

Leura Uniting Church Worship Service for Sunday 29th August 2021

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost. Leader: Mark Hillis.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY:

This Christian congregation respectfully acknowledges the Gundungurra & Dharug peoples, as original owners, custodians and inhabitants of this land for millennia.

Page | 1

CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: *In the Song of Solomon chapter 2, verses 10 to 12 we read:*

My beloved speaks and says to me:

Arise, my love, my fair one,
and come away;

[Response:-]

**for now the winter is past,
the rain is over and gone.**

The flowers appear on the earth;
the time of singing has come,
**and the voices of beautiful birds
are heard across our land.**

With joy, let us worship God!

Together in Song Hymn 477 Jesus calls us here to meet him (Words on page 5)

PRAYER OF ADORATION, CONFESSION AND THANKSGIVING

Beginning with words from Psalm 15:1-5

“O Lord, who may abide in your tent?
Who may dwell on your holy hill?
Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right,
and speak the truth from their heart;
who do not slander with their tongue,
and do no evil to their friends,
nor take up a reproach against their neighbours;
in whose eyes the wicked are despised,
but who honour those who fear the Lord;
who stand by their oath even to their hurt;
who do not lend money at interest,
and do not take a bribe against the innocent.
Those who do these things shall never be moved.”

[... Prayer continues ...]

Good and gracious God, we hear the truth from this Psalm. Did the writer remember times when friends had failed; or perhaps when he or she had failed others? Does the writer recall these things as victim or perpetrator? We too remember such times when we have said things we would prefer not to have said and done things we wish we had never done. Those times when it would be preferable to start the day, or one's very life, again. Forgive us if we have sinned against you and others in this way. Grant us fresh resolve to do good and to make restitution for any hurt or harm we have done to others. And enlarge our hearts, Good and Gracious God, to be able to forgive those who have wronged us: to receive and to give

forgiveness in the way your Son, our Lord, Jesus would have us do. In his blessed name we pray, AMEN.

Together in Song Hymn 598 Dear Father, Lord of humankind (Words on page 5)

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Leader: Hear the Good News: You are forgiven!

Response: Thanks and praise to God, forever. AMEN.

SCRIPTURE

James 1:17–27 (Will Prowse)

READER: Your word is a lamp to my feet

RESPONSE: and a light for my path. (Ps 119:105)

Mark 7: 1-8, 14-15, 21-23 (Annie Cox)

READER: In this is the Gospel of the Lord:

RESPONSE: Praise to Jesus Christ, the Word!

Together in Song Hymn 434 Where there is charity and love (Words on page 5)

SHARING THE WORD

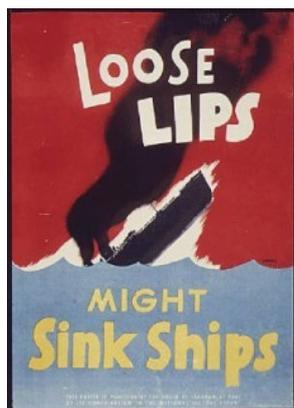
‘Pure and Undefined’?



(i) **There is an old saying or song,** "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names [or words] will never hurt me." What are your thoughts about that saying? Also, take a few moments to think about today's Bible passages may be saying to you.

(ii) **The power of words.** Notice that in this picture the woman has words printed all over her. What can she do about that? Whatever words are said about her, it is what she does that matters most.

(iii) **The power of your tongue.** There is teaching in the Bible which warns us of this power. Like all power, it can be used for good or bad reasons. Here's a brief part of a story where words are used hurtfully by a young girl, Destiny. This extract is from Michelle de Kretser's novel, *Questions of Travel*:¹



Tracy would often visit her friend Laura. Tracy often had her daughter, Destiny, with her. [Laura would usually be attentive to Destiny, but on this particular day was distracted by trouble in her life.] "When Laura came to Paddo, she would say, 'Have a squiz in my bag, Destiny.' There would be a book or a toy or a bracelet [for Destiny]. But there was no bag this time, nothing for Destiny, who was obviously disappointed. Laura was asking Destiny one of the dumb questions grown-ups ask about school. There were only three that mattered: What must you not show? Who is the leader? Where can you hide? A long time later, when Tracy and Destiny were

¹ Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*. Allen & Unwin, 2013, p.448

leaving, Destiny went unbidden to Laura. *She pretended to kiss but placed her mouth very close to the large ear. Very softly and very distinctly, in her light, childish voice, she said, 'Everyone says you're ugly.'* Destiny's best friend had said this to her on the last day of school, and Destiny knew its power. *At the gate, she turned her flower-face to Laura and waved."*

(iv) It would be far too easy to read Mark 7:1-23 as condemning practices from long ago which we (so called enlightened persons from the 21st Century) would never have taken so seriously. The Gospel reading gives the impression that Jesus was struggling with unenlightened, bigoted keepers of empty tradition. However, this was clearly not the case. The Pharisees were admired because they were so distinctive. They were 'stand-out' examples of Jewish faith in an otherwise hostile and pagan world which looked down upon them and despised them. By contrast, most Jewish people looked up to Pharisees as exemplary Jews, and thanked God daily for their courage and stamina in the faith. When you think of the Pharisees this way, it is easier to understand why Jesus argued with them so passionately (like any good Jewish man would do). From the exchanges between Jesus and Pharisees in the Gospels it is possible to discern three things:

- i. That Jesus expected more leadership and less pride from the Pharisees;
- ii. That they expected more piety and support from Jesus; and
- iii. That the tension between the disciples of Jesus and leading Jews was an ongoing part of religious struggle well into the first and second centuries of our era.

How willing are we, today, to suspend our favourite routines or to bypass our usual practices for the benefit of another person or group?

(v) Turning to the Letter of James, we can see that the same kind of struggle between religious parties was also found in the early Christian churches, as it is among Christians and other religions today. In James we find the exposition of "true religion that is pure and spotless/undefiled." Guess what? Such pure religion is willing to get its hands dirty, and even to bypass beloved rituals, in order to do those things which are most important in the service of God and neighbour: "To care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world." What a simple yet profound message. You want to be pure? Then serve the lowly, and those who may never praise you or point to you in the street. Don't look for worldly rewards. Seek a heart like that of Jesus: pure and undefiled in the best sense of the term. Allow the Spirit of God to do that necessary work within you that transforms what comes out from you.

Proverbs 12:18 "There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing."

Silent Meditation

THE PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Leader: Spirit of compassion,

Response: **heal our inward being, we pray.**

Loving presence, we dare to come unarmed before you because Jesus has taught us that your gaze upon us is a gaze of love and acceptance; a gaze full of grace and understanding. Even so, loving God, we do not abandon the desire to develop the “tongue of the wise” (Proverbs 12:18). We know how hurtful human beings can be towards one another, and that it is often something more than cruel or thoughtless words. When we look around at the world where we live, we are witnesses to cruel, appalling, and tragic acts amongst the human population and towards other forms of life. We pray earnestly that humans will become more inwardly reflective. We pray for insight to conquer the serious wrong that develops within human beings: that which emerges as acts of selfishness, greed, envy, pride, hatred, prejudice, violence, callousness, and brutality.

Spirit of compassion, **heal our inward being, we pray.**

We observe those who have closed their hearts to all others: who only care for their own reputations; their own popularity, their own profit: things which they believe they have earned or deserved. Wake them up, Spirit of God, we pray. Wake up the unfeeling political leaders. Wake up the complacent business magnates, we pray. Open the eyes of those who seem blind to the suffering of others, to the pain and anxiety around them.

Spirit of compassion, **heal our inward being, we pray.**

Gracious God, open our eyes to our own prejudices and anxieties. Do not allow us to attribute bad motivations to those who may not harbour them. Grant us a purity of vision that allows us to see genuine good and concern in others. Strengthen us to cooperate with all in the world that is good, and lovely and worthy of praise.

Spirit of compassion, **heal our inward being, we pray.**

We turn to our own local community. We pray for strength of faith and restoration to unwell bodies and souls. We pray for willing imaginations to reach out as church, as families, as groups of friends – to explore, together, the good we can do in the name of Jesus.

Spirit of compassion, **heal our inward being, we pray.** In the name of Christ. **AMEN.**

OFFERINGS, DEDICATION & NOTICES

Together in Song Hymn 560(i) All my hope on God is founded (Words on page 5)

BLESSING

Together in Song Hymn 778 Shalom to you now, shalom, my friends. (Sing twice)

Shalom² to you now, shalom, my friends.

May God’s full mercies bless you, my friends.

In all your living and through your loving,

Christ be your shalom, Christ be your shalom.

[Elise Shoemaker Eslinger 1942– .Words and music from the *United Methodist Hymnal* USA by permission United Methodist Publishing House. © Gary Simpson. Words: Used with permission CCLI Licence No. 300742]

² Shalom is a Hebrew word meaning “peace.”

Hymn 477 Jesus calls us here

1. Jesus calls us here to meet him
as, through word and song and prayer,
we affirm God's promised presence
where his people live and care.
Praise the God who keeps his promise;
praise the Son who calls us friends;
praise the Spirit who, among us,
to our hopes and fears attends.

2. Jesus calls us to confess him
Word of Life and Lord of All,
sharer of our flesh and frailness
saving all who fail or fall.
Tell his holy human story;
tell his tales that all may hear;
tell the world that Christ in glory
came to earth to meet us here.

3. Jesus calls us to each other:
found in him are no divides.
Race and class and sex and language
such are barriers he derides.
Join the hand of friend and stranger;
join the hands of age and youth;
join the faithful and the doubter
in their common search for truth.

John L. Bell 1949– and Graham Maule 1958–
Words and music from *Wild Goose Songs 3, Love
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Hymn 598 Dear Father, Lord of humankind

Dear Father, Lord of humankind,
forgive our foolish ways;
re clothe us in our rightful mind:
in purer lives thy service find,
in deeper reverence, praise.
in deeper reverence, praise.

Breathe through the heats of our desire
thy coolness and thy balm;
let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
O still small voice of calm,
O still small voice of calm.

John Greenleaf Whittier 1807–92 *alt.* Reproduced
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Hymn 434 Where there is charity and love

*Where there is charity and love,
there the God of love abides.*

1. The love of Christ has gathered us as
one:
rejoice in him with joy which he imparts;
let us revere and love the living God,
and love each other with unfeigning
hearts.

2. And so, when we are gathered here as
one,
let quarrels die, and envious rancour
cease;
be our resolve all bitterness to shun,
and in our midst be Christ, his love and
peace.

3. O lead us, Master, by your saving grace,
to where the blessed glory in your sight;
there let us see and love you, face to
face,
gathered once more in everlasting light.

From the Office of the *Mandatum* paraphrased by
Richard Connolly 1927–. Words and music © R.
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Hymn 560(i) All my hope on God is founded

1. All my hope on God is founded;
all my trust will be renewed,
through all change and chance God
guides me,
only good and only true.
Lord unknown,
who alone
calls my heart to be God's own.

3. God's great goodness lasts for ever,
deepest wisdom, passing thought;
splendour, light and life attending,
beauty springing out of naught.
Evermore
from God's store
new-born worlds rise and adore.

5. Still from earth to God eternal
sacrifice of praise be done,
high above all praises praising
for the gift of Christ the Son.
Hear Christ call
one and all:
those who follow shall not fall.

Robert Bridges 1844–1930 *alt.* after Joachim
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