

Tamworth City Uniting Church

Worship for 21 June 2020



CALL TO WORSHIP:

If you are thirsty, come and drink.

If you are pursued by worry, come and be still.

If you are overwhelmed, come and rest.

God hears the cries of the distressed and comes to the aid of the afflicted.

You, O God, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call on you.

God is gracious and will gladden our souls.

We will sing to God our rock and our redeemer. **AMEN.**

HYMN TIS 83: (Let us with a gladsome mind)

1. Let us with a gladsome mind

Praise the Lord, for he is kind:

for his mercies shall endure,
ever faithful, ever sure.

2. Let us blaze his name abroad,

for of gods he is the God:

for his mercies shall endure,
ever faithful, ever sure.

3. He, with all-commanding might
filled the new-made world with light:
for his mercies shall endure,
ever faithful, ever sure.
4. All things living he doth feed,
his full hand supplies their need:
for his mercies shall endure,
ever faithful, ever sure.
5. He his chosen race did bless
in the wasteful wilderness:
for his mercies shall endure,
ever faithful, ever sure.
6. Let us then with gladsome mind
praise the Lord, for he is kind:
for his mercies shall endure,
ever faithful, ever sure.

John Milton 1608-74 alt.

GREETING:

Good morning to you all, wherever you may be. At this time may you feel the blessing of the presence of God and the fellowship of all who are worshipping Him (though physically apart for the present).

Let us give thanks for all in our congregation who have supported us in their prayers and efforts to keep in touch, and especially Nicolette and Rev. Betty for the online contact and church services.

Also let us remember our own church at East Tamworth and the many ways in which we have got to know each other here in acts of worship and service. As we remember and celebrate the foundation of the Uniting Church 43 years ago, let us praise God for its growth and witness over the years, for its leaders and its witness and for the opportunities it has given us to know and serve our Lord in a variety of ways.

PRAYER OF PRAISE AND ADORATION:

We praise and adore you, O God, for doing wondrous things in our lives - for loving and forgiving us. Even when we become distracted by the events of our daily existence, we are aware of your divine activity in our lives, prompting us to deepen our trust in you. Your desire for us to live full and abundant lives has been realised in and through Jesus, your most wondrous gift of all. He is surely the everlasting sign of your steadfast love towards us, and all people. He is the assurance that we are known intimately and valued by you in ways beyond our human understanding. May our praise and adoration for such goodness towards us be visible, as we respond to Jesus' appeal to take up our cross and follow him. This we pray in Jesus' name. **AMEN.**

READING: *(This is a paraphrase of Psalm 86, from Leslie F. Brandt)*

O Lord, my prayer to You always comes out of a life full of need.

I am Your servant; I am trying to represent You.

I need Your support for every step I take.

How gracious You are to hear my plea and respond to my cry
and pour out Your forgiving love upon me!
People are so foolish about the things they love and worship.
You alone are God, and You alone possess the healing grace
that can support and sustain fickle hearts.
Continue to lead me in Your course for my life.
Enable me to walk, body and soul, in loving obedience to You.
Then I shall glorify You forever, and my life shall be a
continual thankoffering to You.

I find the daily journey not only difficult but painful.
There are forces within me and around me that overpower me.
But You are a loving and patient God.
Continue to have mercy upon me
to stir me from the doldrums of sin,
to deliver me from selfish involvements,
to forgive my sins and failures,
to shore up the weak places in my life.
Help me
feel Your loving acceptance and reflect to others the
joys of being Your child and servant.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Lord Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace, you warn us today that you have not come to bring peace, but a sword. Forgive us for believing in 'peace at any price', forgetting that the cost of peace for you was a life spent challenging and defeating the power of evil and sin.

Pierce our weakness with your strength and give us courage to confront behaviour which is contrary to all you teach us.

Strip away all that prevents us from exercising faith and courage in the face of injustice. Penetrate the defences we erect around ourselves and help us offer the gift of vulnerability to others.

Cut through our efforts to protect ourselves at the expense of the wellbeing and peace of mind of others.

Expose the fearfulness that shapes much of our decision making and replace it with the courage of your convictions.

Lord Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace, give us your strength we pray.

Empower us with your Spirit to be bearers of love and peace and reconciliation, so that we can follow wherever you lead us. Amen.

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

Jesus died and rose again so that we might experience "newness of life so we can consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Jesus Christ". (*Romans 6: 4b,11*)

The good news therefore is this: in Jesus Christ our sins are forgiven.

Thanks be to God!

HYMN TIS 619: (Have faith in God, my heart)

1. Have faith in God, my heart,
trust and be unafraid;
God will fulfill in every part
each promise he has made.

2. Have faith in God, my mind,
though oft your light burns low;
God's mercy holds a wiser plan
than you can fully know.
3. Have faith in God, my soul,
his cross for ever stands;
and neither life nor death can pluck
his children from his hands.
4. Lord Jesus, make me whole;
grant me no resting place
until I rest, heart, mind and soul,
the captive of your grace.

Bryn Austin Rees 1911-83 alt.

GOSPEL READING: Matthew 10: 24 - 32

Matthew 10:24-32 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

²⁴ “A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; ²⁵ it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

Whom to Fear

²⁶ “So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. ²⁷ What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. ²⁸ Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰ And even the hairs of your head are all counted. ³¹ So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

³² “Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven;

REFLECTION: "DO NOT BE AFRAID!"

The theme of much of this chapter from Matthew's Gospel is confessing Christ publicly - being his disciple and following in his steps. In the chapter, Jesus is sending the twelve disciples to "proclaim the good news of the coming of the kingdom of heaven". He warns them that they will be like "sheep in the midst of wolves" and that they will likely suffer much hardship in carrying out his work.

When Matthew wrote down these words later, there was still real danger for those who proclaimed Christ - they too were hated and persecuted and so Matthew tells how Jesus said to the twelve: "Don't be afraid". These words are repeated several times in this chapter and indeed they are to be found at least 365 times in the Scriptures

Certainly, it is a command that is still very relevant to us today for fear - in some form or other - assails so many people. Many of the fears are family-oriented, often relating to their safety – at school – at work – on the roads. Then there all the threats that seem to magnify when we wake through the night and can't get back to sleep. Can we survive financial downturns, fears about climate change, terrorist threats, health – and currently, getting safely through this Corona Virus pandemic? When we read the

newspapers or watch television, we are confronted with the fearful conditions across the world where people are faced with far greater threats. We fear for them and their futures. It is not too difficult for these fears to overwhelm us about life and the future.

Jesus' words in this chapter tell us that that life will not always be smooth, even for those who follow him. I guess that there is a danger of the Christian Faith's being presented as something which, if taken like the dosage of a universal medicine, can magically clear away the troubles of life and guarantee lasting happiness. Not so! Christians are not immune from the storms of life, which can result in feelings of fear, doubt, pain, confusion. You need not think that your beliefs are in vain because such times do come and they will have to be entered into and gone through, with degrees of endurance and suffering. You are not required to always present a smile that is as false as those on the faces of people in TV advertisements. Christians are human beings – God's children reclaimed and reaffirmed by Him, yes - but human beings still, and as such are never completely free from the storms of this life or the hungers of this world, and so are always in need of the grace of God whereby help and sustenance are theirs so that their fears are allayed.

We are told by Jesus to be not afraid, not because our circumstances are not frightening, but because such things do not have the final word for us. Rather we are told to take such fears to him

There is a story told of a seeker who met Jesus on a lonely road. "Lord", inquired the pilgrim, "after all the people had been fed with the bread and fish, you said to your disciples: 'Gather up the fragments left over that nothing may be lost.' What are the fragments that must be gathered up so that nothing will be lost?" Jesus answered: "The fragments are your fears, which multiply like the loaves and fish and fill more baskets than you can carry by yourself. These must not be lost. Instead, they must be brought to me, so that I may bear them with you." ¹.

When our fears seem to multiply, they can lead to doubts about our ability to hand them over as easily as suggested in that story. We can even fear that we are so insignificant and powerless that God will not be bothered with our concerns. I think that Jesus knew of the doubts that could cloud our faith and so he went further in his encouragement to his followers.

He went on to say the most amazing thing to his disciples, something that he says to each of us today. It is a statement that gives to us the strength to be able to take our fears to him and to know that he will receive them, seeing into our hearts and minds, replacing those fears with his strength as he accepts us as we are and promises his presence to free us from them. All this because he assures us of his constant love that knows us and values us for who we are, just as we are.

Jesus tells us this amazing thing in words so simple that they ring with a truth that cannot be doubted. "Don't be afraid," said Jesus a second time. "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father." And then a third time: "Even the very hairs of your head are numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows." Jesus is saying to us that, whatever our fears, God is aware and God cares. It is for us to simply accept the assurance of how intimate and complete is God's knowledge and, even more, his acceptance and value of us.

In everything that Jesus said and did, He proclaimed that God is a loving God who wants to be with His people, to comfort, to help, to uplift, to save, and who has power to do this. We are told in Mark that Jesus' heart went out in compassion to the large crowd which had followed him into the wilderness, and by a miracle He fed them. We are being told that it is in Jesus that God offers help to all His people, caught in predicaments largely of their own making and hungering for answers to their need. In forgiveness of our weaknesses, we experience new life that is sustained and nurtured by the food of His presence.

The feeding of the five thousand is followed in John by the incident where the disciples are caught in a small boat upon the Lake. A sudden storm arises, a fierce wind blows, the waves threaten to overwhelm them. Out of the darkness, Jesus comes to them across the water, saying: "It is I; do not be afraid". Jesus was assuring the frightened followers that God's presence was with them; and, as He did so, they reached the land safely to where they were going. Note that it does not say that the storm was taken away, but rather that they were brought through it.

Yes, there are times when we find ourselves in troubles. We are confused; we do not see the way ahead clearly. Problems surround us; disastrous things happen that would seem to rob life of its meaning.

Let us embrace the Good News that God has come in Jesus to provide for us, to guide us safely through the storms; so that in clinging to Jesus, we cling to God and to His gift of eternal life, which is our final destination. We need no longer fear. Rather, as Ephesians says, our challenge is to experience the breadth, length, height and depth of the love of Christ that passes knowledge, so that we will be filled with all the fullness of God. We, individually and as the Church, are called to step out in the name of Him who defeats the things we fear; and our commission is to lead others to live in the way of Christ who comes to save and to empower. We do this as our lives are rooted and grounded in love - the love of God - a love so strong that it releases a power within us that is able to accomplish far more than all we can ask or imagine, to make us His children, the agents of His love to others.

The Good News is that we need fear neither life nor death, neither today nor tomorrow. We are called to live lives bolstered by our knowledge of God's love for us and God's presence with us.

Yes, there will come times when you think you are alone as you face your fears, but it is then that you need to cling to the assurance that there is One who is even closer to you than the air you breathe. He knows your needs and He cares about you. We are God's children, and just as we would never abandon our children, so God will never abandon us. Such an awareness of the unconditional love of God will enable us to come through those times with a renewed sense of his presence with us and a new vision of life lived with him.

In the life of Christ and in his suffering even to the Cross, God has demonstrated that he places a very great value on you. Your place in the world and this universe may seem small and insignificant, of doubtful lasting worth. But today hear afresh this unique and cheering word: that in Jesus Christ you are worth much to God. This, now, is the good word which we as Christians need to hear for ourselves and we need to tell each other and all others. Such assurance is not something we earn. It is a free gift from our heavenly Father. The only way you can receive it is to open yourself to it. A simple prayer will do. Your life may be in turmoil. Fear keeps you awake at night. If only you

could trust the God who watches over sparrows. And so you pray the prayer uttered by a man who brought his ailing son to Jesus, "I believe; help my unbelief!" That is a prayer that God will always answer.

In the words of the gospel hymn: "I sing because I'm happy, / I sing because I'm free, / His eye is on the sparrow, / And I know he watches me." Psalm 84 declares that even sparrows are welcome in the house of the Lord. Certainly then you too are most welcome! Therefore do not be afraid!

AMEN.

HYMN TIS 184: (When trouble strikes)

1. When trouble strikes and fear takes root,
and dreams are dry and sense unsound,
when hope becomes a barren waste,
then doubts like mountains soar around.
2. Our wandering minds believe the worst
and ask, as faith and fervour fade,
'Has God now turned his back on us,
Forsaking those he loved and made?'
3. God says, 'See how a woman cares.
Can she forget the child she bore?
Even if she did, I shan't forget:
though feeling lost, I love you more.
4. 'My dearest daughter, fondest son,
my weary folk in every land,
your souls are cradled in my heart,
your names are written on my hand.'
5. Then praise the Lord through faith and fear,
in holy and in hopeless place;
for height and depth and heaven and hell
can't keep us far from his embrace.

*John L. Bell 1949- and Graham Maule 1958-
suggested by Isaiah 49:14-16*

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE:

Divine Caregiver, you have counted the hairs on our head and your loving eye is always upon us.

Show us how and where we might move out with confidence to speak bravely of your way, even if the consequences at times seem hard to bear.

Lord, grant us the courage and compassion to live for you.

Holy Creator, you take delight in the tiniest sparrow and your compassion sustains all of Creation.

Plant your selfless love within our hearts and give us the desire to be a voice for those who's voices have been silenced.

Grant us the courage and compassion to live for you.

Loving Creator, you said to your people many times, "Do not be afraid", yet in these worrying times there are many things that cause us anxiety- the pandemic which is

sweeping the world, the cruelty we witness, the lack of equality and fairness between peoples of differing cultures, indeed, the leadership of some countries troubles us deeply. Remind us always loving God, of your good news – that no matter how fearful we may become you are beside us with the comfort we need.

So help us to be your loving hand of comfort.

Please save your children, loving God, from all that is untrue, unkind or unjust.

Save us from cruelty, violence and war.

Please save your children from all mischievous half truths, deceit and bad government.

Please save your church, loving God, from stale worship, exclusive fellowship, begrudging humanitarian service, and any form of self righteousness.

Great and holy Friend, thank you for sharing with us both the joy and the agony of our human condition.

Today, we ask your blessing on all your healthy and happy children, that their joy may be complete.

Today we ask your blessing on all your suffering and bewildered children; on the estranged, the dying, the sorrowing, the despairing, and anyone who feels hopelessly trapped in a web of evil.

Friend of sinners, hear us – Loving God, save us.

For yours is the commonwealth of truth,

the power of love,

and the glory of incomparable love,

for ever and ever. Amen!

COMMISSIONING:

God is good always, in all ways, and all the time.

Let this steady truth be our guide.

Let us overcome division, hardship, uncertainty.

Look for the living water, in stillness and trust.

BENEDICTION:

May the steadfast love of God surround you;

The vulnerable love of Jesus Christ inspire you;

The penetrating power of the Holy Spirit surprise you. **AMEN.**