

Tamworth City Uniting Church

Worship on 4th October 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

May the words of my mouth
and the thoughts of my heart
be acceptable to you,
God, my strength and my redeemer.

(Psalm 19:14)

Song *Let all creation dance*

Let all creation dance in energies sublime,
as order turns to chance, unfolding space and time,
for nature's art in glory grows,
and newly shows God's mind and heart.

God's breath each force unfurls, igniting from a spark
expanding starry swirls, with whirlpools dense and dark.
Though moon and sun seem mindless things,
each orbit sings: 'Your will be done.'Ti

Our own amazing earth, with sunlight, cloud and storms
and life's abundant growth in lovely shapes and forms,
is made for praise, a fragile whole,
and from its soul heaven's music plays.

Lift heart and soul and voice: in Christ all praises meet
and nature shall rejoice as all is made complete.
In hope be strong, all life befriend
and kindly tend creation's song.

TiS 187 Brian A Wren. Copied under CCLI Worship Licence No. 604439

Reflection

One of the Old Testament readings set down for today is from Exodus: the occasion where
Moses is given the Ten Commandments.

Take a moment to read through the passage which is below,
and then read The Litany of Deliverance which is based on them.

*I am the Lord your God; you shall have no other gods beside me.
You shall not make idols out of anything.
You shall not use my name lightly.*

*Observe a day of rest-- and that includes your servants and slaves.
Honour your father and mother.*

Do not kill.

Do not commit adultery.

Do not steal.

Do not tell lies about another person.

Do not lust after any possession your neighbour has.

Litany for Deliverance

God of truth and mercy, save your people
from the chaos of divided loyalties and the worship of many gods;
Save us, God of truth and mercy.

From making God in our own likeness and the slavery of self-centredness;
Save us, God of truth and mercy.

From using God's name trivially and claiming him for our prejudices;
Save us, God of truth and mercy.

From neglecting sabbatical quiet times and being obsessed with busyness;
Save us, God of truth and mercy.

From ignoring or despising the elderly and over-indulging the new generation;
Save us, God of truth and mercy.

From glorifying armaments and war and wishing our enemies dead;
Save us, God of truth and mercy.

From watering-down love and marriage and the exploitation of sex;
Save us, God of truth and mercy.

From the legal robberies of the stock exchange, and the cunning thefts of tax evasion;
Save us, God of truth and mercy.

From TV programmes that twist the facts, and cruel gossip in supermarkets;
Save us, God of truth and mercy.

From those who preach greed as a virtue and possession-lust which is never satisfied;
Save us, God of truth and mercy.

O Jesus Christ, Saviour of all who lose their way,
O Healing Spirit, Power who renews the world;
We need you!
We need you God of truth and mercy. Amen!

Rev Bruce Prewer, "*Prayers For the Twenty-First Century*"

Psalm 19

The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

²Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.

³There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard;

⁴yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,

⁵which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy,
and like a strong man runs its course with joy.

⁶Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them;
and nothing is hid from its heat.

⁷The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul;

the decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple;

⁸the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;

the commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes;

⁹the fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever;

the ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

¹⁰More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb.

¹¹Moreover by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

¹²But who can detect their errors?

Clear me from hidden faults.

**¹³Keep back your servant also from the insolent;
do not let them have dominion over me.**

Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression.

**¹⁴Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.**

The Epistle *Philippians 3:4b-14*

(Paraphrased by Rev Nathan Nettleton)

If anyone starts bragging about their breeding and background to win an audience, I could trump them every time. I've got a pedigree to die for! I'm a pure blooded Israelite, born into the noble tribe of Benjamin. I was circumcised when I was eight days old, exactly as the law prescribes. I was educated by the Pharisees at the best school, so I know the scriptures inside out, and discipline and obedience are second nature to me. I was so pumped up with passion for the purity of religion that I led violent campaigns against declared heretics, including the church. You could measure me against the strictest interpretations of the law and I'd come out with a perfect record every time.

Most people would count all this as the perfect start in life, but I have come to see it as more of a disadvantage. Why? Because of the Messiah. You see, the one and only thing that is of

real and lasting value is knowing the Messiah Jesus, my Lord, and I now realise that just about everything else gets in the way of that. This is why I've stopped counting my so-called blessings. I used to think that such things gave me the inside running with God, but I now regard such thinking as a lot of nonsense. I have given up clinging to such silly ideas, so that

I can give myself totally to the Messiah and be embraced fully by him. I'm no longer interested in how I measure up to any checklist of religious laws, however worthy it may be.

God's checklist is the only one that matters to me now and it only has one item on it. All those who trust Christ get the big tick from God. What I really want now is to know Christ intimately and to experience in my own life the power that raised him from the dead. I'll do whatever it takes — I'll take my share of his sufferings, I'll follow him on the road to death if need be — because the only thing that matters to me is to be united with him in his resurrection life.

I'm not claiming for a moment that I've made it, or that I've now got it all together. There's a long way to go, but at least I'm now on the right track and I'm not giving up. I know I'll make it because the Messiah is backing me all the way. My friends, I don't see myself as the expert in these things, but I know enough to be sure of which way to go. I'm taking no further interest in the successes or failures of the past. I've got my eyes firmly fixed on what God has called me to become, and I won't let anything stop me until I cross the line and fall into the waiting arms of Christ.

Message

I received an email on Thursday from a colleague who is the Presbytery Minister of the Macquarie Darling Presbytery. In it he included an article (adapted by himself) by the Right Rev Jake Owensby – Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Western Louisiana. As I read it through it spoke to me about where we find ourselves at this time and for me, lead me into reflecting on the passage we read from Paul's Letter to the Philippians. I've put the article in italics.

The term crisis fatigue has entered our vocabulary in 2020. Strictly speaking, it's not an officially recognized psychological disorder. At least, not yet. But social scientists tell us that people are experiencing it. Lots of people.

Confronted by a relentless barrage of stress-inducing events, we respond with a draining mixture of exhaustion, rage, disgust, despair, anxiety and grief.

We want things to change, but the problems seem so huge that we don't know where to start.

We begin to wonder if we could make a real difference anyway. We're overwhelmed.

In the space of a year we have been overwhelmed by relentless drought, unprecedented bushfires, floods in some places, the COVID-19 pandemic and all its health and employment/economic impacts and the Black Lives Matter movement.

These are big problems requiring sustained, vigorous action.

But when we're feeling overwhelmed, the sheer size and scope of the challenges we face can sap us of the energy we need to confront them effectively.

Within our Church community we can feel overwhelmed as well: by the realisation that things will probably never go back to the way they were; that, for the foreseeable future, we will not be able to meet in ways that we are used to nor, perhaps, in ways that are life-giving for us, and the realisation that, over the months of COVID, we seem to have lost some of our identity forcing us to ask: Who are we really? What is our reason for being when we can't meet and do things in the ways we always have?

If we look at our challenges as a whole — the impact of climate change, the pandemic, the deep fractures across cultures within our communities and those which face our

congregation, we may feel too small and inadequate to do anything about them. We know that we should do something, but we may struggle to get started.

But experience has taught me not to be frozen in my tracks by the illusion that only big things can make a difference. Instead, just do the next right thing.

With regard to the issues of climate change, COVID, and the Black Lives Matter movement, take steps to minimise your own reliance and dependence on the use of fossil fuels.

Follow the Government requirements about physical distancing and wear a mask in public if it is necessary.

Listen to the First People of this land about what it's like to be Aboriginal in our society, and resist the urge to defend yourself.

But what might we do about the challenges facing our congregation?

Well let's take a closer look at our reading from Philippians: does it have anything to say to us?

For me, the passage is all about Paul embracing Christ and Christ's way. What was important for Paul was that he lived according to how God wanted him to live, and the only way he could do this was by living the way of Christ. This meant engaging in Christ's mission and ministry: a ministry that included reaching out to those in need – reaching out with compassion and love. In doing this he was enabling people to experience God's generosity and love.

In the passage Paul makes it very clear that his ministry was not dependent on having power, or status, or being invincible or, somehow, being perfect. For Paul, his ministry depended on his relationship with God and Christ and he wanted this for his readers of the church at Philippi.

Paul's focus is made clear by his words: 'I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.' What does this mean? The high calling may be a calling to join Christ on high. Or, it may be a calling that comes from on high. Either way the goal or prize is not a thing, but a relationship with God and Christ. In this letter Paul is clearly wanting the early church at Philippi to recognise that the only way to have fulfilling lives and ministries is by being engaged in the life of God.

So what does this have to say to us as a congregation as we face the challenges of emerging – albeit tentatively, from COVID?

I think for me the most important thing is to keep our eyes on the goal. That goal is continuing to be a community of faith that takes its calling from Christ and lives its life by being deeply engaged in the life of God.

What does this mean in practice?

I was called here as an Intentional Interim Minister to help this congregation find ways to move forward on its journey of discipleship. This, to say the least, has been difficult over the last six months as we have not been able to have the gatherings that I would have liked to have had to discuss how you see your calling as a community of faith in Tamworth. But we are re-emerging – all be it on a limited basis from this time of isolation. I have had meetings with the various mission groups within the congregations. These have been preliminary meetings and there will be others to determine how these groups might name their vision and mission – within the context of the overall mission of this congregation, and then determine how, over the next year this might be accomplished.

A couple of months ago a special Task Group was set up to look at the way Church Council is structured. This group has brought its proposal to the Church Council Executive who will be recommending to Church Council that it be taken to a Congregational meeting for ratification. Church Council will consider the proposal over the next couple of weeks.

These are small, practical steps that can be taken but it must be noted that they can only be taken by us, as a congregation, as we tune in and engage with God on a deep level. All our

planning, all our decisions must occur with this framework. This means spending time in reflection and prayer – listening for and paying attention to the Spirit as it encourages us, and perhaps leads us in ways that might be a bit scary – ways that are different to what we might want or have experienced before.

It means looking at the life and ministry of Christ and taking our cues from him – asking ourselves questions such as: ‘How might we minister to those who are the dispossessed in our community?’ ‘How might we engage with those who are different to us?’ ‘How might we become more welcoming and inclusive?’ ‘How might we better care for this world of which we are a part?’ ‘How might our community of faith be a group of people who bear witness to God’s kingdom?’ I invite you to consider these questions over the coming week.

We can do all our planning – coming up with great programmes or ideas. We can change things to make them more streamlined, have great vision and mission statements or introduce things in worship that might help faith seekers connect in meaningful ways, but unless we keep our eyes, hearts and minds on the goal then they are all for naught.

We are called to engage with a God who desires for his creation wholeness, love, creativity, acceptance, compassion and reconciliation. This is what we are about. This is who we are called to be.

As we engage with God and each other over the coming months may God’s Spirit encourage, support us and give us hope, and may we be transformed in the process.

Song *May the mind of Christ my Saviour*

May the mind of Christ my Saviour live in me from day to day,
by his love and power controlling all I do and say.

May the word of God dwell richly in my heart from hour to hour
so that all may see I triumph only through his power.

May the peace of God my Father rule my life in everything,
that I may be calm to comfort sick and sorrowing.

May the love of Jesus fill me as the waters fill the sea;
him exalting, self denying, this is victory.

TiS 609 Kate Barclay Wilkinson. Copied under CCLI Worship Licence No. 604339

Prayers of the People

(Prepared by Judith Archbold)

Dear Lord, we know we don’t have to be in a Temple to worship you, but today some of us are, and it feels good to be together again with, not all, but many of our church family. We truly give thanks that our environment feels safe enough to once again gather together even though there are many guidelines and rules we must carefully follow.

And so we come before you in a time of prayer – bringing to you our concerns, our hopes, our fears – all of which you are already so aware of. You know we are living in anxious times – for so many people their daily life is so very different. Even in Tamworth where we are blessed in feeling comparatively safe, we know this could change any day.

And so Lord, as we give thanks for rain that has fallen, for those farmers who are looking forward to their best season for some years, our prayers are also for those who are suffering today - be it because of injustice and hostility, racial discrimination, the denial of human

rights, lack of safe shelter for families, domestic violence or those who have been affected by
this wretched Pandemic.

Loving God, grant courage and your blessing to those who nurse the ill and the diseased, not
counting the cost to themselves.

We pray that you would inspire peace and hope to our war torn and, at times, almost hopeless
world. That our world leaders would focus on the genuine well-being of their people rather
than the grasping of power and the accumulation of weapons of destruction.

We ask your blessing on those who work for peace when the only result seems to be more
violence. Those who preach and live the gospel in the face of persecution.

Those who feed the hungry although their efforts are often misinterpreted.

And those who maintain the church when those around belittle it.

Grant us the passion of Paul, as like him, we declare our devotion to you and seek to learn
what it is you have called us to be.

Holy Friend, please reach out your hand over each of us gathered in worship today, be it in
our home, or in our church, that our faith may be enlarged and truly fortified.

And in a quiet moment we bring to you our very private prayers from the heart that no one
can speak on our behalf.

(Silence)

We bring our prayers to you in the name of your precious son, our Redeemer, Jesus
Christ. **Amen.**

Song *God gives us a future*

God gives us a future, daring us to go
into dreams and dangers on a path unknown.
We will face tomorrow in the Spirit's power,
we will let God change us, for new life starts now.

We must leave behind us sins of yesterday,
for God's new beginning is a better way.
Fear and doubt and habit must not hold us back:
God gives hope, and insight, and the strength we lack.

Holy Spirit, teach us how to read the signs,
how to meet the challenge of our troubled times.
Love us into action, stir us into prayer,
till we choose God's life, and find our future there.

TiS 687 Elizabeth J Smith. Copied under CCLI Worship Licence No. 604439

Blessing

Go forth into this coming week keeping your hearts and minds on the goal God has for you.

And the blessing of God:

the creator who loves and cares for you,
the son, who walks with you – at times of joy and despair,
and the Spirit who brings hope, encouragement and life,
be with you this day and remain with you always. Amen.