

LEURA UNITING CHURCH 11 APRIL.

Welcome and Acknowledgement of Country.



Hymn. 613.

Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy,
whose trust, ever childlike, no cares could destroy,
be there at our waking and give us we pray,
your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the break of the day.

Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith,
whose strong hands were skilled at the plane and the lathe,
be there at our labours and give us, we pray,
your strength in our hearts, Lord, at the noon of the day.

Lord of all kindness, Lord of all grace,
your hands swift to welcome, your arms to embrace,
be there at our homing and give us we pray,
your love in our hearts, Lord, at the eve of the day.

Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm,
whose voice is contentment, whose presence is balm,
be there at our sleeping and give us, we pray,
your peace in our hearts, Lord, at the end of the day.

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The Grace.

Announcements. (John Cox)

Prayer of Adoration.



Loving and Eternal God, we come before you and thank you for being our rock, our foundation. It is your Love and Grace that is so crucial in helping us to make sense of the world around us. You give us that constant identity as your people that anchors our very existence in such a changing and unpredictable world, which wants us to conform to every fad and accept our identity through what we consume. Remain the stabilizing force in our lives, we pray, in Jesus name. Amen.

Prayer of Confession.

Merciful God,

We confess that we have sinned against you in thought word and deed,
By what we have done, and by what we have left undone.
In your mercy forgive us for what we have been.
Help us to amend what we are, and who we are.
Direct our hearts and minds that we may walk in your ways to your glory.
In Christs name we pray.
AMEN.

Reading. Psalm 133. (Trevor Prowse).

Reading. John 20: 19-31. (Kerry Jordan).

Hymn. 601.

O Master, let me walk with thee
in lowly paths of service free;
thy secret tell; help me to bear
the strain of toil, the fret of care.

Help me the slow of heart to move
By some clear winning word of love;
Teach me the wayward feet to stay
And guide them in the homeward way.

Teach me thy patience; still with thee
in closer, dearer company,
in work that keeps faith sweet and strong,
in trust that triumphs over wrong.

In hope that sends a shining ray
far down the future's broadening way,
in peace that only thou canst give,
with thee, O Master, let me live.

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Prayer before Sermon.

Sermon.

SERMON PSALM 133.

I was reading this Psalm at the beginning of the week and questions came to the fore straight away.

Clearly this phenomenon of **people living in unity** was something he had observed. But what had he **observed**? We don't know: he doesn't say. He mentions kindred, but who are the kindred he talks about? We don't know. He doesn't say. He likens the brethren living in unity as being like the dew of Hermon, a beautiful metaphor, which appeals to me as a person living in the Blue Mountains being often greeted in the early morning to the sight of rain drops or dew drops sparkling on the leaves.

But this doesn't get us any closer to knowing who the kindred are who live in this unity. Maybe he is being deliberately vague about it, so that we try to figure it out ourselves. The translators of the Psalm have had a go at it. The RSV had brothers living in unity, the NRSV have substituted **Kindred for brothers**. A big step in the right direction for the obvious reasons.

But that still gets us no closer to knowing the kindred he has observed and refers to. Could he be referring to wider region of time. I don't think so.

Assuming that he is writing from Jerusalem, this is a region that hardly lives together in unity. Jerusalem has been the subject of numerous wars and invasions, Assyrians; Babylonians; Egyptians; Ottomans and so on. Hardly fitting of the term, living in unity.

Jerusalem itself was a city that was rife with factions and sects, and it itself could hardly be depicted as a population that lived in unity. Perhaps larger collectives living in unity are ideas that reside in the minds of philosophers, who have philosophized (perhaps fantasised) about Utopia and there has been no shortage of them over millennia. **None of which, of course, have never and could never, come about**. Many of which we could breathe a sigh of relief that they haven't.

So, when the when our Psalmist talks about kindred living in unity he, I think, is talking about, and has observed, small scale relationships, not larger the collectives. It is here that the depth of love and commitment can be shown. I think that the Psalmist has seen kindred living in unity in the microcosms. I think that is where the potential is. I say potential, because it is in the microcosm that we can be known for our virtues and our follies. It can be both liberating and threatening to be truly known.

I think the Psalmist may have seen something like I saw on Wednesday evening when had it in mind when he wrote this Psalm. I was at a meeting of the Blue Mountains Friends of the Camino when a film was screened. I have put up a trailer of it. For me, it is like the dew of Hermon, or my dew drops on the leaves of plants here in the Blue Mountains.

Screen film clip. [Youtube.com/watch?v=W7gKD3q0V0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W7gKD3q0V0)

This pilgrimage is an extraordinary event. But it is an event that flows out a long-established commitment between two friends, that is the point being made in the film, the event itself, extraordinary as it is flowed naturally out of a commitment. That was the point made by the

young woman who helped them up to O Cebreiro. That commitment was **not only between the two friends**: it extended to their spouses, their children, the friend who assisted them for the first couple of weeks, other pilgrims who brought the wheelchair to the summit of the Galician village of O Cebreiro. It wouldn't have happened without them and so the list goes on. Commitment brings out the best in people.

When I worked overnight in the child protection unit for DoCs, we often encountered ugly violence. We were often seeking a safe place for children we had removed under orders. One woman from the outer western suburbs of Sydney, with very limited means, would take children regularly. This was a very demanding activity, which she was very good at. Very few people would even know about it. She had no recognition. She wouldn't have wanted it. But she was a saint in my eyes. But crucially the last verse of this Psalm tells us, loud and clear, that these acts of love and commitment are given God's imprimatur.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

AMEN

Hymn. 650.

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.

We are pilgrims on a journey
and companions on the road;
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.

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.

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.

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.

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.

CCLI Song # 72673 Richard Gillard

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Offering Prayer.

Prayers of the People (John Cox).

Introduction. After different sections of our prayers I will say

God of Love or God of mercy,,,,,the last word will vary. Will you please join with me by saying **hear our prayer**

Let us pray.

Great God of the universe creation and all that we know, and do not know we come to you as people in a world that is so difficult to understand and leaders to trust.

It is difficult to know how to pray. The world is carved up and divided with terms like

East and West. North and South

third world, two thirds world, developing world

rich and poor, privileged and impoverished,

powerful and powerless,

We see and hear endless reports that disturb horrify and leave us feeling powerless.

Even when it comes to responding to a universal covid-19 pandemic rich and powerful countries use the distribution of vaccines as means of garnering political influence rather than responding to the desperate needs of people. We are saddened to hear that again it is the poorest, it is the women and children who are the last and the least who receive help. Those you love and in whom we see your face. There are many situations requiring compassionate and courageous leadership. All too often this leadership is absent. We pray for leaders to rise up with heart, conviction and commitment.

We pray that as people who worship you as Creator God, we will provide leadership in restorative regenerative action to heal the earth and address climate change.

God of love and justice..... **Hear our prayer.**

We pray for churches and all faiths to provide moral ethical and spiritual leadership. The Psalmist says It is good when God's people meet together in unity.

We ask that as people of faith we will find ways that unite us. To find ways of sharing the common threads we all hold. Whether this is in the words we say, or the actions

we make, the harmony with which we come together declares your purpose for the all people.

We pray for our own denomination as we seek to provide leadership in matters of marriage equality and unlawful detention of people seeking asylum. We also pray for the government, that laws being currently considered will not lead to LGBTIQ+ people of our community being discriminated against. because of their sexual orientation.

God in your love and justice..... **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our country its people and its leaders.

We say we love a sunburnt country a land of sweeping plains far horizons and flooding rains. And it is true. But the extremes we have experienced over the last couple of years has been tough for so many. We pray for the physical emotional and spiritual wellbeing of our nation. For those who experience the disasters, those who are first responders and support people, for the family and friends, may we all find ways of generous love towards each other and ourselves.

God of compassionate presence..... **hear our prayer.**

We pray for governments federal state and local. We pray that partisan politics will be put aside for the good of the community. We pray for courage of the many good honest and faithful servants of our community, that they will have the courage to call out illegal unethical decisions and immoral behaviour. We pray for leaders to be willing to take action despite the inherent risks involved.

God of justice.....**hear our prayer.**

And now we pray for ourselves. We thank you for the encouraging and uplifting services of Easter. For the sense of community and new beginnings we experience. We look forward to the future expressions of your presence among us and through us to the community in which we live.

We pray for those in our church our family and friends who are struggling with health and other matters. We pause now to remember them silently and hold them up in our arms to you

God of loving presence.....**hear our prayer.**

Together we pray the prayer Jesus taught his disciples

Our father.....

Hymn. 602.

O love that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee:
I give thee back the life I owe,
that in thine ocean depths its flow

May richer, fuller be.

O light that followest all my way,
I yield my flickering torch to thee:
my heart restores its borrowed ray,
that in thy sunshine's blaze its day
may brighter fairer be.

O joy that sleekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to thee:
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
and feel the promise is not vain,
that morn shall tearless be.

O Cross that liftest up my head,
I do not ask to fly from thee:
I lay in dust life's glory dead
and from the ground there blossoms red
life that shall endless be.

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Blessing.