at the heart of the Olive Way. This has been helped by a grant from the Inner North Community Foundation. This has enabled us to distribute a number of mobiles.

A couple of stories help illustrate some outcomes from this project:

One was a single mother of four children living in Brunswick. A significant portion of her Centrelink income goes on her rent leaving a small amount to cover groceries, medicine, utilities and other needs. She had spoken to her landlord about the government moratorium on evictions, but the landlord said that he would not be honouring it and there would be no change to her rental situation. She had a very old phone and was paying premium prepaid prices to connect. Consequently she rarely had any credit on her phone and would instead use other people’s phones to make appointments or contact whomever she needed. She said she was constantly embarrassed to have to ask and to make private calls when there were people listening to her conversations. We were able to offer her a year's worth of unlimited text and phone time, with a small amount of data (we keep our wifi on and available at the church door as 'spill-over' wifi, which she also uses). She was also able to have a more modern phone.

A second anecdote is of an elderly homeless man who attends the Olive Way regularly. He had no income, no Centrelink, and a series of chronic health conditions. He was ineligible for any phone service as he had no ID or any way of verifying his identity to the phone companies. Eventually he was provided with a basic phone through another Uniting Church Pastor (signed up in her name), but he was concerned about contracting the virus due to his many health complications. He asked us if we had a phone that could take the COVIDsafe app. We were

eventually able to provide him with one which could install the App. He was relieved, and whilst the effectiveness of the app is debatable, it meant that he felt safer to go about his daily business with less fear.

We continue to hold OW, the place that it holds, the people that are welcomed in it, and the wonderful and compassionate people that help us to run it, in our prayers at this time.

Offering

(Kirsty)

We make our offering. Let us ask ourselves
What can we give?
What can we do?

****MUSIC: Peter B guitar music**

Loving and generous God
We bring these gifts to you,
We bring ourselves to you,
Knowing that you greet us with love and open arms,
And that your Kingdom will come.

Amen

Prayers of the People

(Helen Burnham)

God our Father, Mother, Lover, Friend.
You are the very breath of life.

Breathe in. God with us.

All over the world people are bound together by dreams, hopes and needs. It doesn't matter what colour, race, nationality, or religion we are. Millions of us are asking, praying, for the same things.

So these are our prayers.

For life and community

We pray for a safe place to live, a home, and for enough food to feed ourselves and our families.

For sustainable agriculture which doesn't destroy and despoil the earth we depend on.

For friends and family to sustain and comfort us.

For patience and tolerance when we must live so close, and yet cannot touch and hold each other.

For freedom from violence which can erupt in families.

For care enough to reach out to those who are alone, or in need.

Breathe in. God with us

For health.

Our prayers are for those who are sick, with Covid 19 or just ordinary illness.

Open the eyes of leaders who just refuse to see the suffering of their people.

For the dying, who cannot be comforted by their families. For Doctors, nurses, paramedics, scientists, researchers, cleaners, police, workers and Government officials, who put themselves, and their families, at risk to keep some semblance of normality in our lives.

Breathe in. God with us.

For Peace

For freedom from war and the power hungry,
so we can live our lives and raise our families.

Open our minds to new ideas about what is important to us, the people not the things.

We pray that nations join together to fight climate change, saving animals from extinction, and land, sea, and the very air we breathe from greed and short sighted exploitation.

Breathe in. God with us.

For Hope

In joining together to watch Church on a screen instead of in a building.

May we find you in the small things, in the everyday things of our lives, in our homes, families, friends.

In the walks we take through the streets, gardens, bush and beside the rivers or sea, and in the very earth that sustains us.

May we know, even in our isolation, and imperfection, that you walk with us.

Breathe in. God with us

These things we pray in the name of Jesus.

Amen

Notices

(Saide)

Good morning from my kitchen this week – a place that I love to be. Following on from Peter's stories the Justice and Mission committee encourages us to check out the Olive Way page on our website for more news about this ministry. Also we'd love to receive donations of washable face masks for Olive Way guests – see the Olive Press or Facebook for details.

The Climate Action group is now meeting fortnightly on Saturdays at 5pm. Details are posted on the Events page along with Ian's weekly Zoom worship chat at 10:30am and fortnightly Table Church gatherings at 6pm.

A link to the weekly e-news from the Assembly is now being shared on our Olive Press post – this week's news includes reflections from the Uniting Church President and Moderators.

For all this and more visit the Olive Press on our website and keep an eye on our Facebook Group for other interesting stories and news.

SONG: Amazing Grace TIS129

- 1. Amazing grace (how sweet the sound)
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
was blind, but now I see.*
- 2. 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
and grace my fears relieved;
how precious did that grace appear
the hour I first believed!*
- 3. Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come,
God's grace has brought me safe thus far,
and grace will lead me home.*
- 4. The Lord has promised good to me,
his word my hope secures;
he will my shield and portion be
as long as life endures.*

SONG: [Amazing Grace](#), by John Newton 1725-1807,
from [Together in Song](#), Harper Collins *Religious* PUBLIC DOMAIN

Blessing and Sending

(Ian and Meg)

Meg: Matthew 13: 33

He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”

Ian:

As we move now out into the world
as Christ’s people:
go to grow as a seed of God’s reign;
go to seek the treasure of Christ’s love;
and may the holy Spirit
who is making all things new,
like yeast bubbling up through
a whole batch of dough,
continue to bring to birth new things through you.

Go with the blessing of the love
from which nothing can separate us:
from the Source of all love,
by the Son of all love,
through the Spirit of all love.

In the name of Christ. Amen.

Thank You

... we do not know how to pray as we ought,
but the Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.
(Romans 8:26)

Ministers

Rev Ian Ferguson
Dave Hall
Peter Blair

Liturgist

Kirsty Bennett

Acknowledgement of country

Benjamin Qi-En Hon

Bible readings

Meg Orton
Bridie Turner

Artwork: Abel Pann

<https://freebibleimages.org>

Children’s time

Dave and Clara Hall
Voices:
Greta and Rowan
Amelie and Matilda
Hoth
Hudson
Harriet and Clementine
Oscar

Musicians

Alistair Hunter (co-
ordinator)
James Balsillie
Courtney Rodhe
Shawn Whelan
Daniel Whelan
Natalie Sims
Saide Cameron

Guitar music

“Cantilena de los Bosques”
by Leo Brouwer.
Played by Peter Blair

Prayers of the people

Helen Burnham

Notices

Saide Cameron

Production

Shawn Whelan
Saide Cameron
Ian Ferguson
Dave Hall
Jane Allardice