

Tamworth City Uniting Church

Worship for Sunday, 22nd November 2020

Prepared by Jim Furze



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

As we come to worship – wherever we are, let us acknowledge the custodianship of this land by the traditional owners, and pay respect to their elders – past, present and emerging, by acknowledging their rite to walk this land, maintain their sacred sites, and celebrate their rich cultural heritage in ways that give meaning. May we all feel safe in community as we all experience God’s Grace, Love, and Compassion.

CALL TO WORSHIP

We praise you, O God, for making your divine truth real to us in Jesus Christ.

We ask that what we do, how we live, and the way we love, may increasingly become a worthy response to your divine truth.

Come, let us worship God in all that we say, do and think.

PSALM 100

Break forth into exclamation of joy and gladness,
you who serve the Lord.

God is not dead! He is ever our God!
He made us we belong to him.
we are His sons, daughters, and servants.
And His love for us never runs out.
His care and concern for us will go on for ever.

Let the world see our manifestations of joy!
Let us lift up our voices in words and songs of praise,

and surrender our lives
as perpetual offerings of thanksgiving!
Let us bless His name for ever! AMEN.
Psalms Now – Brandt / Corita

HYMN TIS 142 – GLORY BE TO GOD THE FATHER – *tune Regent Square.*

Glory be to God the Father,
Glory be to God the Son,
Glory be to God the Spirit,
God almighty, Three in One!
Glory, glory, glory, glory
While eternal ages run.

Glory be to him who loved us
Washed us from each spot and stain;
Glory be to him who bought us,
Made us kings with him to reign;
Glory, glory, glory, glory
Th the Lamb that once was slain.

Glory to the king of angels
Glory to the church's king
Glory to the king of nations
Heaven and earth, your praises bring;
Glory, glory, glory, glory
To the King of Glory bring.

Glory, blessing, praise eternal!
Thus the choir of angels sings
Honour, riches, power, dominion!
Thus its praise creation brings
Glory, glory, glory, glory
Glory to the King of kings.

Horatius Bonar

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Patient shepherd, like the people of Israel we have allowed current distractions surround us, calling our name to follow them, leading us away from you.

We are like sheep scattered across the hillside, all searching for something better, feeling satisfaction when we find it, moving a little further from you.

The pandemic has turned life on its head. We struggle to find truth in the voices enticing us to follow them.

Forgive us Lord. Open our ears to your voice so we may hear you clearly once again. Grant us the humility to recognise you, our shepherd, fill us with the courage and conviction to follow you.

Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Sisters and brothers, God's goodness offers us forgiveness and acceptance without any preconditions. This is justification by faith alone because of God's grace, God's generosity.

Rest in the assurance of God's redeeming love.

Thanks be to God.

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON: EZEKIEL 34:11-16, 20-24 (NRSV)

¹¹ For thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. ¹² As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. ¹³ I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the watercourses, and in all the inhabited parts of the land. ¹⁴ I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. ¹⁶ I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice.

GOSPEL LESSON: MATTHEW 25:31-46

³¹ "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³ and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴ Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' ⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, ⁴¹ you did it to me.' ⁴¹ Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; ⁴² for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' ⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

HYMN TIS 145 – THE KING OF LOVE MY SHEPHERD IS – *tune Dominus Regit Me*

The king of love my shepherd is whose goodness faileth never
I nothing lack if I am his and he is mine for ever.

Where streams of living water flow my ransomed soul he leadeth
and where the verdant pasture grow with food celestial feedeth.

Perverse and foolish aft I strayed but yet in love he sought me
and on his shoulder gently laid and home rejoicing brought me.

In death's dark vale I fear no ill with thee, dear Lord, beside me
Thy rod and staff my comfort still thy cross before to guide me.

Thou spread'st a table in my sight thy unction grace bestoweth
and O what transport of delight from thy pure chalice floweth.

And so through all the length of days thy goodness faileth never
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise within thy house for ever.

Henry Williams Baker.

MESSAGE

Most people who have sheep know that if you want to still have them in the morning, you need to
have good fences

However back in the time of Ezekiel, around 571 BC, fences were not known and the care for a
person's sheep was up to the shepherd. A good shepherd loved their sheep, cared for them, kept
them together, and was willing to lay down their life for them.

Scripture has many references to sheep and shepherds. This was part of life and people understood
the image of a shepherd and knew the difference between a good shepherd and a bad shepherd.
Ezekiel was writing to the Israelites living in Babylonia. They were there because the Babylonians
had defeated them and destroyed their temple. They were a scattered people (**sheep without a
shepherd**) living in a foreign land, struggling with the destruction of the holy of holies, the temple
in Jerusalem, and the loss of all things they considered essential for life and faith.

Ezekiel writes as a prophet of God, pointing out that **God is still with them** and will see them come
together once again when they put their **trust** in Him and not in their own wisdom and strength.

You could say the people of Israel were in chaotic times. Being forced to do things they didn't
want to do, not having the Temple central to their faith, being ruled over by a tyrant. Their world
had changed from where they could do what they wanted to; into a time when they had to submit to
what others wanted them to do.

Let us pause and reflect, what has the past 8 months of Covid 19 meant to you?

What do you consider to be lost?

What do you want to come back the same?

What have been the things that has sustained you?

Do you believe we can just go back to being the way we were?

Stop and think how you felt when: -

You couldn't go out to visit friends or family

You had to wear a face mask

Shopping was an ordeal and often needing to be done online

You couldn't go to restaurant or just have a coffee

People keep telling you to maintain social distancing

The church was closed

Even now, can't sing in worship

And the list goes on ...

We are people, torn from our "normal" way of life and find ourselves in a time when regulations
and conditions keep changing from week to week.

What does this mean for us?

For some they have held onto their hope and faith in a just and loving God. However, others are left wondering, where is God in amongst all of this.

Ezekiel quotes God in Chapter 36 when he reassures the people of Israel with these words – ***“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”***

The apostle Paul urges us as Christians to view this differently when he says – ***“do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.” (Rom 12:2 NIV)***

In his record of many of Jesus’s saying, in **Matthew 25:31-46** we hear what God requires of us, what is God’s good and perfect will.

Our return, our new heart and spirit, our renewal of mind, leads us into action. God’s inheritance isn’t gained through inaction but by an acceptance of all people, signified here by the –

Hungry,
Thirsty,
Stranger
Naked
Sick
Prisoner

Again take a moment to consider what people may **hunger** for, **thirst** for, who are **strangers** to us, who have everything **stripped** from them, what are the **sickness** people suffer in the world, and those who are **imprisoned** in the minds and bodies, not free to be the people God has called them to be.

After his resurrection, Jesus ate with his disciples and asked Simon Peter – ***“Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” (John 21:15) when Peter responded YES, Jesus said to him “FEED MY LAMBS”.***

In this time of changes, in this time when we see some of the -

old ways
old traditions,

entrenched rituals and cultures

being changed, redefined, lost, we are reminded the **old has past and the new has come**. Covid has caused us to be like scattered sheep. We are being called as disciples of Jesus (**the Good Shepherd**) to live in the “NEW NORMAL” where we have the responsibility to **feed all the lambs of Jesus** as Matthew has pointed out.

HYMN TIS 547 – BE THOU MY VISION – tune - Slane

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart
Naught be all else to me, save that thou art
Thou my best thought, by day or by night
Waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, thou my true word
I ever with thee and you with me, Lord
Thou my great Father, thy child let me be
Thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.

Be thou my armour, my sword for the fight
Be thou my dignity, thou my delight
Thou my soul’s shelter and thou my high tower
Raise thou me heavenward, O Power of my power.

Riches I scorn and the world's empty praise
Thou my inheritance, now and always
Thou and thou only the first in my heart
High King of heaven, my treasure thou art.

High King of heaven, after victory won
May I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's Sun
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall
Still be my vision, O ruler of all.

Eleanor Henrietta Hull

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

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Dear Lord, we seek your grace today as we come before you aware that your love embraces us all no matter what our circumstances of life might be. Where natural disasters strike, wherever the location, you shepherd both animals and humans, giving hope and refuge. Lord we give you thanks.

Occurring more often, many of us face situations of hardship and trauma in which we are protected and embraced by your love for us. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. Just as you protect us Lord as the faithful shepherd looks after his flock, may we as individuals and as a community respond to the hardship that others are facing by offering help in the form of prayer, by offering practical assistance and by including shattered people on the path of shared responsibility towards joy and hope. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

During the past 6_8 months we have been aware of dire circumstances which some countries have

encountered and are now facing during the pandemic as well as Australians, in particular the citizens of Victoria. The threat to life has been and is extreme and the emotional trauma for those unable to comfort a dying parent or unable to attend the funeral of a loved one is immeasurable.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

Time and time again and in fact always Lord we know you are beside us and uplifting our spirits by tempering our grief, consoling us, and giving us the strength to move forward. Lord, we give you thanks. You shelter us from the extremes of all the effects of storms in our lives. We thank you and we know that we should be more mindful of your power and grace so that we don't rely on our own strength or be led by wayward advice. Let us also encourage others to call upon your grace.

As we heard in the previous hymn: The king of love my shepherd is whose goodness faileth never,
I nothing lack if I am his and he is mine for ever: Amen.

Let us now join together in the Lord's Prayer,

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your Name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

HYMN TIS 687 – GOD GIVES US A FUTURE – *tune Camberwell*

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
Fears and doubt and habit must not hold us back
God give 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 out future there.

SENDING FORTH

Pause in this time of frantic activity. Take time to listen to the voice of the shepherd who is calling
your name.

He is calling you to take the message of God's hope to a world struggling with disruption, hunger,
thirst, illness, injustice, and abuse.

Step out boldly, to meet the challenge, take courage, for the shepherd will lead you into places of
unimaginable joy.

BENEDICTION

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy
Spirit be with us all now and always. Amen.

WORDS OF BLESSING

May the feet of God walk with you
and his hand hold you tight.

May the eye of God rest on you,
and his ear hear your cry.

May the smile of God be for you,
and his breath give you life.

May the Child of God grow in you,
and his love bring you home.