

# Sunday Worship Service

Easter 4, Sunday 8 May 2022, 9:30AM

Boronia Park Uniting Church

Lead: Kevin Lee

Good morning everyone! Glad to see all of you here this morning! Happy Mothers Day! It's great to bring you Sunday service today whilst Seungjae is on his leave. I know Seungjae makes great use of his free time and I'm sure we will all hear of his endeavours and possibly some exciting adventures as well on his return. I'm sure there will be some publication of more bushwalking trails in his written notices on the noticeboard.

It is Easter 4 in the church lectionary calendar as we make our way towards Pentecost in a month's time. Again Easter is the season for self-reflection on the message of the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us have our Call to Worship now.

## **CALL TO WORSHIP**

The LORD is my light and my salvation, the stronghold of my life.  
Whom shall I fear? And from whom shall I tremble in dread?

My opponents and enemies drew near, intent on devouring me, but they stumbled and fell.

Issues in my life sit like an army encamped against me,  
but my heart shall not fear, even if they all rise up against me.

One thing I have asked from the LORD.

This will I seek;

to dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to catch the vision of the kindly ways of the LORD.

For the LORD God will hide me like treasure, in a booth,  
on that miserable day;  
hiding me in the secret folds of his tent.

And now the LORD will raise my head, above my enemies round about me.  
And I will sacrifice in the tent of the LORD sacrifices of joy;  
I will sing, and make music to the LORD.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Hymn

### **Morning Has Broken**

Morning has broken,  
like the first morning  
Blackbird has spoken,  
like the first bird

Praise for the singing,  
praise for the morning  
Praise for the springing,  
fresh from the word

Sweet the rain's new fall,  
sunlit from heaven  
Like the first dewfall,  
on the first grass

Praise for the sweetness  
of the wet garden  
Sprung in completeness  
where his feet pass

Mine is the sunlight,  
mine is the morning  
Born of the one light,  
Eden saw play

Praise with elation,  
praise every morning  
God's recreation  
of the new day

Words: Eleanor Farjeon, 1881-1965

## **Prayer of Adoration and Confession**

O Lord,

How we adore thee.

How we marvel at the depth of your love.

How we wonder at the waves of your grace.

How we are astounded by the glorious balance of the earth.

We are in awe of the vastness of the universe.

We are so privileged to be called your children.

We are accepted and forgiven and embraced.

You are almighty, above and beyond everything.

You are victorious. Darkness, sin and death are under your feet.

You are holy, beautiful and full of love.

How we adore thee.

Amen.

Eternal God,

by your word you create and by your breath you give life.

We worship you with joy and thanksgiving,

praising you for the fullness

that your presence brings to our lives,

and our life together.

We praise you that by your word you feed us;

we are satisfied, and there is always more.

Your goodness is displayed in your wonderful works for all humanity,

and in your perfect love.

In our humanity we are rebellious,

and sometimes follow after foolish ideas;

going ways which lead away from life with you . . .

And yet, when we cry out you are there,

your word healing our inner emptiness and pain,

embracing us, leading us in your life-giving ways.

For your unending faithfulness, revealed to us in Christ Jesus,  
and made present to us in your Holy Spirit  
we praise you, Lord God. Amen

### **1<sup>st</sup> Reading JOHN 10: 22-30**

22 Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, 23 and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's Colonnade. 24 The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."

25 Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, 26 but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. 27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one."

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Reading ACTS 9: 36-43**

36 In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. 37 About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. 38 Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!"

39 Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

40 Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. 41 He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. 42 This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. 43 Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.

## **Children's Story**

By Margaret Maxwell

### **2<sup>nd</sup> HYMN Amazing Grace**

Amazing grace (how sweet the sound)  
That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found,  
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,  
and grace my fears relieved;  
how precious did that grace appear  
the hour I first believed!

Through many dangers, toils and snares  
I have already come;  
'tis grace has brought me safe thus far,  
and grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me,  
his word my hope secures;  
he will my shield and portion be  
as long as life endures.

### **SERMON**

Good morning church! Happy Mothers Day! Happy Mothers Day to all mothers here and to our mothers wherever they are today. On Friday this week, my employer made it a bit of a Mothers Day week where baked cupcakes and muffins were made for staff (part of it was to encourage staff to head back to the office). How many of you all here today have a Mothers Day luncheon or something to attend today? Well to express our well wishes to all Mothers here and to each other, let us all give and show each other some BIG WAVY hands! Yes, nice and wavy!

It's the month of May already (where has this year gone?) and the chill of autumn is already upon us. How cold was it in the last couple of mornings? But we can't complain with a sunny day.

I have a laptop which I use everyday and it has a calendar (which I believe is hooked up to Google) and each morning I turn it on I am greeted by notifications reminding me of friends birthdays, any special anniversaries or even if it is a special day or week. So I was quite surprised to actually notice this week that on Monday 2 May (it was World Tuna Day) and on Tuesday 3 May (it was World Press Freedom Day) and even today on 8th May it is Time of Remembrance and Reconciliation for Those Who Lost Their lives During WW2 Day. These are days published by the United Nations (UN) of which Australia is one of the 193 member states. The UN's motto is Peace, Dignity and equality on a healthy planet.

Do you ever wonder about the role of Government? I work in a field that provides services to the NSW State Government. Some of us recently voted in the NSW Local Government elections late last year. There is a Federal Election in 2 weeks time (on May 21). Yes we will know in 2 weeks time whether Scott Morrison or Anthony Albanese is the Prime Minister of Australia. Somo or Albo! Have you made your decision? Elections are opportunity to help share in Australia's voice both here and overseas.

Back in the early nineties I was working as an engineer on large infrastructure offshore projects in telecommunications and helping setup international communications for developing countries. I mainly worked on projects in the Pacific, Indian Ocean and Central Asia. But many of my colleagues worked in Indochina on a large UN project in Cambodia. Back in the early nineties, after the fall of the Polpot regime in Cambodia (where millions were killed in the 80s) it took the newly unified Vietnam and its invasion of Cambodia to help overthrow the Polpot regime. However, there were millions of displaced people in neighbouring Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. The Australian Government under the UNTAC (United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia) helped with this process of resettling displaced

people (returning Cambodians) and setting up fair elections. Australia was granted the project to build the international telecommunications network in the capital Phnom Penh and major other cities. For many of my colleagues it was a life changing experience to work 6 months – 2 years in a foreign country well at least very foreign to Australia amidst a humanitarian crisis in that time period.

The refugee crisis in this world (displaced people) is a major humanitarian challenge for the UN and for many affected countries. Outside of climate change, the destruction of the natural environment and environmental pollution, the global refugee problem is one that is of a truly global scale. Whether peoples of the Pacific like Kiribati see their lands swamped by the oceans and having to seek refuge on other Pacific islands, or displaced people ravaged by Civil wars or uprisings like the Arab Spring or like the more recent Russian occupation of Ukraine, people are the end cause of the global refugee problem (no continent is spared). Men, women and children are all significantly affected in any humanitarian crisis. By travelling overseas and spending time in places, one gets a real first hand sense of how people and governments work or fail in their efforts to create a peaceful and stable society. You soon get to realise that we as people of this Earth are all the same and only through circumstances we have our differences.

Which leads me to the reading today from the Book of Acts. This passage is a very powerful story about a disciple called Tabitha from Joppa. But it is also at a very important stage of the Book of Acts in God's revelation to Peter about human life and what God values. The passage is actually multi themed and I'll elaborate on this further.

Joppa is now modern day Tel Aviv (a large metropolis) in Israel and it is also the location of Jonah's story (800 years earlier) where Jonah did not want to answer God's call to go preach to the Ninevites. This time Peter does not make the same mistake and visits Tabitha as he is close by in Lydda. To read that Tabitha is a disciple meant she must have been an important follower of Jesus and recognised for her good works as mentioned in the reading. She followed the teachings of Jesus and seems to have dedicated her life looking after the poor (who were more likely widows). The passage seems to have her elevated as one that tirelessly works for her community.

The rising of Tabitha from the dead parallels Jesus raising the son of the widow of Nain and also Jairus' daughter (both mentioned in Luke). So in many respects the passage from Acts today focuses on the selfless nature of Tabitha during her life or service to her community but also through Peter with the power of Christ we see that "the way of Jesus is a way of life that death has no power over, even when everything would lead us to believe the opposite".

The last sentence of the Acts reading, verse 43 as read by Christy, "Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon." This last sentence which at first glance might seem so innocuous to us all but is actually a real telling moment of Peter's true epiphany which would be revealed in the next chapter of Acts.

For Peter to stay with Simon the tanner would be a breach of the purity laws of the day. Simon as a tanner was a socio-economic outcast. He lived on the margins of society. Tanners worked with dead animals. The filth and the stench were awful. Just imagine how Simon looked and smelled at the end of a hot day. He would have been the object of social disdain. Almost anyone would have felt superior to him. But Simon the tanner had joined the Jesus movement, and found acceptance there that society never gave him.

Simon's story shows how the early believers struggled with Jewish laws about ritual purity as even Gentiles joined their movement. The Levitical purity laws were laid down over a thousand years earlier and these laws were written to ensure that followers were clean whilst expressing themselves to God. At the heart of Jewish understanding is Yahweh's quote from the Torah, "Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy." Religious scholars debate how much ordinary first-century Jews maintained ritual purity, but the Pharisees about whom we read so much in the gospels certainly did. They repeatedly criticized Jesus because of his casual disregard for ritual purity. Jesus the Jew touched a leper, ignored sabbath laws, befriended Gentiles, and handled a corpse. People complained that his disciples ate with "unclean" hands and didn't fast.

Simon the tanner was at the bottom of this spiritual ladder. And notice Luke's irony. It's in the home of Simon the tanner, a Gentile who handled animal carcasses every day, where Peter the conscientious Jew had his vision of — surprise! — unclean animals in the upcoming chapter of Acts. Peter learned that even though purity laws forbid him to associate with Gentiles, "God has



shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. I now realize how true it is that God does not show favouritism."

One of my favourite religious scholars, Marcus Borg argued that Jesus turned the purity system with its "sharp social boundaries" on its head. In its place he substituted a radically alternative social vision. The new community that Jesus announced would be characterized by interior compassion for everyone, not external compliance to a purity code, by inclusivity rather than by hierarchical exclusivity, and by inward transformation rather than outward ritual. So In place of the famous "be holy, for I am holy," says Borg, Jesus deliberately substituted the call to "be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."

So on this Mothers Day in 2022 in Sydney, Australia in our blessed community. Let us ask ourselves a question!

What 'outcasts' in our society do we indiscriminately and unconsciously conjure up in our mind? Do we see unconsciously outcasts as the poor on our streets, those that have mental illness, even people with multiple marriages, welfare recipients, refugees, conservative politicians, or maybe just anyone different from me?

In today's fast-paced world, let us ask the question how have I distorted the self-sacrificing love of God into? What boundaries do I wrongly draw or judge? I pray to experience what Marcus Borg calls a "community shaped not by the ethos and politics of purity, but by the ethos and politics of compassion."

Let us pray.

Dear God of Truth and Life,

Let us be compassionate people and be people like Tabitha rich in her time for the needy. Let us reflect on how we judge people and ourselves and what causes we pursue and for what end. Let us be like Peter who trusted in Jesus and ensure we pray to God each day for our own purpose.

AMEN.

**3<sup>rd</sup> HYMN The Lord is My Shepherd**

1 The Lord's my shepherd; I'll not want.  
He makes me down to lie  
in pastures green; he leadeth me  
the quiet waters by.

2 My soul he doth restore again  
and me to walk doth make  
within the paths of righteousness,  
e'en for his own name's sake;

3 Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale,  
yet will I fear no ill;  
for thou art with me, and thy rod  
and staff me comfort still;

4 My table thou hast furnished  
in presence of my foes;  
my head thou dost with oil anoint,  
and my cup overflows.

5 Goodness and mercy all my life  
shall surely follow me,  
and in God's house forevermore  
my dwelling place shall be;

### **Offering & Dedication**

*Holy and eternal God,  
whose vision for humanity  
is justice, peace and wholeness;  
by the presence of your Spirit  
may our generosity flourish,  
and our living  
hasten the advent of your vision.*

**Amen**

**Prayers of the People (by Phoebe Joo)**

#### **4<sup>th</sup> Hymn Guide us Thou O Great Jehovah**

Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,  
pilgrim though this barren land;  
I am weak, but thou art mighty;  
hold me with thy powerful hand;  
Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven,  
feed me till I want no more,  
feed me till I want no more.

Open now the crystal fountain,  
whence the healing stream doth flow;  
let the fire and cloudy pillar  
lead me all my journey through;  
strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer.  
be thou still my Strength and Shield,  
be thou still my Strength and Shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,  
bid my anxious fears subside;  
bear me through the swelling current,  
land me safe on Canaan's side;  
songs of praises, songs of praises,  
I will ever give to thee,  
I will ever give to thee.

#### **BLESSING**

May the love of God bless you and keep you;  
the mercy and faithfulness of Jesus Christ be born in your hearts;  
and the Holy Spirit create and bring dreams to reality in your lives.

Amen.

#### **DISMISSAL**

Go in peace; refreshed and renewed in the eternal love of God. In the name  
of Christ.

Amen.

## **Now Unto Him**

Now unto Him, who is able to keep  
Able to keep you from falling  
And present you faultless  
Before the presence of His glory  
With exceeding joy

To the only wise God our Saviour  
Be glory and majesty  
Dominion and power  
Both now and forever

Amen.