

Sunday 1st November 2020, Leura Uniting Church Service – ALL SAINTS DAY

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

This Christian congregation respectfully acknowledges the Dharug and Gundungurra peoples as original owners, inhabitants and custodians of this land for millennia. We honour their descendants and their elders: past, present and emerging.

Page | 1

CALL TO WORSHIP

Give thanks to the Lord, who is so good;
whose steadfast love endures forever.

Let those who are redeemed by the Lord say so,
those saved from trouble and woe.

Gathered in from many places,
**from the east and from the west,
from the north and from the south:**

Gracious God, your people come to worship
**seeking fresh water in the desert,
hungry and thirsty for your justice.**

Give thanks to the Lord, who is so good;
and whose steadfast love endures forever. (Psalm 107:1-9)



Together in Song HYMN 156, *Morning has broken*

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Revelation 7: 9-17

Matthew 23: 1-15

PRAYER OF ADORATION, CONFESSION AND THANKSGIVING

Gracious and loving God, we worship together today with gratitude for life and sustenance; for love, and for hope. In a world which so often confuses, appals and disappoints us, we dare to affirm that you are God. You are the one who is holy, and we dare to believe that because of Jesus, we may share your holiness. You are the one who is just, and because of Jesus, we dare to believe that justice is ultimately in your hands. You are the one who is love itself, and our loving is a sharing in your loving, a true reflection of that hope you give us for a world redeemed from cruelty and suffering. Forgive us we pray when, instead of holiness, we have been drawn to gossip and believing the worst of others. Instead of living as you call us to live, we have joined in the daily chorus of rumour, innuendo and cynicism. Today, may your love and forgiveness inspire in us a fresh embrace of our neighbours, a willing faith in our friends, and a diligent hope in your world. Help us no longer to judge by human standards, but to be immersed in praise and thanksgiving for all that you are doing for good through so many people throughout the world.

In the words of Psalm 107, verses 10 to 16, we continue our prayer:

Some of us were living in gloom and darkness,
prisoners suffering in chains,
because we rebelled against the ways of God

and had rejected the Lord's guidance.

We were worn out from hard work;

we would fall down, thinking there was no one to help.

Then in our trouble we called to the Lord,

who saved us from our distress.

Who brought us out of gloom and darkness

and broke our chains in pieces.

We will thank the Lord for such constant love,

and bless God's name forever.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Children of God, you are forgiven!

We will thank the Lord for such constant love,

and bless God's name forever. AMEN.

SHARING THE WORD

So near, and yet so far

Matthew 23: 1-15

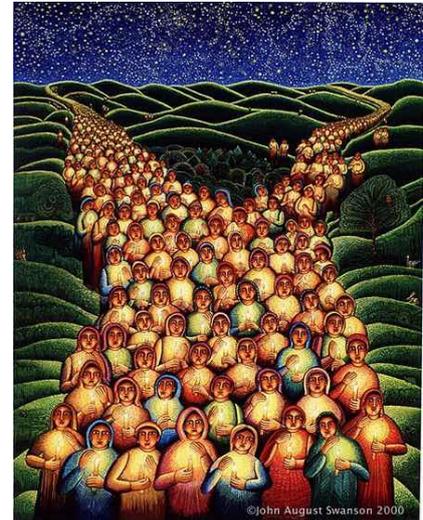
Is it possible to humble yourself? To work at being humble may not be a good idea. One of Charles Dickens' characters, Uriah Heep, tried that. He turned bitter. Uriah was devious and crafty, pretending to be humble. Humility is most real in those who do not know that they have it. The clever science-fiction writer and humourist, Douglas Adams, gave a formula for the person who wants to learn to fly: Aim to throw yourself at the ground, and miss!

It is hard for a humble person to be a hypocrite, but it has nothing to do with lacking self-respect. You can be a well-balanced human being by learning and practising the lesson that God loves you and wants the best for you. The person who is truly loved, and thankful for their relationships, is glad to encourage other people to find the same way to life.

What's going on with Jesus and the scribes and

Pharisees? Why does he give them such a strong serve in Matthew 23? The answer to that question may include the following observations:

- Jesus knew how important to Jewish faith these men were. He knew that that they were the public upholders of Jewish law and tradition. Pharisees were the ones called apart to live according to God's law, scrupulously. It's because Jesus admired what they stood for that he said to his disciples, "Whatever they teach you, follow it: but do not do as they do, for they don't practice what they teach." (Matthew 23:2) [Picture <bible-history.com]
- Jesus feared that the scribes and Pharisees had 'sold out' their true vocations for approval and recognition. Prestige and prominence had a grip on them. They had come to believe in their own importance. (Matthew 23: 6-10)
- Instead of inspiring and encouraging people to live more faithfully, they had come to believe in their own propaganda as being exceptional and holy – distinct from



Picture: John A. Swanson,
Festival of Lights

The Pharisee



ordinary Jewish people. Some of them had come to believe that they were special and perhaps entitled? (Matthew 23: 13-36)

- In their zeal to prove their exemplary selves, they condemned others. They oppressed their genuinely humble admirers with heavy and complicated expectations and laws. (Matthew 23: 4)

Some questions for us to ponder today

How do you feel when you hear today's Gospel? Does the vehemence of Jesus surprise you or alarm you?

To whom would Jesus direct his tirade against hypocrisy today? I know that I was ready to start pointing my finger at a number of candidates! It is a terrible thing, for example, to hear privileged people blame the underprivileged for their own problems. Yet we must also remain alert to our own temptations to regard ourselves as better than others.

In what ways might the words of Jesus be directed at the Church today? The horrific lesson of historical sexual abuse by church leaders and members is hard to learn. But the churches have certainly lost a great deal of their respect in the community and the trust they once had.

What comfort may we draw from this Gospel passage? That there is a passion for justice and reform in the Gospel. It names the wrongs and points to the better possibilities, if people will humble themselves before God, not making excuses.

How may today's Gospel guide the mission of our church in the Upper Blue Mountains?

We don't want to be a church that holds to privilege or panders to those who may give us recognition. We don't want to be a church that fears to speak out because it might alienate its 'sponsors.'

We DO want to be a church that confesses its hypocrisy.

We DO want to be a church that addresses the abuse of power courageously.

We DO want to be a church that values its greater treasure: connection with the poor and lowly. Our only hope of becoming a genuine community of care is to adhere to the teaching and example of Jesus: to be formed and informed by authentic faith. Let's not work towards 'restoring our reputation.' Let's surrender our pride and our shame and open ourselves to the work of God's Spirit in and through that which is called 'the body of Christ:' the human presence of God's love for the world. On *All Saints Day* we have the opportunity to remember the ones who have been true examples of faith for us.

Together in Song HYMN 409, O breath of life come sweeping through us

SHARING NOTICES – See this week's Bulletin.

OFFERINGS AND DEDICATION

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Ever-living God, we pray with genuine concern and hope for the peoples of the world. Where there is oppression, fear, corruption and suffering: in so many places these are daily realities for people seeking food and shelter. May those people of good will and brave action stand up for the oppressed, stand together with those under threat, confront their compromised leaders and work for the relief of those who are burdened. We are increasingly aware of those living in poverty in Australia, the United States and Great Britain. It seems so wrong that greedy people prosper without seeming to know or care. It is so sad that people would store up wealth for their own selfish needs and not see the sister or brother in need outside their front gate. Open our eyes, our ears and our hearts we pray.

We bring to you our longings for our own communities. We pray for recognition and respect towards our Indigenous peoples. We thank you that they may yet be encouraged to know they have valuable wisdom to share from their cultures and traditions. We pray for justice for immigrants and refugees and for those who advocate on their behalf. We pray for the homeless in our midst and those who do not know a “home.” We thank you for those who support and encourage them in their needs. May we consciously choose to act in our communities, using the gifts and abilities we have, as an offering to you, loving God.

We ask you to call us again and renew us as a church. Help us to be open to change the way we interact with our local communities and our neighbours. May we become alert to opportunities for love and service that even now may be unknown to us. Guide us in our spiritual discernment. Lead us in our decisions and actions, in the way of Jesus. Open our eyes, our ears and our hearts we pray, in Christ’s name, Amen.

THE LORD’S PRAYER – A pattern for everyday prayer, which Jesus taught his first disciples.

Our Father in heaven
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done on earth as 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 forever. Amen.

Together in Song HYMN 455, *For all the saints who from their labours rest*

BENEDICTION

The grace of Christ attend you;
the love of God surround you;
the Holy Spirit keep you;
this day and forever. **Amen**



Picture: *All Saints*, By Fra Angelico