

**Tamworth City Uniting Church**

**Worship on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2020**



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 and present.

**Call to Worship**

This is the place ..... God is waiting to break into our experience.  
This is the time..... God's Spirit is waiting to shift and change us.  
Through story, prayer, song and reflection  
God is waiting for us to see the world in a different way.  
God's Spirit is waiting to challenge our ways of thinking:  
calling us to move beyond what has always been  
to a place of newness, possibility and, always, hopefulness.  
This is the place and time, as are all places and times.  
God of this place, and every place,  
God of this time, and all time,  
Here and now, we praise you!

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

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 John L Bell and Graham Maule. Copied under CCLI Worship Licence No. 604439

### **Reflection**

I invite you to spend some time reflecting on the following statements:

*The kingdom of God is like someone who decides that there is something missing in their life  
and goes in search of something to enhance their life.*

If this person was you, what would you be looking for?

*The kingdom of God is like a tree that shelters birds, cows, sheep and people seeking refuge  
from the hot, blazing sun.*

What shelter might God's kingdom offer you and others?

*The kingdom of God is like a woman who places a small amount of yeast in the dough she is  
kneading.*

What type of yeast do you put into the dough of your life and the lives of those with whom  
you interact on a daily basis?

### **Prayers**

Generous and loving God, as we come to this time of prayer we are conscious that there are  
times when we fail to live the life offered in your kingdom. As we reflect on these times  
enable us - through your Spirit, to get back on track more fully.

For those times when we have failed to plant seeds of warmth, love and compassion for those  
who are hurting.

(Silence)

For those times when we seek plaudits for our efforts, rather than just going about our lives  
and working away with what you have given us.

(Silence)

For those times when we fail to share and reflect the treasures that you have given us:  
treasures of hope, joyfulness, empathy, new life and love.

(Silence)

For those times when we seek for worldly treasure, rather than the things that you offer us.

(Silence)

God, through your Spirit of grace, transform us we pray.  
Amen.

Hear God's word of grace to you through Christ:

*Your sins are forgiven.*

**Thanks be to God!**

## **The Psalm 105:1-10**

(A paraphrase by the Rev B D Prewer 2001)

Be thankful, call on the name of our God, let it be heard among all nations!  
Sing, sing, sing your best praises, tell the wonderful things God has done!

Revel and delight in our God's name, let all seekers rise up and celebrate!  
Set your mind on God's type of strength, set your heart on the presence of the Spirit!

Remember all the great things that have happened, the unexpected deeds and justice of God,  
by love we are spirit-children of Abraham, sisters and brothers of the chosen people.

Our trust is in the living God whose decisions determine life on earth.  
God's covenant is never forgotten, it will stand for a thousand generations.

It is the same covenant made with Abraham, the pledges made to Isaac.  
The divine vows confirmed on Jacob through Christ are with us all forever.

### **Song** *Help us, O Lord, to learn*

Help us, O Lord, to learn the truths your word imparts:  
to study that our 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**

<sup>31</sup> He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; <sup>32</sup> 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."

<sup>33</sup> He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with<sup>[a]</sup> three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."

<sup>44</sup> "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.

<sup>45</sup> "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; <sup>46</sup> on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

<sup>47</sup> "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; <sup>48</sup> when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. <sup>49</sup> So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous <sup>50</sup> and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

<sup>51</sup> "Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes." <sup>52</sup> And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

## Message

Today's reading gives us five short parables of what the Kingdom of Heaven is like? Jesus talked a lot about the Kingdom of Heaven or God's Kingdom and used many stories and sayings to amplify what he meant by it.

Let's just briefly think about what it means for us, before we look at what our reading might be adding to the discussion.

In his parables, Jesus turned common understandings upside down. Those were understandings that said that great Kingdoms were large and powerful; that in order to be someone, you had to be noticed, and had to be successful. They were understandings that said that in order to obtain something you wanted then you had to be prepared to push small people aside as being of no account, that you had to be ruthless to get what you wanted; that you got rid of all those people whom you deemed to be worthless and of no account. These understandings were alive and well in Jesus' day, and they are alive and well today. So let's take a close look at these stories:

*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.*

I'm not convinced that the mustard seed is the smallest of all seeds, but I think Matthew, in claiming it as the smallest, wanted to emphasize a point, rather than be strictly accurate. Nor does a mustard seed grow into a tree. Rather it becomes a largish shrub growing – at the most – to about three and a half metres.

When you look at the seed in the picture at the beginning of our Order of Service, it's hard to imagine a large shrub being the end product? It seems an impossibility doesn't it?

Sometimes, as disciples, we plant small seeds of love, of hope, of acceptance amongst other things. Well ..... Jesus says that the kingdom of heaven is like these seeds. They might start off as small and insignificant, but the end result will be one where growth is evident – abundantly evident. I don't know about you, but sometimes I can get discouraged when the seeds I sow don't seem to bear any sort of growth. But maybe that's not the point. Maybe I need to remember that I'm not always the focus – sometimes I am just the facilitator for something bigger than myself. Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa once said: *As an old man, I can say this again.*

*Start where you are and realize you are not meant on your own to resolve all of these massive problems. My heart leaps with joy at discovering the number of people who say 'we want to make a better world'. And you will be surprised at how it can get to be catching. Do what you can, where you can.'*

*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.*

I don't know whether you've ever made bread. I've had a couple of goes. Apart from remembering the absolutely wonderful smell that emanated from the cooking bread, I also remember letting the mixture prove – then kneading it – and letting it sit again – and from time to time lifting the tea towel which covered it, to see whether it had risen. Then putting it in the oven and peering anxiously through the door to see whether it was doing what it was supposed to. I couldn't see the yeast, but I could see the result of it working quietly away in that dough.

Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven was like this yeast. What did he mean?

One of the things I think he meant was that the growth of the kingdom is often imperceptible. It comes about through people's lives being changed – not necessarily with a big bang, but often gradually and slowly – just like the slow rise of the dough as I was baking.

It comes about through people loving and serving in small, seemingly insignificant ways. Ways which when added together make up a larger whole.

Also, like the yeast in the dough, it has to be worked at. We can't just drop a bit of love here and there, and expect it to work well. Love has to be nurtured. Our relationships with other people will take time, energy and commitment in order to blossom. The things we invest in have to be given the opportunity to make a difference.

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But let's take a look at what the yeast was put into. In my reading for this message I learnt that three measures of flour amount to forty to sixty pounds! It's not three cups as I had always thought. This quantity speaks of generosity and abundance – the woman is going to produce more bread than a single person can eat. Perhaps a conclusion that we can draw from this is that the kingdom is present when everyone has enough to eat. Perhaps the parable is suggesting that we adapt our lives in light of the kingdom and do something that might seem foolish or wasteful to people on the outside.

*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.*

Notice that the finder of the treasure has not done anything except find it. We are not told that he was digging for it – he wasn't some miner out looking for gold. Nor are we told that he expected to find it. Presumably he was a worker ploughing the field who, when turning over the earth, chanced upon the treasure. It came out of the blue and seemingly without cost to him. And yet ..... What does he do? He hides it and then goes off to purchase the field. In order to do this he has to sell everything he has. He obviously wanted the treasure very badly.

We might ask ourselves, 'What is there about God's kingdom that makes it like a treasure?' Or, to put it another way, 'What are the treasures of God's Kingdom?' Here are some possible answers – although there are many more:

The fact that everyone – regardless of their race, skin colour, ideology, sexuality or stage in life, is loved and accepted by God. The fact that in Jesus we can see God's kingdom in action – through the way he lived and by what he taught. Maybe the treasure of the kingdom blossoms when we open ourselves up to meeting God/Jesus in the lives of those with whom we interact on a daily basis and being surprised and enriched by the experience.

*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.*

Firstly, let's note that the kingdom is compared to the merchant – not to the pearl. To restrict the analogy to the pearl eliminates the provocation of the parable. The merchant is seeking a commodity he can purchase, not an ethic to live by. He invests all his resources to obtain what he seeks. Is he foolhardy to sell all he has? Perhaps he should have been prudent and reasonable and spread his investment over a number of things.

Let's also note that the merchant was looking for fine pearls, but ended up buying only one. You could say that by finding the pearl of ultimate worth he stops being a merchant. He thus redefines himself and we must see him anew as well. We might ask: Who is he now that he has found that pearl of great value? Does it change who he is?

What are we to make of his example and how do we locate ourselves in the parable?

Perhaps, like the merchant, we discover that instead of seeking for many things we need to seek for just one – one which we could call our *raison d'être* – our reason for being. As we

do that we may well discover that priorities are reshaped. What was formerly most important – work, wealth, prestige, give way to following more closely Christ's example. Maybe the parable is pointing us to the fact that in order for God's kingdom to become a reality we have to keep working away at discovering God in surprising places. Do we understand fully what Jesus is saying to us today through these stories? Do we realise that our understanding of God's kingdom is something that grows – a bit like the yeast – almost imperceptibly. Understanding is critical - not the head stuff so much, but rather an understanding from the heart. An understanding that grows out of our relationship with God. An understanding that grows from our desire to search more deeply for what it is that God is saying to us. This is only possible when we commit ourselves to the discipline of learning more about God and developing our relationship with God. It is only possible when we allow the Spirit to lead us in following the way of Jesus who, through his life, death and resurrection demonstrated the nature of God's reign.

And a short poem to finish:

God longs for God and uses us,  
rises in us .... becomes in us.  
Let us be silent, a quiet dough  
where God moves into every pore .....  
Where God lives as God pleases.  
Let us rise simply, a quiet dough.

Gunilla Norris

### **A Creed based on the Mini Parables of Jesus**

We believe in the love-kingdom of God, through Christ upon us, within us, beyond us.

We believe the love-kingdom is like a mustard seed; sown in apparent insignificance,  
growing into magnificence for the greening of the world.

We believe the love-kingdom is like yeast; inserted in humble insignificance  
into the dough of life, expanding into enough bread for the world.

We believe the love-kingdom of God is like a treasure; lost and rendered insignificant  
under the ground, now found with joy and thanksgiving.

We believe the love-kingdom of God is like pearls; all others become insignificant  
when the largest, most beautiful pearl of all is found.

We believe the love-kingdom of God is like a net full of fish; where even insignificant  
sardines are saved but worm-ridden barracouta are thrown away.

We believe in the love-kingdom of God, through Christ upon us, within us, beyond us;  
where the meek and the poor, the merciful and the hungry, rejoice with the angels of God.

Loving God, we believe; scatter our unbelief.

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### **Prayers of the People**

(Prepared by Peter Battle)

**The kingdom of heaven is a treasure – God's treasure. It exists in the world about us,  
often in the most unlikely places.**

**Let us pray:**

**Lord, in troubled times, help us to realise that the treasure of your kingdom is all about us; open our eyes and our hearts to search for it in our world:**

Where those in authority here in Australia and throughout the world. make important decisions on our behalf as the world deals with the current COVID 19 situation.

Where seeds of peace are being sown, be it locally or across nations, amid racial, ideological, national, social confrontation.

Where scientists and researchers in many countries are working hard to develop their knowledge about the corona virus and to find a vaccine..

**The kingdom is a treasure – God’s treasure. We will search for it in our society:**

Where practical help is given to those who do not know where the next meal is coming from; where public servants work tirelessly to implement the changing restrictions; where Aid agencies care for people locked in towers, isolated in their homes, unemployed or mentally struggling; where teachers continually change methods of learning to assist the children in their care; where people are patient in queues, be it at borders, testing clinics or retail outlets; where assistance is being given to bring communities back from the destruction of fire, flood and drought; where advisors and counsellors work tirelessly to enable persons to find jobs that meet their skills and abilities

**The kingdom is a treasure – God’s treasure. We will search for it in our homes:**

Where social workers bring understanding to those going through the storms of life; where child-care workers bring relief to parents and calm to disturbed children. where parents try to balance the challenges of home life, work, their social lives, and activities for their children; where sensitive family doctors gain the confidence of their troubled patients; where ministers, counsellors and funeral directors bring peace and a new reality to those who mourn; where volunteers at schools, in home care, deliver services to the infirmed and house bound; where friends, relatives and strangers show compassion and practical help to those enduring difficult restrictions, especially the aged and disabled;

**The kingdom is a treasure – God’s treasure. We will search for it in our faith community:**

Where those within our churches provide pastoral care and connection to members of their congregations in new ways; where churches have developed new and effective methods to conduct services and meetings; where church leaders are working hard to allow people to meet and worship together as restrictions are being lifted.

Lord, we give you thanks for your kingdom that is like a treasure in the world about us, to be found even in the most unlikely places. Count us among those, O God, who search carefully and persistently for it, and, as we find it, may it be like the leaven which is able to penetrate to every area of our life - like the seed that is able to grow into a mighty plant. Help us to value the insight which you give us, so that following Christ becomes the most important thing in our daily lives and inspires us to concentrate above all upon doing your will and sharing your love and the good news you have proclaimed through Jesus with one another and with the world. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen!**

**Song** *Community of Christ*

Community of Christ, who make the cross your own,  
live out your creed and risk your life for God alone:  
the God who wears your face, to whom all worlds belong,  
whose children are of every race and every song.

Community of Christ, look past the Church's door  
and see the refugee, the hungry, and the poor.  
Take hands with the oppressed, the jobless in your street,  
take towel and water, that you wash your neighbour's feet.

Community of Christ, through whom the word must sound –  
cry out for justice and for peace the whole world round:  
disarm the powers that war and all that can destroy,  
turn bombs to bread, and tears of anguish into joy.

When menace melts away, so shall God's will be done,  
the climate of the world be peace and Christ its Sun;  
our currency be love and kindness our law,  
our food and faith be shared as one for evermore.

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### **Blessing**

Go forth into this week knowing that you will be blessed by God;  
that Jesus will be with on your journey;  
and that the Spirit will encourage, transform, challenge and equip you  
as you live God's reign. **Amen!**