



Leura Uniting Church  
17 January 2021  
Epiphany 2  
Gail Hinton

## Welcome

*Welcome to worship this morning, to those of you gathered here in the church building and to everyone watching along via Zoom or reading this Service Order at home. Regardless of where we may be physically situated we are a blessing to one another.*

## Acknowledgment of country

*We acknowledge the Darug and the Gundungurra people,  
the first inhabitants of this place.  
We honour them for their custodianship of the land,  
On which we gather today.*

## Announcements

## Call to Worship

*Let us worship God,  
Holy Mystery of God,  
We praise you for the wonders of your love.  
As we come to worship you,  
your presence is all around us,  
above us, before us and close beside us.*

*Brothers and Sisters in Christ, .....*

**(Call and Response):** In you I see the face of God

## Prayer of Adoration

*Lord, you are a mystery,  
so, give you many names; God, Creator, Spirit,  
Mother, Father, Big Guy in the sky,  
None of them capture your essence.  
We just cannot get our heads around you.  
You are so beyond the reach of our thoughts,  
even our imaginations fail to perceive you.  
Yet, we do know Love.  
The poets tell us that love is all around us,  
that love is in the air, that love makes the world go 'round,  
so, we give love many names, and look for it in many places.  
confusing it with lesser things, distractions, and daydreams.  
Yet your Word breaks through our muddled ideas  
and your Prophets' speak love's true name.  
Love becomes for us an action,*

*a way of seeing and treating others as your beloved children;  
a way fully revealed in the life, death, and resurrection  
of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
and fully expressed as a selfless, unconditional love with no limits.  
This is mystery, one we rightly name.  
This is Love.  
**Amen.***

### **Hymn: Tis 179 Praise with joy the world's Creator**

1. Praise with joy the world's Creator,  
God of justice, love and peace,  
source and end of human knowledge,  
force of greatness without cease.  
Celebrate the Maker's glory,  
power to rescue and release.

2. Praise the Son who feeds the hungry,  
frees the captive, finds the lost,  
heals the sick, upsets religion,  
fearless of both fate and cost.  
Celebrate Christ's constant presence,  
friend and Stranger, Guest and Host.

3. Praise the Spirit, sent among us,  
liberating truth from pride,  
forging bonds where race or gender,  
age or nation dare divide.  
Celebrate the Spirit's treasure,  
foolishness none dare deride.

4. Praise the Maker, Son and Spirit,  
one God in community,  
calling Christians to embody  
oneness and diversity.  
Thus the world shall yet believe,  
when shown Christ's vibrant unity.

CCLI Song # 4559872  
Graham Maule | John L. Bell  
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### **Prayer of Confession and Declaration of Forgiveness**

*O Lord, we ask that you search us  
and lead us to a new awareness of our shortcomings.  
May your searching Spirit bring to light  
the things we fail to notice about ourselves  
and help us to see any errors, in our thinking,  
and in our behaviour.  
In this moment of silence, Lord,  
speak to us your gentle words of correction.*

....

*God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,  
that whoever believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.  
Hear then Christ's word of grace to us:  
'Your sins are forgiven'  
**Thanks be to God.***

**Readings: Psalm 139: 1-6, 13-18 and John 1:43-51**

## Sermon

*There once was a congregation that struggled for over nine years with a difficult and complex issue. The matter at hand threatened to tear the community of believers in two and indeed many people left the congregation because they could not see a way through the problem. Others left because they felt they had not been heard and some left because they were filled with anger, bitterness and yes, even hatred. When it came time for the Minister in placement to move on there was still a lot of hurt, confusion and tension within the congregation and the poor Minister was faced with trying to leave the people with some kind of positive message, with some words that could perhaps begin to heal and draw together the disgruntled, unsettled, confused believers together. What would you have said and done?*

*Towards the end of the closure service the Minister told the congregation that they would each receive a small parting gift. Each person was then given a lovely card, handmade and beautifully crafted. On each card was written the phrase, 'In you I see the face of God'. The Minister then asked everyone to turn to those around them and exchange the simple yet profound statement. Somewhat miraculously this even continued on into morning tea until just about everyone had said 'in you I see the face of God' to everyone else. And they all lived happily ever after. Well, no, that's not true, nor is it realistic. There was still a lot of healing to be done in that place and a lot of learning as well. Yet, something shifted that day in that troubled congregation, together they had broken through the darkness and had glimpsed the light; they had seen themselves and each other through God's eyes.*

*Over the last few weeks, we have been considering what it means to identify ourselves as the beloved children of God. Today we are going to expand that concept and see if we can apply it to every living person. Like the troubled congregation in my introduction, can we begin to live and act like God's children towards everyone we meet? Is it possible to see something of God in people we dislike, in people whose beliefs offend us, in people who have hurt us, in people who appear destructive, in people who are full of themselves, in narcissists, in bullies, in those struggling with bad habits or addictions, this list could go on and on, couldn't it?*

*Well, today's beautiful psalm affirms, yes, it is possible to see the face of God in everyone. It also affirms that this will be challenging and difficult and that it requires us to take a good long hard look at ourselves and our own brokenness and shortcomings. Let's start this challenging little journey by once again hearing the words of the Psalmist. How well does God know us? The Psalmist declares that God knows when we sit down and rise us up, so God knows our every move. God is acquainted with all our ways, all those funny little things about us, those quirks of our personality. God is behind us and before us, God is everywhere. God formed us in our Mother's womb and knew we were there before our form had substance, God sees us in our secret and dark places.*

*Now depending on how you look at it, this may sound like a divine intrusion of privacy, it may even make some of us fearful and anxious about be so closely and intimately known. However, for those of us who know and understand the nature of unconditional love and acceptance, this Psalm speaks of the freedom we have in Christ; it means we can bring anything before God in prayer, even our doubts and our less than holy and godly thoughts. The Psalmist describes God's thoughts, as vast and weighty and far beyond human comprehension. When we consider that God has intimate knowledge of all 8 billion of us, plus our fellow creatures, ( because remember our Father in heaven even notices a bird fall from the sky Matthew 10:29), my mind is blown. How about yours?*

*When I was doing my research for this Sunday's service , I happened to glance down at what I thought was a random psalm, I read this....*

Psalm 139:19-22

New Revised Standard Version

- <sup>19</sup> O that you would kill the wicked, O God,  
and that the bloodthirsty would depart from me—  
<sup>20</sup> those who speak of you maliciously,  
and lift themselves up against you for evil!<sup>[a]</sup>  
<sup>21</sup> Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD?  
And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?  
<sup>22</sup> I hate them with perfect hatred;  
I count them my enemies.

*These disturbing words are in the final few verses of today's lofty, meditative, poetic Psalm; what a contrast! What are we to do this ending? It certainly doesn't resonate with the words of our Lord Jesus, who commanded us to 'Love (our) enemies, (and) do good to those who hate (us.)'<sup>28</sup> (to )bless those who curse (us) and pray for those who mistreat (us).<sup>1</sup>*

*Some commenters suggest that at the very end of this Psalm, the extremely honest and passionate Psalmist realises that if God knows him intimately, God must also know the movements, the ways, and the hidden thoughts of his enemies. Perhaps with this realisation in mind the final verses sound very much like the prayer of Examen;*

- <sup>23</sup> Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my thoughts.  
<sup>24</sup> See if there is any wicked<sup>[a]</sup> way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting.<sup>[b]</sup>

*Another commentator suggests that the Psalmist is "so convinced of his intimate connection with God, that an assault on his own identity is an assault on God, and an assault on God's identity is an assault on himself."<sup>2</sup> We cannot know for certain if either of these theories are true and neither of them explain why the ending is at odds with the God we know revealed in Jesus Christ. However, despite the oddness, I am glad those problematic verses are there because they speak to the reality of being human. All of us at some point in our lives will feel hatred towards another person. Those of us who have journeyed with God for some time may be disciplined enough to avoid hating another with perfect hatred like our Psalmist, but what about hatreds' lesser but equally vile cousins, judgement, bigotry, jealousy, racism, sexism, extremism, many of the 'isms' really. Sometimes we do not even realise we are falling victim to these forms of hatred.*

*Over the next week or so listen out for the following words that may crop up in conversations with friends, family and colleagues, words that slip so easily out of our mouths, words like, druggy, loser, derro and so on. These phrases seem innocent enough in day-to-day conversation, but they reveal a lack of understanding and empathy for our fellow human beings, who just like us are made in the image of God and who just like us are known intimately by the same Lord and creator and sustainer of all life.*

*How can we possibly rise above these very human tendencies? How can we ever break free of this brokenness?*

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 6:27- 28.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/second-sunday-after-epiphany-2/commentary-on-psalm-1391-6-13-18-3>

*The good news is that God does not leave us in this trap, the trap of 'isms', of being judgemental and thinking less of others because they do not look like us, think like us or behave like us.*

*Like the psalmist we need to ask God to search us, so that we become aware of our shortcomings and our failure to understand the meaning of God's love. When we grow in our understanding of God's unconditional love we learn what it means to love others in the same way. There is mystery in this, but it can also be observed in aspects of everyday life. Consider the people you know who brought their children up in a way that reflects God's unconditional love and acceptance; their kids generally turn out to be pretty okay. Now think about situations in which parents struggle to express this kind of love to their children, who neglect their children or worse still inflict forms of hatred and violence upon them. Statistics show that these children will suffer a range of consequences in their lifetime, these consequences include difficulty in maintaining relationships, an increased risk of mental health issues, drug and alcohol abuse, a tendency towards violence and criminal activities and homelessness.<sup>3</sup> If these frightening and tragic statistics are not incentive enough to be the presence of our Lord Jesus in this troubled world, I don't know what is!*

*We are the people of the good news, we are the ones who can proclaim God's unconditional love, grace, and acceptance to a broken world. We are the ones who can say to another, in word or deed, 'You are loved beyond measure, accepted for just who you are and in you I see the face of God'.*

*Amen.*

### **Hymn: Tis 693 Come as you are: that's how I want you**

1. Come as you are  
That's how I want you  
Come as you are  
Feel quite at home  
Close to My heart  
Loved and forgiven  
Come as you are  
Why stand alone

2. No need to fear  
Love sets no limits  
No need to fear  
Love never ends  
Don't run away  
Shamed and disheartened  
Rest in My love  
Trust Me again

3. I came to call sinners  
Not just the virtuous  
I came to bring peace  
Not to condemn  
Each time you fail  
To live by My promise  
Why do you think  
I'd love you the less

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<sup>3</sup> <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/effects-child-abuse-and-neglect-children-and-adolescents>

4. Come as you are  
That's how I love you  
Come as you are  
Trust Me again  
Nothing can change  
The love that I bear you  
All will be well  
Just come as you are

CCLI Song # 1504731  
Deirdre Browne

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### **Offering Prayer**

*We bring our gifts to you, Lord God,  
in gratitude and hope.  
In dedicating them, we dedicate ourselves again  
to be your people in the world,  
in the strength and enabling power  
of Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.*

### **The Lord's Prayer and Prayers of the People: William Emilsen**

L: Lord, in your mercy.

**P: Hear our prayer.**

L: As our Saviour has taught us, let us pray.

***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 in the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours  
now and for ever. Amen.***

L: Let us pray for the Church and for the world.  
Almighty God, may all who confess your Name be united in your truth,  
live together in your love,  
and reveal your glory in the world.  
*Silence*

L: Lord, in your mercy.

**P: *Hear our prayer.***

L: Merciful God, guide the political and medical leaders of all nations, the WHO, and companies producing vaccines to make them speedily and freely available to all people

*Silence*

L: Lord, in your mercy.

**P: *Hear our prayer.***

L: Incarnational God, give us reverence for the earth as your creation, that we may use its resources wisely in service of others and to your honour an glory.

*Silence*

L: Lord, in your mercy.

**P: *Hear our prayer.***

Eternal God, we pray for the United States.

We ask that you heal its divisions, show it the way to be one nation under you, witnessing to the world your justice and liberty.

*Silence*

L: Lord, in your mercy.

**P: *Hear our prayer.***

L: Generous God, bless those whose lives are closely linked with ours, and may we exhibit to them that same generosity we experience in Christ, and love one another as he loves us.

*Silence*

L: Lord, in your mercy.

**P: *Hear our prayer.***

Comforting God, watch over and care for all those who suffer in body, mind and spirit; give them courage and hope in their troubles, and bring the joy of your presence.

*Silence*

L: Lord, in your mercy.

**P: *Hear our prayer.***

L: Let us pray for our own needs and those of others.

*Here you may add your own intercessions and petitions.*

L: Loving God, your Son wept at the grave of Lazarus his friend. Be with us and all who are suffering.

*Silence*

L: Lord, in your mercy.

**P: *Hear our prayer.***

L: Holy God, you disclose your radiant presence throughout the whole universe and continually reveal your divine glory in your Son.

Bring healing to our wounds,  
Make whole all that is broken,  
speak truth to all illusion,  
and shed light in every darkness,  
that all creation will see and sing your glory.

**P: Amen.**

### Hymn: Tis 650 Brother Sister, let me serve you

1. Brother let me be your servant  
Let me be as Christ to you  
Pray that I might have the grace to  
Let you be my servant too

2. We are pilgrims on a journey  
We are brothers on the road  
We are here to help each other  
Walk the mile and bear the load

3. I will hold the Christ-light for you  
In the night time of your fear  
I will hold my hand out to you  
Speak the peace you long to hear

4. I will weep when you are weeping  
When you laugh I'll laugh with you  
I will share your joy and sorrow  
Till we've seen this journey through

5. When we sing to God in heaven  
We shall find such harmony  
Born of all we've known together  
Of Christ's love and agony

6. Brother sister let me serve you  
Let me be as Christ to you  
Pray that I may have the grace to  
Let you be my servant too

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Richard Gillard

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### Blessing

*May God, who is love, fill your hearts.  
Christ Jesus, who is new life, inspire your hopes.  
And the Holy Spirit who is lifegiver,  
spur you to deeds of compassion.*

**Amen**