

Tamworth City Uniting Church

Worship on 14th June 2020



Acknowledgement of Country

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

Call to Worship

Give praise to God who calls us to worship:
the one who is the source of our life.

Give praise to God who dances within our life:
the Spirit of grace, the Spirit of truth.

Give praise to God who calls us to follow:
**the one who calls us by name,
who saves us and brings us abundant life,
Jesus, the Messiah, the Christ.**

Prayer

Generous and loving God, as we come to worship you this day,
may our hearts be open to your Spirit moving within us,
may our minds be open to your Word,
and may this time of worship bring us closer to you. Amen.

Song *For the fruits of all creation*

For the fruits of all creation, thanks be to God;
for his gifts to every nation, thanks be to God;
for the ploughing, sowing reaping, silent growth while we are sleeping,
future needs in earth's safe keeping, thanks be to God.

In the just reward of labour, God's will is done;
in the help we give our neighbour God's will is done;

in our worldwide task of caring for the hungry and despairing,
in the harvests we are sharing, God's will is done.

For the harvests of the Spirit, thanks be to God;
for the good we all inherit, thanks be to God;
for all the wonders that astound us, for the truths that still confound us,
most of all, that love has found us, thanks be to God.

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Prayer

(based on the Psalm for today: *Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19*)

I love you, Lord!

How could I not love you when you always respond to my cries?
You are always ready to listen to me, so I will bring my needs to you as long as I live.

How can I ever repay you, Lord?

What gift could ever express my gratitude?

I will raise my glass in your honour, I will name you as the one who saved me.
I will make good on all I promised you, Lord, and I'll let everyone know it's for you.

Whenever one of your faithful people dies it affects you deeply.

Lord, you have released me from my chains.

I will serve you forever, just as my forebears have done.

I will bring a gift to say thanks; I will pray to you, and you alone.

I will be true to the vows I've made; and I won't keep it hidden.

In full view of all your people, in the public place of worship,

I'll do all I promised you, Lord.

All the praise and all the credit are your, Lord!

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Prayer of Confession

For our Prayers of Confession this week I invite you to spend some time in prayer without the printed word. Our theme for today is 'Discipleship: 'What does it mean to 'Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons, and be Jesus' hands, hearts and feet for the people we meet on a daily basis?'

You might like to reflect on the times when you have been less than faithful in being a disciple of Jesus, and have a conversation with God about this.

Assurance of Forgiveness

Hear God's words of forgiveness spoken through Christ:

You are loved by God; you are forgiven by God.

Go and sin no more.

Thanks be to God!

Song *Help us, O Lord, to learn*

Help us, O Lord, to learn the truths your word imparts:
to study that your laws may be inscribed upon our hearts.

Help us, O Lord, to live the faith which we proclaim,
that all our thoughts and words and deeds may glorify your name.

Help us, O Lord, to teach the beauty of your ways,
that all who seek may find the Christ, and live a life of praise.

TiS 428 William Watkins Reid. Copied under CCLI Worship Licence No. 604439

The Gospel Reading

Matthew 9:35-10:8

³⁵ Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸ therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

10 Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. ² These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, ⁶ but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷ As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.

Message

Last week we looked at Jesus’ commission to his disciples: “Go therefore into all the world and **make disciples** of all nation and lo I am with you always to the end of the age’, and what this means for us both as individuals and as community of faith. In part of today’s passage we hear about what it means to **be a disciple**. We read that Jesus sent out his disciples to *proclaim the good news that the kingdom of heaven has come near, and to cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers and cast out demons.*

The Rev Bill Loader, in his commentary on this passage, asks the question: *How is your ministry of healing and exorcism going these days?* He goes on to say that *we mostly shy away from such commissions; they are, at most, imitated in fringe groups. But if we ignore them, we are ignoring something central to the task of ministry.*

We might find that a commission such as the one Jesus gave his disciples makes us feel somewhat uneasy. I don’t know about you, but I haven’t encountered anybody whom I thought was possessed by demons. Nor have I been able to make someone who was ill recover physically, brought a dead person back to life or cleansed lepers.

If we do find this passage discomfiting or unsettling and not really speaking to us in any meaningful way then perhaps we could ask ourselves: If we can’t relate to it, can we look at it from another perspective?

In order to do this I’m suggesting that we might ask ourselves questions such as:
Who are the those in our society who are pushed to the margins?

What are the powers that bind us and others – preventing us from living fulfilled, hopeful and free lives?

By asking these questions we can then start to think about how we might be the bearers of the Good News to the outcast and to those who are bound by forces beyond their control – including ourselves.

As I've watched and read news reports of the protest marches – firstly in America and then across the world, including here in Australia, I have been reminded, once again, of the millions of people throughout the world who have been pushed to the margins of society. People whose lives are held, by some, to be of little account. People who have struggled to make their voices heard down through the centuries. People – both black and white, who have fought for justice and have discovered that it seems to be one step forward and three steps back in achieving it. People who have been bound by unjust structures of government and society and by the ingrained racism that is alive and well in so many places, If Jesus were here today – in the flesh, and sending us out to be his disciples what might he say to us? Would it be something like any of the following:

I am sending you out to stand in solidarity with people of colour. Walk peacefully with your indigenous brothers and sisters as they protest. Get to know them, listen to their stories, read all you can about the long history of the first peoples of this country and what has happened since colonisation. Learn about black deaths in custody and the recommendations of the Royal Commission – most of which haven't been implemented properly. Learn about how a percentage of our indigenous brothers and sisters are still pushed to the edges and given little voice in affairs that matter to them. Pick up a pen and paper or, if email is your thing use it, and write to your local member, the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, the Prime Minister seeking their urgent attention to address the unacceptable number of black deaths in custody. Maybe Jesus might not use those words but I reckon his words may well have much the same intent.

Of course there are other people who are often pushed to the margins: the homeless, the drug addicts, the alcoholics, and people with disabilities. I invite you to consider what Jesus might say to us as he commissions us to spread the Good News to people who are suffering in these ways.

What might be other forces in our world that bind people today?

In this era of economic rationalism there seems, at least to me, to be a marked bias towards the rich becoming richer at the expense of the poor and where the health and growth of the economy is put ahead of the needs of those who are least able to survive in life-giving ways. Statistics tell us that the number of people living in poverty in Australia is increasing. Our Prime Minister's statement 'Anyone who has a go will be able to get a go', does not apply to a lot of those who are caught up in the vicious cycles of unemployment and poverty. These cycles – so often brought about by government policy and the attitudes of some of the general public, are powerful forces that bind people with despair, hopelessness and lack of self-worth.

Allied to this is the growth of individualism which says, 'it's all about me. As long as I am okay, have a job, concentrate on my family and what I am able to achieve, then nothing else matters much'. Individualism is the very antithesis of what society should be about. When we care only about ourselves then we forget those for whom life is hard, we forget to celebrate together, we forget to make relationships that will enrich and bring joy to our lives and the lives of others. Individualism can be a thing that binds us, leaving no room for the 'other' in our lives - often closing our eyes to the suffering that is going on around us, often making us apathetic and unconcerned.

As we meet people who are in the midst of these circumstances, Jesus might well say to us: Take with you, on your journey of discipleship, the compassion and love that I have shown you. Meet people - whoever they are and wherever they might be, and listen to them with respect. Open your ears, eyes, hearts and minds to the pain and suffering of others. Offer your support in whatever way is best for them. Give encouragement and bring hope in whatever way you can. As you do this, build relationships that show it is only through a community that cares and shows compassion for each other, that lives are able to be transformed.

There are many powers and systems in our country that put people down, that treat people as numbers or names on a piece of paper, rather than as human beings, that see everything through the eyes of profit rather than through the eyes of humanity. These powers can be personal or governmental. They can be abusive and controlling either through what we do to ourselves or what someone else does to us. They bind us so that our lives become less joyful, purposeless, dissatisfied, Jesus preached and lived a gospel that said: I want to free you from all that binds you. I want you to live lives that are fulfilled and happy. I want you to experience the love that I offer you.

Jesus sent his disciples out over two thousand years ago and commissioned them to preach and live the gospel that he lived and proclaimed.

And so he sends us out as well. As we've thought about what Jesus' words might be to us, his modern day disciples, you will have noticed that words such as acceptance, respect, love, allowing people to share their stories and walking with people in their struggles are a common theme. These words are not words that are just said. They are words that are a way of being – a way of living the Kingdom that Jesus showed us.

The road of discipleship is a road that changes us as we interact with people to whom we are called and sent to show God's love, compassion and justice. Each of us will do it differently, according to our personality, our age, physical ability and experience. But at all times we will, like those first disciples, need to rely on the presence of God's Spirit with us. A Spirit which will encourage us, pull us into line when needed, give us a push or a shove when we are hesitant, equip us, teach us and, in the process, transform us. May each one of us in our own way and according to our circumstances in life know, that as we follow Christ's example, we are bringing God's Kingdom closer for those to whom we proclaim the Gospel.

Song *Help us accept each other*

Help us accept each other as Christ accepted us;
teach us as sister, brother, each person to embrace.
Be present, Lord, among us and bring us to believe
we are ourselves accepted and meant to love and live.

Teach us, O Lord, your lessons, as in our daily life
we struggle to be human and search for hope and faith.
Teach us to care for people, for all – not just for some,
to love them as we find them or as they may become.

Let your acceptance change us, so that we may be moved
in living situations to do the truth in love;
to practise your acceptance until we know by heart
the table of forgiveness and laughter's healing art.

Lord, for today's encounters with all who are in need
who hunger for acceptance, for righteousness and bread,
we need new eyes for seeing, new hands for holding on:
renew us with your Spirit; Lord, free us, make us one!

TiS 648 Frederik Herman Kaan. Copied under CCLI Worship Licence No. 604439

Prayers of the People

(prepared by Norm Dezius)

Our church family, with deep longing for the bread and cup of life, turns to you our God from whom all good gifts come and pray for the people of the world and at home here in Tamworth.

Lord we need a vaccine, in so many areas of our life today in June 2020, God of Love and Peace, we need a healing of the sin of racism. As people walk the streets of more than 75 cities in the United States, demonstrating against the deaths of African-American citizens, others are demonstrating in solidarity across the globe. We need to be made whole Lord, and lift our voices to proclaim, as you demonstrated so many times, that all lives matter. For we, your people, desperately need a vaccine, a healing, a sense that the desperate pain we are feeling will come to an end.

All of this comes in the midst of the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic, which continues to sicken and kill people throughout the world, even as governments and the W.H.O disagree on how best to contain and control the spread of the virus. Italy is reopening its borders, while the death toll in Brazil has passed 30,000, and cases in the African continent exceed 160,000, even as statistics everywhere are uncertain and knowledge of the behaviour of the virus remains the subject of intense medical and immunological research, lord we need a vaccine! We pray for the untold millions of refugees around the world, that the conjunction of Refugee Week and the coronavirus pandemic will awaken us to our shared humanity. We need a vaccine, God of All People, a healing for our troubled bodies and spirits. We long for an intervention into the human family, that world-wide turmoil fed by rivalries between nations and cultures will be defused by a new and heartfelt desire for peace.

We need a vaccine for indigenous peoples and minority groups subjected to entrenched discrimination, for domestic violence sufferers that their cry for justice, safety and intervention and respect will be heard. We pray for all who have lost their livelihood from the downturn in industry in Tamworth, that they will find other work and are supported as they endeavour to move forward and provide for their families. We need a **vaccine** for the elderly among us who are worried, neglected or abused, cut off from family members so that they will receive your spirit and the communities care, which is their right.

We pray Lord and need a vaccine for the direction our services will take into the future and we pray for our Minister Rev. Betty, the Church Council, the Elders and Pastoral Partners, for our Moderator Rev. Simon and our church family while these issues are thought through and prayers lifted to you to guide and direct us . We pray Lord for a vaccine for the ill and those grieving for a recently deceased , and for those whose loved ones anniversary of death occurs around this time, that they will be reassured that their loved one is welcomed at the banquet of eternal life.

Driven to our knees by the loss ,pain and uncertainty, our minds and hearts are filled with questions and doubts, our spirits often at their lowest ebb in these recent days, we turn to you, the Trinity, in desperation for a vaccine, knowing that only in you can we find comfort and healing. We seek a vaccine for those things we cannot seem to get right on our own. And, though we are not yet able to sing in our churches, we each and all can sing on our own, so we lift our voices, to lift our spirits in private song, this week. Amen.

Song *We are your people: Spirit of grace*

We are your people; Spirit of grace,
you dare to make us to all our neighbours,
Christ's living voice, hands and face.

Joined in community, treasured and fed,
may we discover gifts in each other,
willing to lead and be led.

Rich in diversity, help us to live
closer than neighbours, open to strangers,
able to clash and forgive.

Glad of tradition, help us to see
in all life's changing, where you are leading,
where our best efforts should be.

Give as we venture justice and care
(peaceful, resisting, waiting or risking)
wisdom to know when and where.

Christ, as we serve you in different ways,
may all we're doing show that you're living,
meeting your love with our praise.

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Blessing

Go forth into the world in peace.
Be of good courage, hold fast to that which is good,
render to no-one evil for evil.
Support the weak, comfort the afflicted, love and honour all people,
always relying on the power of the Holy Spirit.
And the blessing of God - Father, Son and Spirit,
be with you this day, and remain with you always.

Amen!