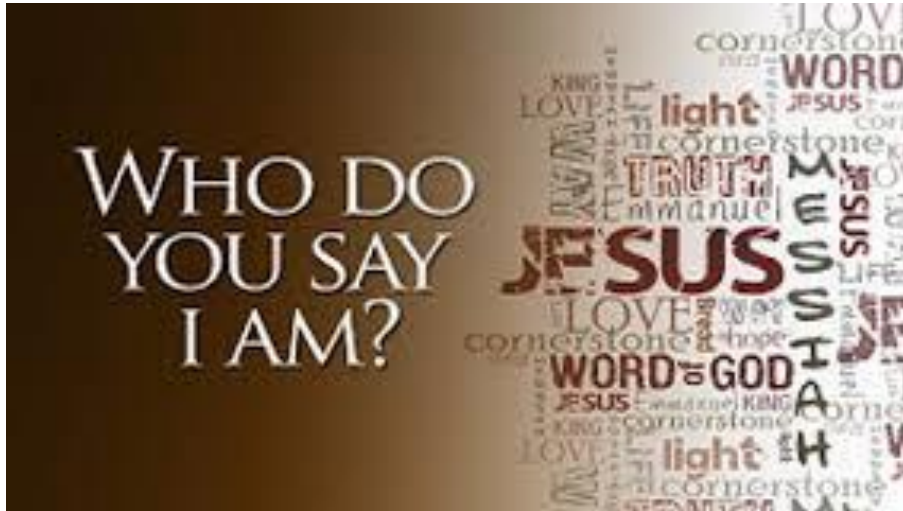


Tamworth City Uniting Church

Worship on 23rd August 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 and present.

Call to Worship

How shall I call you?
Maker of heaven? Poet of sunset and painter of sky?
How shall I call you?
Lover of children? Shepherd and teacher? Brother and friend?
How shall I call you?
Spirit of comfort? Guide as we wander?
Listener and helper? Protector in Danger?

Silence

Prayer

All these things and more we name you by our
generous and loving God: Father, Son and Spirit.
As we come to worship you today we give thanks that although
We cannot adequately describe you or, indeed, know you fully,
you bless us with your presence at all times. During this time of worship may we be
conscious of your presence with us. Amen.

Song *At the name of Jesus*

At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,
every tongue confess him King of Glory now:
this the Father's pleasure that we call him Lord,
who from the beginning was the mighty Word.

Humbled for a season to receive a name
from the lips of sinners unto whom he came,
faithfully he bore it spotless to the last,
brought it back victorious when from death he passed.

In your hearts enthrone him, there let him make new
all that is not holy, all that is not true.
He is God the Saviour, he is Christ the Lord,
ever to be worshipped, trusted and adored.

When this same Lord Jesus shall appear again
in his Father's glory, there with him to reign,
then may we adore him, all before him bow,
as our hearts confess him King of Glory now.

TiS 232 Caroline Maria Noel. Public Domain

Prayers

Generous, wholehearted and loving God, we name Jesus – your son, as Lord of our life and King of Glory, yet there are times when we put other things in his place: our time, our possessions, our friendships.

Silence

Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon us

There are times when we pushing people aside in our busyness; failing to take the time to stop and listen to what your Son might be saying to us, through them.

Silence

Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon us

There are times when we fail to see your son walking with us on our life's journey. Walking with us in the form of friends, neighbours and, even strangers.

Silence

Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon us

Hear the good news!

To all and to each where regret is real,
God pronounces pardon and grants the right to begin again.

Thanks be to God!

Amen.

The Epistle *Romans 12:1-8*

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

³ For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, ⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. ⁶ We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ⁷ ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; ⁸ the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Song *O thou who camest from above*

O thou who camest from above the pure celestial fire to impart,
kindle a flame of sacred love on the mean altar of my heart.

There let it for thy glory burn with inextinguishable blaze,
and trembling to its source return, in humble prayer and fervent praise.

Jesus, confirm my heart's desire to work, and speak, and think for thee;
still let me guard the holy fire, and still stir up thy gift in me.

Ready for all thy perfect will, my acts of faith and love repeat,
till death thy endless mercies seal, and make the sacrifice complete.

TiS 572 Charles Wesley. Public Domain

The Gospel *Matthew 16:13-20*

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” ¹⁴ And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” ¹⁵ He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” ²⁰ Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Message

What gives us our identity?

There are any number of things that give us our identity:

Our family name: for some of us this is really important. We take pride in the name which has been handed down to us from generation to generation.

Our looks can also be part of who we are. I remember my sister Barbara recounting the time when she was on a train in Sydney. She was quietly sitting reading a book and minding her own business, when she heard a voice from the other end of the carriage call out:

‘You must be one of the Stroud girls from Dubbo!’ All my siblings and I have a marked resemblance to each other and I, for one, am quite happy to be known as a member of my family.

Where we come from can also give us our identity – it might be that we are ‘off’ the land, or from the city.

Our job plays a part in identifying us. How often have you been asked, ‘What sort of work do you/or did you do?’

These things, amongst others that you can probably think of, serve to build our identity. They give a picture of who we are.

Identity is important for each one of us. It grounds us and forces us to look at ourselves and ask, ‘Who am I? What or who, has made me the person I am?’

The passage from Matthew is about identity – the identity of Jesus and of the church. It is a well-known passage: it has Peter’s declaration of who Jesus is; in it Jesus says he will build his church on Peter – seen by many, as the basis for the papacy.

It’s an expansion and a revision of Mark’s account of this incident. One of the main differences is that Matthew connects Peter’s confession of Jesus as Messiah and Son of God to the reality of the church. In Matthew’s account, the declaration of who Jesus is has special significance for who the church is.

As I said previously, identity is important for each one of us but this passage is not talking about our identity. Instead, it’s asking a question of us. We, like those first followers are being asked by Jesus, ‘Who do you say that I am?’

How do we name Jesus? What is it, for us, that gives him his identity?

So let’s imagine that Jesus is here asking us, ‘Who do you say that I am?’

What would we say?

As we consider who Jesus is for us, let’s think about some of the images that we have of him. I’ve made a list of some of the images and I invite you to spend a moment or two thinking about each one and what the image might mean for you:

- Good shepherd
- Son of God
- Saviour
- Gentle Jesus meek and mild
- Advocate
- Compassionate friend
- Healer
- Teacher
- Life-giver
- Trouble-maker for those in power
- Servant

Who is the Jesus you find it easier to follow?

Take a moment to think about this.

Who is the Jesus you have most trouble with?

Again, take a moment to think about this question.

For me, it’s the Jesus who was prepared to stick his neck, indeed his life, on the line as he strove to preach about and to live the kingdom of God.

Why do I have difficulty with this? Because he calls me – one of his disciples – to do the same and, sometimes, it’s hard.

- It's hard, sometimes, to speak up for what I believe is right
- It's hard, sometimes, to move beyond my comfort zone into places that are challenging and uncomfortable
- It's easy for me to preach about how we, as Jesus' disciples should live. It's much harder for me to actually practice what I preach.

And this leads me to ask:

What is it that we are saying yes to if we say Jesus is Lord?

What is it that we are saying yes to if we say that we want to follow Jesus' way?

Peter got it a bit wrong.

He saw Jesus as the Messiah – a person who was expected to free the Jews from the oppression of their Roman rulers.

Along with the other disciples he saw Jesus as all powerful and all conquering.

This is in contrast to how Jesus saw his role.

If we look at the verses following this passage we see Jesus talking about the suffering he has to undergo.

What a contrast! Jesus' way was not to be the all-powerful, all-conquering hero.

Jesus knew that his way - a way of servanthood, of non-violence, of passionate activism for those who needed him to speak for them, would bring him into conflict with the authorities and he would thus end up suffering.

Our identity – both as individuals and as a community of faith called the church, is firmly rooted in who Christ is for us.

If we are to be a church built on the foundation of Christ then part of our identity is to be a community that is prepared to risk suffering for opposing what is evil in the world.

In Australia, fortunately, we're not going to be put to death for speaking up for those who don't have a voice.

We are not going to be put to death for daring to speak out against those in authority.

But we may well be ridiculed, or called bleeding hearts for daring to stand up for those who seek shelter in our country.

We may well be called communist lefties for speaking up for those pushed to the edges of society.

We may well be called 'greenies' – or worse, for daring to speak up for the environment.

We may well be told to keep our religious convictions to ourselves and that politics and religion don't mix.

But they do – Jesus very firmly showed us that they do.

Today, we are invited to reflect again on Who we say Jesus is – both for ourselves individually and as a community of faith.

May we ponder the question deeply and ask ourselves: Do we really mean what we say?

Affirmation of Faith

I believe in God.

A Creator who fills the world with light,
rainbow colours,
and shapes beyond imagining.

A Lover who gives us grace upon grace,
not asking for anything in return
but just giving, so that we might reach
our full potential.

I believe in Jesus – God’s son
who came and turned people’s way
of thinking upside down,
A person for whom sinners
came ahead of the well-established;
for whom losers were first, rather than last.
A person who put people’s wellbeing
ahead of rules and regulations.

I believe in God’s Spirit.
A Spirit that lives within us and around us.
A Spirit that encourages, nourishes,
confronts and challenges us
as we seek to follow the way of Jesus.

I believe in God,
Creator, Son and Life-Giver.

Betty Stroud

Prayers of the People
(Prepared by Paul Turner)

Gracious God our Heavenly Father, in whom we live and move and have our being, at this time in our worship of you, we bring those cares, those matters, that are of concern. Although we are absent from each other in body, yet we are united in mind and soul, for we pray as a body of your children, united in our shared faith through the shed blood of our saviour – Jesus your son.

We pray for our world. Lord, we live in a time of great suffering and distress, with the disease that has afflicted so much of society. Not only that, it seems that so much of society is at odds with each other. Strife is rampant – driven most likely by the fear of the unknown, as well as the ambitions of those who seek to divide and conquer, not only within their own societies, but against others. We pray dear God for all those who are caught up in this; that in some way, will come a realization that for humanity to survive, we must live in peace and co-operation. In particular for the people of Lebanon. Their nation is in tatters at this present time – not just from the bomb explosions, but for a variety of other problems. May help and guidance from outside their country be available for reconstruction = free from corruption, and in justice for all.

Lord God, we pray for our own nation, Australia. We are blessed to be citizens of a free and lovely country, even though of late, we have suffered under drought, fire, flood and the ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic. Help us dear Father, to co-operate with each other in obedience to government and health authorities, in an effort to defeat this disease. We pray for our leaders of all levels of government. Would that they look to you for guidance and good commonsense in dealing with the problems we are faced with at this time. May they govern for all levels of society, particularly those who are poor and disadvantaged.

We pray for your Church – of all denominations. Lord, restrictions against gathering together, have cause sadness and heartache, and the fracturing of our common life. Because of our love and friendships, we miss being together. We miss worshipping you in the way that we are accustomed to. We cannot greet each other – either by handshake or hug. We miss the conversation, the banter, the occasional humour and the cups of tea or coffee. There is an empty feeling within us. In this, dear God, we must needs look to you our Father,

for comfort and for the strength that is needed to get us past all of this. Help us always to remember and be conscious of the fact that as your children, you love us and you care for us, for your Word tells us that even the very hairs of our head are numbered. We pray for those known to us that are experiencing life's problems and those who are sick. We ask for your intervention for each, and may they know your comforting presence and peace in their lives. Now, loving Lord, we would take a moment to pray for those people and matters of concern, that are known to us individually.

Silence

Finally, gracious God, we pray for ourselves. In the rough and tumble of life, help us to draw closer to you, to love and serve you with devotion to your will, and filled with thankfulness for your mercy towards us. We ask and pray in our savior Jesus' name. Amen.

Song *If you can use the church, O God*

If you can use the church, O God, to wake a sleeping world again,
transforming apathy to hope – then use us; we are yours to send.

If you can use the church's voice to tell the truth in spite of fear,
to cry for justice, plead for peace – then have us speak, that all may hear.

If you can use the church to heal the broken-hearted, and to be
a home for everyone who comes – then make us that community.

All things are possible with you. Our flawed and human church can be
Christ's body, by your grace, O God – so help us do Christ's ministry.

Tune: TiS 213 (ii) Elizabeth J Smith. Copied under CCLI Worship Licence No. 604439

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.
Strengthen the fainthearted, support the weak,
comfort the afflicted.
Honour all people, rejoicing always in the power
of the holy Spirit.
And the blessing of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be with you this day, and remain with you always.
Amen!