



Leura Uniting Church
25 July 2021
Pentecost 9
Rev Dr Mel Macarthur

Order of Service.

John. 6: 1-21. (Mathew 14:9)

Acknowledgement of Country. What do we acknowledge?

A society that is informed by its foundational stories. Acknowledge that we as a society have largely neglected our foundational stories*. Consider one of our foundational stories today.



Gallery.

- **John Carroll** . *The Wreck of Western Culture* based on *Western Dreaming*.
- **Perce Marland**. (Refer to *Prayers of the People: peace and peacemaking in a world replete with violence*).

Hymn. 106. Now thank we all our God.

1. Now thank we all our God
With hearts and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things has done,
In whom the world rejoices;
Who from our mothers' arms
Has blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love,
and still is ours today.

2. O may this bounteous God
Through all our life be near us,
With ever joyful hearts
And blessed peace to cheer us.
Lord, keep us in your grace,
And guide us when perplexed,
And free us from all harm
In this world and the next.

3. All praise and thanks to God
Who reigns in highest heaven,
To Father and to Son
And Spirit now be given:
The one eternal God,
Whom heaven and earth adore,
Who ever was, is now,
And shall be ever more.

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Prayer of Adoration.

God's Grandeur. Gerard Manley Hopkins

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
it gathers to a greatness like the ooze of oil
crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all are seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.
And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the deepest freshness deep down things;
and through the last lights off the black west went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward springs----
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with Ah! Bright wings.

Gerard Manley Hopkins. Public domain.

Prayer of Confession.

O Christ the master carpenter,
who at the last through wood and nails
purchased our whole salvation
wield well your tools in the workshop of your world,
so that we, who come rough hewn to your bench,
may be fashioned to a truer beauty by your hand.

We ask this in your name and for your sake.

AMEN *(Prayer of the Iona Community in Uniting in worship)*

Reading Psalm. Psalm 14 (Paul Cameron)

Reading of Gospel. John 6:1-21(Olwen Prowse)

TiS 207 Jesus shall reign where'er the sun

1. Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Does its successive journeys run;
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.

2. For him shall endless prayer be made,
And praises crowd to crown his head;
His name like sweet perfume shall rise
With every morning sacrifice.

3. People and realms of every tongue
Dwell on his love with sweetest song;
And infant voices shall proclaim
Their early blessings on his name.

4. Blessings abound where'er he reigns:
The prisoner leaps to lose his chains;
The weary find eternal rest;
And all who suffer want are blessed.

5. Where he displays his healing power
Death and the curse are known no more;
In him the tribes of Adam boast
More blessings than their father lost.

6. Let every creature rise and bring
The highest honours to our King,
Angels descend with songs again,
And earth repeat the long amen.

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Isaac Watts

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Sermon.

Preached only once before on this passage. Couple of decades ago. In my exit year from College. It was my final sermon and was based around this passage based on this passage.

In College, needed to support a family, so, I had to work, the only option was overnight. Worked in the Child Protection Crisis Unit of DoCS. Challenged me to integrate studies in theology with work I was doing. How did they inform one another. If they were kept discrete, then I would of necessity be living in a discrete, Jekyll and Hyde type schizoid world. What happened was I developed a kind of parallel kind curriculum running at night and the College running during the day. Fascinating but exhausting.

Starting to put sermon together during week to deliver in the chapel on Friday. Tuesday or Wednesday working overnight, we were called out early around midnight to a situation of disgusting violence. Finished around 4am coming back to write reports when received another call from police in transit. We were only about five minutes away from the address where we would meet them. I was tired, emotionally and physically exhausted. This matter we were going to was the last thing I needed, plus I had a Greek exam the following morning (Ruth Dicker)*.

Back to the main point. We arrived at the address, police cars outside, there were various people and police in front yard. I peered through the windscreen at this scene of chaos and said to my colleague. 'Liz, I wish his would go away, that someone would just send it away'. It wasn't about to because the police were at the car before I even opened the door. He didn't want to be there any more than I did. He simply said, 'This is your responsibility; you deal with it'. We found ourselves in the middle of the chaos. **My first thought** was one of resignation: 'If I have to be somewhere in the chaos, I may as well be in the middle of it'.

My second thought went to today's reading. The setting of the reading is a wilderness scene. The crowd that have followed Jesus are restless and hungry and there is no food.

The John reading has Jesus ask the disciples where they could buy bread (to test Philip). Testing indeed. I think I might have said 'Do you know where we are'? I may even have added, 'Even if there was a bakery at hand, we don't have the money to feed a multitude'.

The corresponding passage in Matthew has Jesus respond to the disciples request to disperse the crowd by saying, rather starkly 'You give them something to eat' In other words, you deal with it. An equally improbable solution to the situation one would think. I thought that Jesus statements to the disciples was similar to the police officer's statement to me. **Basically he was saying 'there's a scene of chaos over there, bring order into it.** Now, chaos had been part of those children's lives for the last five or six years, it had come to a head in violence. I wasn't all of a sudden going to bring order into it. I issued removal orders, and medical examination orders, this undoubtedly reduced the volatility of the situation for the children involved, but it didn't bring order into the chaos of these children by any stretch of the imagination. I think what Jesus was getting at with Philip making this suggestion was to confront him with the situation and get him to think outside the square. To tell him that he at least has to address the problem. Even if ultimately the result was for Philip to **come to terms with his limitations**, he needed to be engaged in the process.

Well, Philip did not bring order into the chaos, any more my colleague and I did to our situation. This only came about Jesus acted, and brought order into the chaos

In drawing this parallel between the reading and our situations in life where we live among the chaos, there are a couple of things I learned.

1. God wants us to confront problems, even though they can appear overwhelming: we are not to shy away from them. We live in a world obsessed with outcomes. I think God is concerned that we make our **best efforts**, even though we don't and perhaps

can't resolve those problems. God does not judge simply on outcomes. If that was to be the case, we would likely do nothing in the face of the magnitude of the problems, in particular the problem of violence, which I will refer to shortly and which Perce addressed in his prayers of the people.

2. If we endeavour to bring order into the chaos, then we are participating in God's work, work which God has been doing from the beginning of this world.
3. We must to not neglect our foundational stories, for in today's reading we have spelled out very clearly that God can bring order into the chaos. In this thought I find great hope is great hope. In this story from John, I find great hope as I am faced with problems of great moment.

I want now to refer to Perce's prayers of the people a week or two ago. The prayers came out a concern, perhaps a disgust, at the violence that pervades the world. There is an old adage that there are two things in life that are certain; death and taxes. This is rather simplistic of course. The discourse needs to be widened to include violence. It seems the default position for humans. A couple of things emerged for me from the prayers.

Firstly, Perce knows a lot about situations in the world where violence has wrought havoc. This is hardly surprising, as Perce and Delma's daughter has spent much of her working life in overseas aid, endeavouring to bring order into these situations of chaos have been created, directly or indirectly, by violence. I had the privilege of walking tracks here in the mountains with Sarah and learning about the work she was doing. The prayers brought back to me some of the material in these conversations with Sarah, that the expression of violence underlies much of the chaos and ugliness of today's world and God would have us address it.

The other thing that came to me was that Perce, nor Sarah for that matter, in any way diminished the immensity of this problem of bringing order into the chaos. There are no quick fixes, there may not be any fix, but we are not looking here at outcomes, but rather the need to make our best efforts, which may entail encouraging those people who are amid the wreckage it has created and is creating and making efforts to bring order into the chaos no matter how remote the chances of any success may seem.

Finally, the appeal in the Perce's prayers is to the one who can bring order into chaos. There in lies hope, God acting in and through God's world to bring order into the chaos of human existence.

AMEN.

Hymn. AHB 613. Lord of all hopelessness

1. Lord of all hopefulness Lord of all joy
Whose trust ever child-like
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

2. 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

3. 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

4. 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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Offering Prayer.

Notices (John Cox)

Prayers of the People. (Denise)

God of hope and comfort, we know this above all things – your steadfast love endures beyond all things here on this earth and beyond this earth. We know this, and yet we still struggle. We know that we are your people, and we also know that you most certainly are our God.

How are we feeling, experiencing in this time of prolonged lockdown?

God of hope and comfort. Be amongst us as we live each day:

Blessed are those who tend to their garden, those who enjoy looking out of the window to see the trees.

Blessed are those who receive and send a kind telephone call or an email to inquire how things are going.

Blessed are those who have a pet to pat.

Blessed are those who can walk outside and experience the cold, crisp air.

Blessed are those who use zoom to keep in contact with family – to read a story, to listen to how they are managing.

Blessed are those who count the birds that fly into their backyard.

Blessed are those who watch TV programmes that inspire like the actor Uncle Jack Charles, others take you to different places – Tour de France.

Blessed are those who have found ways to create – in music, in paint, in writing.

Each of us give thanks to God in the ways we as individuals have been blessed.

God in your mercy

Hear our prayer

God of hope and comfort. Be amongst us as we live each day to remember others:

Give hope to those who are lonely, frightened who become over-whelmed as they listen to the stories about COVID.

Give comfort to those people who wake up with the feeling that there is nothing happening today. We pray for Ron and June in their home.

Give comfort to those aged persons who walk the corridors of aged-care homes and wonder where their family and friends are. We pray for Betty and Shirley.

Give comfort to those who are sick, and their lives have been changed due to their failing health. We pray for Kate, Gabrielle, Anne & Bob, Iris and Jane.

God of hope to those who are experiencing the burden of financial difficulties.

God strengthen and protect those people who are called 'essential' as they support and work in the community.

God encourage those students who are trying to make sense out of their schoolwork at home.

God in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Our world at present has been made smaller due to the restrictions. Open our eyes and hearts as we respond in prayer for the people who have experienced devastation – the floods in Germany, raising numbers of COVID cases effecting our Pacific neighbours – Fiji, Myanmar, Indonesia. Women and children in Afghanistan who are experiencing lack of human rights due to the continuous political unrest.

Lord God provide comfort and hope to our fragile and hurting humanity.

God in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Lord, God give us the ability to see in everyday situations a fresh insight of hope which renews us.

The 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 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.

Hymn. 207. Jesus shall reign where'er the sun

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Does its successive journeys run;
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.

For him shall endless prayer be made,
And praises crowd to crown his head;
His name like sweet perfume shall rise
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Blessing.