

Tamworth City Uniting Church

Worship on 24th May 2020



Acknowledgement of Country

As you enter this time of worship please acknowledge the custodianship of this land by the Kamilaroi peoples - the traditional owners of this land and pay respect to their elders – past, present and emerging.

Call to Worship

This is the place and this is the time;
here and now God waits to break into our experience.

To change our minds, to change our lives,
to change our ways.

To make us see the world and the whole of life in a new light;
to fill us with hope joy and certainty for the future.

This is the place, as are all places;
this is the time, as are all times.

God of this place, and every place,
God of this time, and all time,
here and now, we praise you.

from *Be Our Freedom Lord*, ed. Terry C Falla, Open Book Publishers, 1994

Song *Jesus calls us here to meet him* TiS 477

Jesus calls us here to meet him as, through word and song and prayer,
we affirm God's promised presence where his people live and care.
Praise the God who keeps his promise; praise the Son who calls us friends;
praise the Spirit who, among us, to our hopes and fears attends.

Jesus calls us to confess him Word of Life and Lord of All,
sharer of our flesh and frailness saving all who fail or fall.
Tell his holy human story; tell his tales that all may hear;
tell the world that Christ in glory came to earth to meet us here.

Jesus calls us to each other: found in him are no divides.
Race and class and sex and language such are barriers he derides.
Join the hand of friend and stranger; join the hands of age and youth;
join the faithful and the doubter in their common search for truth.

TiS 477 alt. tune: 590 (What a friend we have in Jesus)
John L Bell and Graham Maule. Copied under CCLI Worship Licence No. 604439

Prayers

God of this time and all time, we praise you!

Take a moment to praise God for who God is.

Silence

Now let's bring to God those times when we have been less than followers of Christ

God of abundant relationship
we know that at times we don't always seek relationship with our fellow human beings.
There are times when we fail to see you in those whom we meet on a daily basis.
God, forgive us for ignoring and bypassing you, who is in each one of us.

Silence

God of abundant relationship
even within our church community we know there are times when there are fractures and rifts
– sometimes caused by people wanting their own way; sometimes caused when we take the
easy way out instead of grappling with issues; sometimes caused because we fail to love as
Jesus loved.

God, forgive us for failing to seek unity within your body.

Silence

God of abundant relationship
we know that as a society we have failed to care for the world, of which we are a part, in a
way that maintains health and well-being for all your creatures.
God, forgive us for fracturing our relationship with your creation, and thus with you.

Silence

God of abundant relationship,
we pray these prayers in and through the name of the one who showed us how to live in life-
giving and wholesome ways – Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Declaration of Forgiveness

Hear God's words of grace spoken by Christ:
'Your sins are forgiven.'

Thanks be to God!

A Reading from the Book of Acts Acts 1:6-14

⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷ He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” ⁹ When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. ¹¹ They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.” ¹² Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day’s journey away. ¹³ When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. ¹⁴ All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

Song *Why stare at heaven’s distant blue*

‘Why stare at heaven’s distant blue when Christ has told you what to do?
Your gaze won’t draw the clouds back down that rose with glory from the ground.
Your Lord now reigns in realms above. Await God’s wind and show God’s love.’

Deep silence fell upon the air, and earth seemed lonely, hard and bare,
and where Christ’s friends had fixed their eyes stood only sun and cloud and skies.
Then with a slow reluctant gait they walked toward home to pray and wait.

That congregation lived between a well-marked past and things unseen.
With Christ no longer at their side, directly there to teach and guide,
they sought through prayer with one accord the will of their ascended Lord.

May we be disciplined to face with that young church’s patient grace
the prayerful, seeking waiting days that are a part of heaven’s ways,
by which we learn how we depend on God to send the flame and wind.

Tune: TiS 375 Thomas H Troeger. Used with permission

The Gospel John 17:1-11

17 After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, ² since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³ And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴ I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. ⁵ So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

⁶ “I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷ Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸ for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹ I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the

world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. ¹⁰ All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. ¹¹ And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

Message

At this moment of time we, in Australia, and indeed the rest of the world, could be said to be waiting:

Waiting for restrictions to be lifted

Waiting for life to get back to normal – whatever normal might be

Waiting to go on holidays again

Waiting for family and friends to come and visit in the way they always have

Waiting to resume work in our usual work places – that is if we have work to go back to

Waiting to see if we can indeed get a job

Waiting for a vaccine that will enable us to get on with life in the way we've always known.

For some, it is a time of waiting for death as infrastructure in many countries is unable to cope with the catastrophe that is the coronavirus

For still others, it is a time of waiting for leadership that has been found wanting, to be ousted and you could add your own list of what you have been waiting for.

But perhaps for others of us, this time has not been all that different to what has been happening for us over the past few years.

In our reading from Acts, the disciples could be said to have been in a time of waiting.

Let's just recap a few of the things that we read in Luke's account of what is known as Jesus' ascension.

Firstly, Jesus tells the disciples that they will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them and that they will witness to him – not only in Jerusalem but beyond its boundaries to the ends of the earth.

Secondly, we have an account of Jesus ascending in a cloud and disappearing from the disciples' sight – an angel tells them that he has been taken up into heaven. It's a bit of a stretch of the imagination, but I think we have to realise that what Luke is doing here is telling the story symbolically, just as he did in the story of Jesus' baptism where a dove – representing the Spirit, appeared, and when – as we will hear next week, he has the Spirit appearing as wind and fire at Pentecost. This symbolism is a wonderful way to tell a story which has, at its core, life and hope.

Thirdly, the disciples go back to Jerusalem where, we are told, they constantly devoted themselves to prayer, along with certain women.

They were waiting.

They were waiting in an in between time – not quite knowing what to expect but hoping that Jesus' promise would eventuate. When we celebrate Pentecost next week we are reminded once again that his promise was indeed fulfilled.

I think it's important to note how they spent their waiting time.

Of course we're not told the whole story as Luke gives only the bare bones. But for him it was important to let his readers know that they constantly devoted themselves to prayer.

Obviously for the disciples it was important for them to maintain contact with the God whom they saw exemplified in Jesus.

At the end of this waiting time their lives were transformed by the gift of God's Spirit.

As we wait out the effects and ravages of the Coronavirus we might ask ourselves, 'How are we using this in between time?'

I've read of and heard about people using the time to hone up on skills that they haven't used for some time. Indeed I am one of this group as I've set myself the goal of practising the piano on a regular basis – something that I haven't done for quite some time. Others are learning new skills, still others are taking the time to read more, and I read of one person who has used this time to re-establish relationships that he had let slide in his pre-coronavirus days. There are still others – of all faiths, who are taking the time to draw closer to God through longer and more regular times of meditation, prayer and study of their scriptures. As disciples of Jesus, and particularly as a community of faith, we have an opportunity – untrammelled by the busyness of life, to think about what might be awaiting us when we emerge from this in between time – this time of waiting.

Do we go back to old ways of being?

What might be the challenges that will confront us?

Will we need to relate to people in a different way?

What might be the promise that Jesus gives us as we walk into a different future?

In our gospel readings over the last few weeks, we've been looking at a long speech from Jesus in the gospel of John, a speech usually known as the "farewell discourse". Here the author has Jesus talking to his disciples about how to prepare for his departure: for life when he was no longer physically with them.

Much of what Jesus says in this discourse is about relationship: about the relationship between him and his father, between him and his disciples and between his disciples and God, and our reading for today carries on this theme. For me, the last verse crystallises the importance of this relationship. Here, Jesus is praying that those first disciples – and indeed us his disciples in this day and age, may be one – just as he and God are one.

This passage has often been used to stress the importance of unity. We might ask ourselves what unity means. Is it about a group of people thinking the same thoughts? Is it about a group of people always agreeing? Is it about a group of people never having a disagreement? I don't think so! For me, unity is all about relationship.

I was talking with a colleague about this the other day and he mentioned that a good example of unity can be seen in our National Cabinet which includes premiers, chief ministers and the Prime Ministers, along with health officials. In this cabinet there are people who have different ideologies, different perspectives on life, different political stances, different personalities, and yet who have worked – over the last couple of months, at building relationships in order to get our country through a difficult time. We know it hasn't been perfect but I think it has been a great effort on their part.

When we come out the other end of this waiting time my hope that the things they have learnt through building relationships and trust and working for the common good will carry on into other aspects of our national life.

What might this have to say to us – Jesus' disciples, who continue to live through this waiting time?

Well maybe we can continue to build our relationship with God.

Maybe we can take the time to think about how we interact with people who might hold a different viewpoint to us and ask ourselves, 'Where might God be in this?'

Maybe we can learn new and creative ways of injecting life into relationships that have become mundane and life-sapping.

Maybe we can think about restoring relationships that have been fractured in some way and as we do this, seek God's help.

Jesus said, 'This is eternal life: to know the only true God, and to know Christ, whom God sent.'

These words are what our life as Jesus' disciples is all about. It is for this relationship, for this dance of love between God, Jesus, the Spirit and us, that we exist. Certainly, as Christ's disciples, we are called to reach out to the world with God's love and mercy, but that mission finds its source and its energy from within the dance of love - the life of God.

Relationships take time to be built, to be nurtured and to grow. If our relationships with God and each other are to deepen, then we need to spend time in attending to them.

If love is to flourish and grow, we need the gift of "in-between" times, the pauses between chapters of activity.

Let's accept, as a gift, this 'in between time' that the Coronavirus has forced upon us.

A gift that gives us time to strengthen our relationships.

Let's seize this opportunity to be more fully drawn into the eternal dance of love that is the inner life of God.

Song *Like the murmur of the dove's song*

Like the murmur of the dove's song, like the challenge of her flight,
like the vigour of the wind's rush, like the new flame's eager might:
come, Holy Spirit, come.

To the members of Christ's body, to the branches of the Vine,
to the church in faith assembled, to its midst as gift and sign:
come, Holy Spirit, come.

With the healing of division, with the ceaseless voice of prayer,
with the power to love and witness, with the peace beyond compare:
come, Holy Spirit, come.

TiS 419 Carl Pickens Daw. Copied under CCLI Worship Licence No. 604439

Prayers of the People

(Prepared by Margaret Cupitt)

Eternal Father through our Saviour Jesus, who is both Christ the King and the Son of Man and who understands our needs and the needs of this world, we pray for your church here in Tamworth; We pray that you will draw us together and unite us in the love of Christ that we may proclaim with one voice your justice and righteousness in a broken world.

Loving God help us reach out to one another with greater love and better understanding; we pray for our homes, our relatives, our neighbours and our friends, particularly those who do not yet realise the extent of your love for them.

We pray for those who are sick, housebound or in hospital; surround the frightened with your tenderness; give strength to those in pain; hold the weak in your arms of love, and give hope and patience to those who are recovering

Let us pray that our minds and hearts may be filled with all that is good, pure and noble and so become living examples of God's love for us.

We pray for all those who are working for understanding and tolerance in our multi-faith world. We pray especially that we will take the lead in building bridges of friendship and understanding with peoples of other faiths in our neighbourhood.

We pray for the destitute and displaced in our midst. May those responsible and those with the power, show compassion and help the poorest in society. We think of those who fear for their lives, for those being met by violence of word and action,

For the hurt that engulfs warring communities,

For the abused, neglected and isolated,
For the hurt, aching and unloved through broken relationship,
For the ones who have lost faith and who seek revenge.

We ask for your help in being a light in every place you've given us to walk. Give us care and wisdom as we live and work with one another. Help us to look to another's needs before our own, and to always be ready to serve those around us by the power of your love within us. Even in every dark and broken place, for the times we feel like we're barely making it through, give us your joy Lord, your grace, and the powerful presence of your peace.

We pray for all those in authority, for every leader of our nation, that you would give them your wisdom and discernment as they lead trying to find the best solution/s to protect us from this COVID19; that lives will be saved and a cure found.

We pray that their hearts would be directed first to you, that they would recognize where their true help and strength come from. We ask that you guard their coming and going, that you would be their refuge and their peace. We pray that you would surround every leader with wise counsel, that they would be humble and kind, patient and loving through their actions and words. We pray that their faith in you would be unwavering, strong, resolute, and firm. Dear God, We know that you are with us and you care for your people. We believe that it's not by might, nor by power, but by your Spirit, that you make a difference in our world; we pray that we bring honour to Your name today, for You alone are worthy. All these things we pray in Jesus Name, Amen

Song *Filled with the Spirit's power*

Filled with the Spirit's power, with one accord
the infant church confessed its risen Lord:
O Holy Spirit, in the church today
no less your power of fellowship display.

Now with the mind of Christ set us on fire,
that unity may be our great desire:
give joy and peace; give faith to hear your call,
and readiness in each to work for all.

Widen our love, good Spirit, to embrace
in your strong care all those of every race:
like wind and fire with life among us move
till we are known as Christ's and Christians prove.

TiS 411 John R Peacey. Copied under CCLI Worship Licence No. 604439

The Benediction

This day, may you know the peace of God that passes all understanding.
This day, may you know the love of God as found in Jesus, God's son.
This day, may you know the assurance of God's Spirit with you.

And the blessing of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit
be with you at this time and in the days to come.
Amen!

Thanks to Ron Greer for suggesting tunes for the hymns