

Leura Uniting Church Worship Service for Sunday 31st October 2021, Reformation Sunday and the Eve of All Saints Day (*Halloween*).

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 and today.

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CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: *In Psalm 146 we read (verses 1, & 7-9):*

Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord, O my soul!

I will praise the Lord as long as I live;

I will sing praises to God my whole life long.

The Lord sets the prisoners free;

And opens the eyes of the blind.

The Lord lifts the downtrodden,

And loves those who do right.

The Lord watches over the strangers,

And upholds the orphan and the widow.

With joy, let us worship the Lord!

And let us hope in God's steadfast love forever!

Together in Song Hymn 557 Awake, my soul (Words on page 5)

PRAYER OF ADORATION, CONFESSION AND THANKSGIVING

It is the season and the day to praise the courage and perseverance of faithful people. God, we seek your steadfast love and we, with the saints of old, dare to believe that your way of loving service is the way of hope for humanity. We are weary of the corruption and compromise that leads to greater oppression of the poorest and most vulnerable members of our society. We are tired of the excuses made by those who wield power over defenceless people. When we tire of seeking gurus and great leaders to save us, grant the stirring wind and fire of your Holy Spirit to so work within us and our community that we act with courage to address the problems we face. Forgive us when we surrender to apathy. Forgive us when we judge others for not doing what we know needs to be done. Forgive us the temptation to point fingers of blame in all directions, rather than facing our own need to act in accordance with your will. As we give thanks for reformers and saints, may we humbly seek the inspiration their stories provide. May your love ignite our actions and infuse us with grace to love you with our whole being, and our neighbours as ourselves. In the power of your Spirit we pray, AMEN.

Together in Song Hymn 587 Fold to your heart your sister and your brother (Words on page 5)

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Leader: Hear the Good News: You are forgiven and empowered by the Holy Spirit!

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

SCRIPTURE

Ruth 1: 1-18

READER: Gracious God, put your law within us

RESPONSE: And write it upon our hearts. (Jeremiah 31:33)

Mark 12: 28-34

READER: In this is the Gospel of the Lord:

RESPONSE: Praise to Jesus Christ, the Word!

SHARING THE WORD: 'Your people shall be my people' (Ruth 1:16):



(i) **The immobilising power of grief.** Grief comes at some stage to each of us, and visits some of our sisters and brothers too often. What power it has to immobilise, perhaps even paralyse! Grief is painful and unavoidable. We cannot hide from it without becoming callous and cold. Grief demands recognition. There are no short-cuts out of the terrible grip of its power. Think of your own experiences of grief. What might you dare to say to others about it? When I look at William Blake's picture, *Naomi Entreating Ruth and Orpah* I can see something of grief's effect on those characters. We

may know that Orpah reluctantly returns to her parental home in Moab. We may know that Ruth will cling to Naomi for comfort and to offer comfort. But as is revealed by Naomi's speeches in verses 8 to 15 and in verses 20-21, we see the fact that Naomi openly declares her feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness to her daughter-in-law and to the community in Bethlehem when she and Ruth eventually reach there. Like Job, Naomi bluntly states that God has brought 'calamity' upon her. 'Don't call me Naomi [pleasant one] anymore. Call me Mara [bitter].' We readers might protest, 'Haven't you heard and seen the wonderful words and faithful actions of Ruth towards you! Look at the grace is so near to you.' That may be okay for us, but Naomi-now-Mara must be allowed her grief. She must be allowed to show the great gaping hole that has opened beneath her. Her very being declares her loss. How could it be otherwise? She is alive yet will only continue to live if the community around her allows her time to grieve and sees and respects the depth of her loss. Unlike the so-called friends of Job, Naomi will discover that her community patiently stands by her, listening and observing the whole time. One day she will be ready to hear their consoling words and breathe easily in their company again.

(ii) **The enduring power of love.** Thomas Matthews Rooke's triptych painting, *The Story of Ruth* is



to be viewed from the right to the left, as one reads Hebrew writing. The first frame is of Ruth clinging to Naomi and accompanying her from Moab to Bethlehem. Ruth becomes a stranger in a strange land in order to stay with Naomi. Those famous words of Ruth, spoken to Naomi in verses 16-17 are not forever lost on Naomi. The words take their form from Ruth's faithful action. In time they draw forth caring concern and carefully supportive actions and advice from Naomi to Ruth. Their

bond becomes mutual, as they together seek to survive in a family-centred society. The male character Boaz is attracted to Ruth by the loving devotion of the women for one another. In fact, the whole community is impressed by the enduring love they witness. So much so that they overlook the foreignness of Ruth and see the loyalty, faithfulness, righteousness, and loving-kindness between them to praise Ruth with extraordinary distinction at the end of the story (chapter 4, verses 14 to 15). The son who is born of the marriage between Ruth and Boaz is appropriately acknowledged, but the blessing and praise to God from the community of women in Bethlehem includes these words to Naomi: [Your grandson Obed] 'shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; **for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him.**' Wonderful and astonishing words? You bet! I encourage you to also read Isaiah 56: 3-5 when you have a chance. But for now, celebrate the blessing from the women of Bethlehem. It is an inspiring

counterpart to Ruth's great words in chapter 1. We can surely see that the greatest of words are supported by patient and enduring loving actions. No epic story of famous reformers or saints of God is better than this. There is no higher calling for any of us.

Silent Meditation

THE PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE – Prepared by Perce Marland.

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There are a number of excerpts from today's Bible readings that focus on praising and loving God. For example, in Psalm 146, these words appear: 'I will praise the Lord as long as I live' (Verse 2); and "Happy are those whose hope is the Lord" (Verse 5). Then in Mark 12 verse 30, we read these words: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." So today I have written prayers that begin with praising and loving God for all his goodness to us.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, when we look about us, we see overwhelming evidence of Your love for us: the amazing variety of trees, plants and flowers to feast our eyes on; the rich diversity of creatures that offer so much help and inspiration in our labours, leisure and innovations; the incredible abundance of resources that underpin our life-styles; the enormously satisfying and diverse sources of food to sustain us; and the magnificence and mystery of our earth and universe. To top it all off, You offer us, through the death and resurrection of Christ, the hope of resurrection and eternal life.

For all Your wonderful generosity to us, we give You thanks. For all the understanding, compassion and mercy You show us, in spite of our failings and sinfulness, we thank You, God. Continue to show us the tougher but better road to follow that is based on compassion, graciousness, peace, justice and love. We ask that Your wisdom may be engrained in our hearts and behaviours. We trust in, and give thanks for, Your unfailing love.

We also come before You today, Lord, to pray for those in pain, whether it be physical, emotional or spiritual. Comfort all those who are grieving and experiencing the loss of loved ones, relationships, jobs, safety, security and the comforts of a home. Lord, we pray especially for those on our prayer list and for those we name in our hearts who are in distressing states of mind and health. We pray that all those affected by the pandemic will be able to bounce back and resume a sense of normality now that most of the restrictions have been removed. We lament the heartless way in which those who are marginalised and those who are seeking refuge in our prosperous land are being treated. We cry with those who suffer the indignities of removal of hope and human dignity. Restore in all these folk the joy of knowledge of You and Your ways. Bring peace and healing to all those who suffer. We pray, too, for all, such as those at Junction 142, who engage in good works aligned with divine love. May the joy of serving others in Your name sustain them in their service. We offer special prayers, too, for the thousands of health care workers whose work conditions have imposed massive stress on their physical and mental well-being. Uphold them and renew their strength.

It saddens our hearts to hear of the tensions and divisions within the international community. It is disturbing when we see world leaders embracing division rather than unity, pursuing power and wealth instead of justice and perpetrating lies instead of truth. Lord, we pray that You will transform their beliefs and actions so that they are more compatible with Your will.

We offer earnest prayers for Your church. May it continue to do good works. May its leaders find inspiration and courage to follow Christ's example in all that they do and say. We give thanks for our Uniting Church and its leaders at local, state and national levels. We pray that You bestow blessings on our current moderator, Rev. Simon Hansford, our moderator elect, Rev. Mata Hiliau, and our own leader, Rev. Myung Hwa Park. Give them confidence and joy in all that they do. We offer these prayers to You in the name of Jesus Christ who taught us to pray saying, 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name'

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is 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

OFFERINGS, DEDICATION & NOTICES

Together in Song Hymn 683 God! When human hearts are broken (Words on page 5)

BLESSING

The grace of Christ attend you;
the love of God surround you;
the Holy Spirit keep you;
this day and forever. **Amen**



Ruth, Antonio Cortina Farinos

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Hymn 557 Awake, my soul

1. Awake, my soul, and with the sun
your daily stage of duty run;
shake off dull sloth, and joyful rise
to pay your morning sacrifice:
2. Glory to you that safely kept
and have refreshed me while I slept;
grant, Lord, when I from death shall
wake
I may of endless light partake.
3. Lord, I my vows to you renew;
disperse my sins as morning dew;
guard my first springs of thought and
will,
and with yourself my spirit fill.
4. Direct, control, suggest, this day
all I design or do or say,
that all my powers, with all their might,
in your sole glory may unite.
5. Praise God, from whom all blessings
flow,
praise God, all creatures here below,
praise God above, you heavenly host,
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Together in Song. The Australian Hymn Book
Company Pty. Ltd. Thomas Ken 1637–1711 *alt.*
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Hymn 587 Fold to your heart

1. Fold to your heart your sister and your
brother:
where pity dwells, the peace of God is there;
to worship rightly is to love each other,
each smile a hymn, each kindly deed a prayer.
2. For he whom Jesus loved has truly spoken:
the holier worship which he deigns to bless
restores the lost, and binds the spirit broken,
and feeds the widow and the fatherless.
3. Follow with rev'rent steps the great example
of him whose holy work was doing good:
so shall the wide earth seem our Father's
temple,
each loving life a psalm of gratitude.
4. Then shall all shackles fall: the stormy
clangour
of wild war music o'er the earth shall cease;
love shall tread out the baleful fire of anger,
and in its ashes plant the tree of peace.

John Greenleaf Whittier 1807–92 *alt.* Reproduced with
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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.

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Hymn 683 God! When human hearts

1. God! When human bonds are broken
and we lack the love or skill
to restore the hope of healing,
give us grace and make us still.
2. Through that stillness, with your Spirit
come into our world of stress,
for the sake of Christ forgiving;
all the failures we confess.
3. You in us are bruised and broken:
hear us as we seek release
from the pain of earlier living;
set us free and grant us peace.
4. Send us, God of new beginnings,
humbly hopeful into life.
Use us as a means of blessing:
make us stronger, give us faith.
5. Give us faith to be more faithful,
give us hope to be more true,
give us love to go on learning:
God! Encourage and renew!

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