



Leura Uniting Church
9 May 2021
Easter 6
Stephen White

Acknowledgement of Country

This land is God's land and God's Spirit dwells here.
We acknowledge the Durag and Gundangurra People, traditional custodians of this land under God.
We commit ourselves again to caring for this land and working for reconciliation in this land.

Call to Worship

Unfortunately today due to COVID restrictions we must wear masks, we are not permitted to sing and we can't serve morning tea/coffee. Our Call to worship and some prayers speak of making a joyful noise to the Lord, but we can make a joyful noise in our hearts even if we can't sing aloud.

Liturgies on Line

Sing to God a new song, make a joyful song

Sing praises to God with instruments and the sound of melody

With trumpets and didgeridoo make a joyful noise before God.

From the Great Australian Bight to the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Let the sea roar, and all that fills it

Let the world and those who live in it with praise unite - brown and golden, black and white.

Let the Murray and Barcoo, Darling and Diamantina, clap their hands,

and eucalypt and banksia-blossomed hills sing together for joy in God's presence

Who judges the world with righteousness and people with fairness.

Sing to God a new song, make a joyful song

Sing praises to God with instruments and the sound of melody

Prayer of Adoration

Liturgies on Line

We, who so often take the wonders of creation for granted, welcome the opportunity to make a joyful noise before you, O God.

We come here this morning to worship and to praise you, glad that we live in this country filled with such diverse and beautiful examples of your creation.

Yet, joyful noises are not easy for everyone to make, as we come from differing situations and lifestyles. Some are burdened down with the stresses of daily living and all that involves; some wearied from tasks of serving others; some worried over the state of the world and where that is all leading.

Speak to us all, O God, in the stillness of this time and remind us of Jesus' willingness to take our burdens upon himself and to learn from him - to experience his gentleness and steadfast love for all.

Jesus also offers us his joy so that our joy might be complete.

Confident in these promises, we offer this time of worship to you, O God, praying that it may reflect our praise and thanksgiving for the gifts of creation and for all that Jesus has done for us. This we pray in his name. Amen

Song TIS 111 Praise to the Lord

1. Praise to the Lord,
the Almighty, the King of creation;
O my soul, praise Him,
for He is your health and salvation.
Come all who hear;
brothers and sisters draw near,
Praise Him in glad adoration

2. Praise to the Lord
who over all things is wondrously reigning
and on wings of an eagle, uplifting,
sustaining;
Have you not seen
All that is needed has been
sent by his gracious ordaining?

3. Praise to the Lord,
who will prosper our work and defend us;
Surely His goodness and mercy
shall daily attend us;
Ponder anew
what the Almighty can do
as with His love He befriends us.

4. Praise to the Lord,
who when darkness of sin is abounding,
who, when the godless do triumph,
our best hopes confounding,
sheds forth his light,
scatters the horrors of night,
saints with his mercy surrounding.

5. Praise to the Lord!
O let all that is in me adore Him!
all that has life and breath,
come now with praises before Him.
Let the Amen
sound from His people again;
gladly for ever we adore Him.

CCLI Song # 43073

Catherine Winkworth | Joachim Neander

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Welcome

Welcome to everyone to worship and especially mothers and grandmothers.

Today we celebrate Mother's Day. Mothers are special. I'm sure we can all remember special times we had with our mothers. For some of us our mothers are still a special part of our lives. But for some of us, we miss her deeply. Some, our mothers are a mixture of blessing and worry as they age and face the difficulties of health and mental wellbeing.

This morning the Kathy and Steph handed out white chrysanthemums. This was a practice that Kathy and my mum did for many years and over the years continued by our families in memory of our mum.

Mother's Day is a time of reflection. It is a time of sharing our love and appreciation to that special person who has given their love and much of themselves for their families.

Many of us will gather together as families and share this special time together with our mothers or with our children.

Prayer of Confession

Rev Bruce Prewer

Our Lord Jesus said:

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

You are truly my friends if you do what I command you."

Let us make our confession. I invite you to say the parts in italics.

Most holy God, most of the time we see ourselves as nice people,
Who are trying to do the loving thing in a difficult world.
We try not to lie, cheat, malign, abuse or injure others.
We try to serve you through the church and within the community.
We pray for peace and justice, and we attempt to forgive those who sin against us.
By the standards of love in the wider community we have not done so badly.
**Yet deep within we know how far we fall short of the love-standard set by Jesus,
And we even fall beneath the level that our own ideals have set us.
We feel compromised and misled by this hustling world with its glitter.
We become frustrated and undermined by a negativity within ourselves
Which diverts us and leads us into withholding love.**

Loving God, we certainly need your pardoning grace and humbly we ask for it.
But also we need much more.

**We seek the grace of self honesty, and a sharper awareness of our own hearts.
We need your illuminating Light, helping us to see through the humbug of society.
We need to allow ourselves to become saturated with your love.**

We ask for the spur of your Spirit

To make us more eager for the art of true loving,
And more determined to practice what we preach.

**Grant us these graces we pray, for without you we are as nothing.
Hear our prayer, through Christ our Saviour.**

Amen

Assurance of Forgiveness

Liturgies on Line

Hear the good news: Jesus, having been made perfect, became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him. (Hebrews 5:9) And so I declare to you: in Jesus Christ, we are renewed, we are cleansed, we are forgiven.

Thanks be to God!

Song They'll know we are Christians by our love

1. We are one in the Spirit,
we are one in the Lord;
we are one in the Spirit,
we are one in the Lord.
And we pray that all unity
May one day be restored.

2. We will walk with each other,
we will walk hand in hand;
we will walk with each other,
we will walk hand in hand.
And together we'll spread the news
that God is in our land.

Chorus

And they'll know we are Christians by our
love,
by our love,
yes they'll know we are Christians by our
love

3. We will work with each other.
we will work side by side;
we will work with each other,
we will work side by side.
And we'll guard each man's dignity
and save each man's pride

Chorus

4. All praise to the Father,
from whom all things come;
and all praise to Christ Jesus,
His only Son.
And all praise to the Spirit,
who makes us one

Chorus

CCLI Song # 26997
Peter Scholtes

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Readings:

1 John 5:1-6
John 15:9-17

George Osborne
Mark Hillis

Sermon

Love one another as I have loved you!

I had been thinking about the readings for today and I read a story in the April edition of the Reader's Digest "Next-Door Strangers" by Karen Stiller. Karen writes about life in the COVID lockdown and seeing her neighbours through her kitchen window. She started communicating by holding up signs, and they would answer with their signs.

She goes on to lament on the difficulty of being neighbours when you cannot meet in person. Going for walks made her sad and mad, as she felt she had to veer away from anyone she met.

She wrote:

"How do I love thee neighbour, like I'm supposed to? Love should pull in, not push out. Love takes risks, not the side road to avoid a crowd.

Love drops off casseroles and attends funerals, always. Love is best and easiest in person, up close and brightly lit, not hiding in the shadows.

And sick people are for visiting, not avoiding.

I can't love like I've been taught. We are all just stumbling along.

The last year has been difficult for everyone, especially where families have been isolated and separated from one another.

This year, many of us are able to celebrate Mother's Day together, though there are still many who have not been able to visit family for a long time.

Mother's Day is a time of reflection. It is a time of sharing our love and appreciation to our mothers, and grandmothers, who have given their love and much of themselves for their families.

Our readings today focus on love.

About 2000 years ago, Jesus was sharing a special time together with his disciples and probably some other close friends. They shared the Passover meal together, and they were thinking of the great things God had done for his people many years earlier.

Jesus spoke of many things that would be happening in the coming days, his arrest, death and resurrection.

The disciples would need the love of God to help them through the coming weeks.

Jesus commanded his followers, including us, to:

Love one another as I have loved you.

The Christian faith is a matter of relationships of love. The Father has loved Christ and Christ lived in his love. This love enables Christ to love us, and we are called to live in Christ's love.

We are grounded in Christ the vine, and the love of God runs — like sap — through us the branches, producing fruits of love.

Last week Myung Hwa spoke about the vine and the branches and about love. God is love. We are commanded to love one another.

Today's readings continue on this theme of love.

It is easy to talk about love. People say things like "I love my dog", "I love pavlova", "I love my football team."

"God is love,"

Love is so much more than mere infatuation, or sexual attraction.

Love in the Bible, Agape love is selfless, sacrificial, unconditional love.

Dr Eben Alexander is a neurologist and a Christian.

He caught a bad virus and went into a coma. He then had an experience of going into heaven, but he was later brought back to life.

His description of heaven was a place filled with love.

God is love. Love comes from God. Jesus came and showed the love of God to those around him.

Jesus said: *This is my commandment: That you love one another as I have loved you.*

When Jesus asks us to love one another, he is inviting us to take on this part of God's character.

We are made in God's image and we have His Spirit within us, so we should be like Him. God is love, and so we too should be loving.

Jesus said: *This is my commandment: That you love one another as I have loved you.*

Jesus, the Son of God, came to show us what the Father is like - God is love.

The Seasons of the Spirit material says:

Jesus shows us how to be a loving friend through his deepening relationship with his disciples. His love for God permeated his call and life.

Jesus calls his disciples to abide or remain in his love. Because we love Jesus and Jesus loves us, we will show love.

Jesus gives further encouragement to the disciples as he moves from the metaphor of vine and branches to disciples and friends - not servants. Jesus is preparing the disciples for his ascension.

Jesus said: *This is my commandment: That you love one another as I have loved you.*

We are charged by Jesus with a task as his friend - to love one another. Jesus sees this as the greatest commandment: To love a neighbour, to love a friend, to love a stranger, to love a guest, even to love an enemy.

We are called to share God's love with the world around us. While we may want to play a game of choice, we are to love everyone.

We are to show love, care, and respect - even when those we are called to love and serve may not have showered in week, or don't dress the way we would prefer. God loves wholly, fully, completely. We are called to do the same.

Jesus said: *As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.*

How do we abide or remain in his love?

If we are overcome by God's love and grace, we naturally live in this love and it is around us all the time. We abide in his love. It is part of us. We need to let go of our egos, not be centred on ourselves but on God.

Jesus said: *'You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my father.'*

What an honour and privilege, to be called a friend of Jesus? As we are enveloped in the love of God, we are no longer strangers but friends.

Jesus said: *'You did not choose me, but I chose you. And I anointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.'*

This again is such an honour. We are special because Jesus has called us, not only as friends but we are anointed, that is set aside to go out and serve him. We are to show the love of God to all who we meet.

Summary

Each one of us, you and me have been called by God to be his children, to receive the endless love that he has for us. This love overflows from our hearts to those around us. And part of this love is to worship our wonderful God and Father.

Our lives should be continual worship and praise to God and sharing this love with all who we meet. God's love is for all people, even those we don't like.

As the People of God here in Leura, let us show this love in our lives and all that we say and do.

Jesus said: *This is my commandment: That you love one another as I have loved you. Amen*

Delma is going to read the story of John 15 from the perspective of the first disciples.

A New Commandment – from Seasons of the Spirit 2018

To be honest with you, most of the time we were with Jesus, we were confused. So much of what he said was hard to understand, like half catching the melody of a song on the wind, you know it's a song and you know that if you could just hear a little more of it you would recognize it and be able to sing along. That was us; constantly straining to hear and understand.

Usually, we'd talk together late at night or when Jesus wasn't around. And most conversations would begin, "What did he mean when he said...?" Or, "Was anyone else confused yesterday?"

For example, that time Jesus said, "I do not call you servants any longer because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father." When we found time to talk later, Pete started by joking that we had had a promotion. We all laughed but Jamie said it was no joke. It really was a promotion.

"But," someone else said, "Jesus has always called us his friends."

"And treated us that way too," someone else added.

Jamie said, "I know that. I think he was telling us that there was a change coming somehow. Like he was passing on the job to us in a new way..."

"Yeah," Pete said, picking up the theme. "That must be why he talked of loving each other as a commandment. I mean, he's always been on about us loving each other."

"And everyone else!" someone else laughed.

"But now it's a commandment," Pete continued. "A new one."

"Like one of the ten," Tom said:—

"Number eleven?" someone laughed.

"No," Jamie said "I think Jesus wants us to know that his commandment is at the heart of all the ten. It's the foundation. Without this one, nothing else matters; with this one, everything else is covered."

There was silence for a while. Then someone said, "Do you mean that if we follow the love commandment, we don't have to worry about the others?"

"No," said Jamie, "I think Jesus is saying that by concentrating on this one, we'll find that we are taking care of the others too."

"Much easier," someone said.

"Except for the bit about dying," Tom muttered.

"Yes," Pete said, "What did he mean about laying down your life for your friends?"

There was a longer silence. We all knew that Jesus had been talking more about death than we had remembered from the early days.

"We're going to be by ourselves soon, I think," said Tom, saying aloud what we were all starting to think. "That's why he is saying these things. That's why he wants us to know and remember the important things..."

"How can we love each other as much as he has loved us?" Pete said.

We all looked around at each other. It was as if we had just stopped being teenagers and become adults and realized that we now had to take responsibility. We were the ones. It was up to us.

"So, maybe it really is a promotion then?" Tom said. No one laughed then.

Even then, we had no real idea about what was going to happen, what it would mean for us, how central Jesus' new commandment was going to become for us all.

I can tell you now, all these years later, that of all the wonderful things Jesus did and said, it is this one sentence that has kept me going; "Love one another as I have loved you."

Song - TIS 164 The great love of God

1. The great love of God
Is revealed in the Son,
Who came to this earth
To redeem everyone.

2. That love, like a stream
Flowing clear to the sea,
Makes clean every heart
That from sin would be free.

3. It binds the whole world,
every barrier it breaks,
The hills it lays low,
And the mountains is shakes.

4. It's yours, it is ours,
O how lavishly given!
The pearl of great price,
And the treasure of heaven.

Daniel Thambyrajah Niles 1908-70

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Announcements

Prayer for the Offering

Many of us give through Giving Direct or Direct Debit, and details are in the Bulletin. There will be a brass plate on the table in the hall where cash gifts can be given.
Let us pray for all these gifts.

Lectionary Generated Liturgy

We pray your blessing, O God, on the gifts we are giving - may they be used to bear fruit as the gospel is proclaimed far and near. We pray your blessing on us, that our lives may be authentic signs of Jesus' love and visible expressions of his joy. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen**

Prayer of Intercession

Carolyn Craig-Emilsen

Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven
Hallowed be your name
Your kingdom come
Your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread
And 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

Song - TIS 588 In heavenly love abiding

1. In heavenly love abiding,
no change my heart shall fear;
and safe is such confiding,
for nothing changes here;
the storm may roar without me,
my heart may low be laid;
but God is round about me,
and can I be dismayed?
2. Wherever He may guide me
no want shall turn me back,
my Shepherd is beside me
and nothing can I lack;

his wisdom ever waking,
his sight is never dim,
he knows the way He taking
and I will walk with Him.
3. Green pastures are before me,
which yet I have not seen;
bright skies will soon be o'er me,
where darkest clouds have been;
my hope I cannot measure,
my path to life is free;
my Saviour has my treasure,
and He will walk with me.

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Anna Laetitia Waring

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Benediction

Seasons of the Spirit

Friends, be blessed as you move through each day in love and service.

May your conversations speak gentle truths in love.

May your dreams be filled with mercy and goodness.

May God speak to you in your waking and your sleeping dreams.

May you seek to find the beauty that surrounds you.

May you know the gifts of friendship with others, friendship with creation, and friendship with Christ.

Go now, creating ripples of God's love.

Amen!