

WELCOME

CALL TO WORSHIP

Come one and all, let's worship and pray:
our way into encounter, let's enter the fray.
Open your heart, get ready for grace –
Let's meet with our God who gives love a face.

Come, be with us in this place, joyful God.
We welcome you, Holy Spirit.

Draw us into encounter.

Draw us into awareness.

Draw us into life.

Draw us into love.

We welcome you, God.

LIGHT THE CANDLE God is here.....God is with us.....

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We pay our respects to the elders past, present and emerging of the Bidjegal and Gweagal people of the Eora nation who have cared for this land in time beyond our dreaming. We acknowledge that this land on which we live and move was and always will be Aboriginal land.

STATEMENT OF KUC MISSION

**We are a congregation who welcome people of all cultures and lifestyles.
We are creating a safe place for the community,
and sharing the journey of life and faith.**

SING: Community of Christ TIS/473

Community of Christ,
who make your cross your own,
live out your creed and risk your life for God alone:
the God who wears your face,
to whom all worlds belong,
whose children are of every race and every song.

Community of Christ,
look past the Church's door
and see the refugee, the hungry, and the poor.
Take hands with the oppressed,
the jobless in the street,
take towel and water, that you wash your neighbour's feet

Community of Christ,
through whom the word must sound –
cry out for justice and for peace the whole world round:
disarm the powers that war
and all that can destroy,
turn bombs to bread, and tears of anguish into joy.

When malice melts away,
so shall God's will be done,
the climate of the world be peace and Christ its Sun;
our currency be love and kindness our law,
our food and faith be shared as one for evermore.

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PRAYER OF CONFESSION AND ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

God of great compassion, God who searches our hearts.
We all have our sin and struggle stories,
our difficulties,
our discomforts.
They're hard to live with,
and we don't like turning towards them.
Forgive us, kind God, for the ways that we project and transmit our pain and struggle onto others.
Forgive us for our unwillingness to go to the root of our struggles in the safety of your love.
Shake us up, God. Do not let us feed on self-centredness or unscrupulous thoughts.
Open our hearts to what is good and transform our hearts by your miraculous generosity.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

When we pray and ask for help, God hears our cries and joins us in our struggle.
God is near to all who call on God, to all who call on God in truth.
This God meets us face-to-face, with love, and tends to our wounds.
God upholds all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down.
Children of God, know that you are forgiven by the God who is all mercy and grace and is slow to anger and loves us lavishly.
Thanks be to God.

PEACE

May God's peace be always with you,
and also with you.

SING: The Life of Jesus Shows a Way tune TiS 375

The life of Jesus shows a way
of living life in love each day.
He lived with kindness, but was strong
in striking out against all wrong.
We seek to live in harmony,
but try to counter tyranny.

The life of Jesus is a cry
to share our wealth and modify
desires for the most and best;
with what we have, we're surely blest!
We seek to live in harmony,
and turn our backs on luxury.

The life of Jesus is a voice,

when doubt engulfs us, to rejoice
in beauty of the world around,
compassion which is so profound.
We seek to live in harmony;
make joy a shared reality .

The life of Jesus is a plea -
"Forgive and love your enemy."
We must not learn to use the sword;
and making guns must be outlawed.
We seek to live in harmony;
to stop all senseless agony.

In Jesus Christ, God's call to life
is lived amidst horrific strife;
God, as the source of love, is known
in Jesus Christ, though not alone;
we also seek our destiny
To let love have supremacy.

George Stuart; Singing a new song 30.
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READING FROM THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES:

Genesis 32: 22-31

²²The same night he got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had.

²⁴Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. ²⁵When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. ²⁶Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." ²⁷So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." ²⁸Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed." ²⁹Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. ³⁰So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." ³¹The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip.

READINGS FROM THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES:

Romans 9: 1-5

I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit—²I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. ⁴They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; ⁵to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

Matthew 14:13-21

¹³Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. ¹⁵When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." ¹⁶Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." ¹⁷They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." ¹⁸And he said, "Bring them here to me." ¹⁹Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. ²⁰And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. ²¹And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

REFLECTION: by Moira Laidlaw

I can never hear the story about the feeding of the 5000 without remembering a story told by the minister in the parish adjoining ours in North Sydney. His father was a medical doctor who spent a considerable time in a prisoner of war camp during World War 2. He agonised over the fact that he could not supply the medical care that was needed by his fellow prisoners because he had no drugs, no medicine of any kind. All he could offer his patients to tide them over a bad time was a cigarette – he somehow got hold of tobacco and rolled cigarettes for those in need.

The only suitable fine paper belonged to something he treasured – his bible. This bible was now one his son's most precious possessions – or I should say – what was left of the bible – because the good doctor used for the cigarettes all the pages which he felt held less meaning than others.

He started with the Book of Revelation – then went on to all the genealogies, lists of meaningless names and so on. The pages that are left – are heavily annotated and underlined. One of the most heavily marked passages was our gospel reading for today. The son said that his father's actions were shaped by stories like the feeding of the five thousand where the needs of so many were met by the small but no doubt costly gift of bread and fish being miraculously transformed by the power of God in and through Jesus.

The doctor gave away one of the most precious possessions he had, and page by page it was transformed into something that helped give some relief to the pain of those other prisoners. And, like the gospel story today – the transformation followed the offering of the gift.

When tasks seem too large to tackle – seemingly too impossible to meet - that can be our response also. Yet, just as Jesus made possible in that meal - something which seemed impossible by the disciples' reckoning, so the Holy Spirit makes possible what may seem impossible by our or the world's reckoning.

The verses from Matthew's gospel are probably familiar ones- the miraculous feeding of about 5000 men, women and children – probably then, more like 10,000. All four gospels recount the story – the only miracle story to be told by all four – so we can be sure that something out of the ordinary happened.

Countless words have been written and spoken over the centuries about just what did happen. We, who are such a long way from the actual event, almost certainly have a great variety of answers ranging from belief by some in the literal account – to many holding a cynical or disbelieving view of the whole affair. However it happened, , hungry people were fed, and maybe we'll never have an answer we can all agree on as long as we concentrate on 'how' people were fed. Because it seems to me that the important question is why they were fed. I believe that the answer to that is found in verse 14 of the gospel passage..."when Jesus saw a great crowd, he had compassion for them...."

Compassion literally means feeling and identifying with a person's suffering. Not a sentimental feeling of pity, but a genuine sharing of the pain. For me, the fact that Jesus had any compassion at all for the crowd at that particular time is the miraculous event in the story, because the verses previous to today's reading give us the horrendous account of the death of Jesus' cousin, John. The one who baptised Jesus in the river Jordan. John the prophet, put to death through the vindictiveness of the corrupt ruler Herod and his even more vindictive wife, the scheming Herodias and her daughter Salome. In a horrific scene, at Herod's birthday party, the head of John the Baptist was presented on a platter. Things couldn't get much worse than that.

The disciples of John came to Jesus and gave him their disturbing report of the beheading. Immediately, Jesus asked his disciples to take him away from the crowds. They boarded a fishing boat and sailed across the bay to a desert place.

You can see by this sudden retreat how devastated Jesus must have been over the death of his cousin. I wonder if he felt that he was in an emotional and spiritual desert. Wanting to be alone to come to terms with his loss; wanting to find comfort and renewal; looking for some spiritual repair and nourishment - out there in that deserted place, Jesus was in a spiritual desert as well. But his time for prayer and reflection was cut short because the crowd had a different agenda. They wanted Jesus' presence with them, they saw where he had gone, so they followed him and it probably didn't take long for Jesus to find he was no longer alone. Predictably, Jesus responded to their needs rather than his own. "...he had compassion on them and cured their sick."

Although his own heart must have aching for silence and solitude, he spent the remainder of the day with greeting people with loving words and touching them with healing hands. So, at the end of the day, he was still there in the midst of the crowd – a hungry crowd. The disciples asked Jesus to send the people away to get food for themselves but he told his disciples to feed them. With only five small loaves and two fish, they must have thought Jesus was joking. But Jesus took the loaves and the fish, "looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves and gave them to his disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowd."

He said the blessing and broke the bread. They all ate and were filled. And at the end of the meal the disciples gathered up the left-overs and found there were twelve full baskets.

A one-off event? I don't think so. Whenever people have been moved by compassion to put the needs of others before their own, miracles occur.

A personal story to conclude – a time when many people, including myself, were miraculously fed through the prayers of a dying man.

The New Testament professor at the Theological College I attended was a man whose academic intellectual and theological brilliance was internationally recognised. His memory was phenomenal and his scholarship without equal. Such brilliance was extremely daunting for students – especially mature age students like me. This particular lecturer came across in a very powerful way – he demanded excellence and did not suffer fools gladly. He gave a fellow student zero out of a hundred for one assignment. You burnt the midnight oil doing his assignments, I assure you. His huge intellect unfortunately made it difficult for ordinary people like us students to relate to him, although most of the students and faculty held him not only in high esteem but in considerable awe. In his classes, he was powerful, we felt powerless.

Then, of all things to happen to a person with such memory and intellect, he developed a brain tumour. You can imagine how that affected the college community – some simply could not come to terms with the fact that this could happen to a lecturer in New Testament. Others believed that their prayers for healing would be immediately and miraculously acted upon – was this a reputable Theological College or not?

We became immensely fragmented but as this man, Bob Maddox, became sicker and was hospitalised, somehow the college community began to come together and we began to relate to one another in ways which could even be described as compassionate. I remember a group of us discussing this clearly changed ethos and we put it down to our coming to terms with the fact that Bob was indeed dying. We discovered the truth however, after his death. During the last weeks of his life, as his intellect was being stripped away, he meditated on the different fruits of the Spirit and he prayed that all those whose names he remembered – and that included us students – would be nourished by these fruits – by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control. And we were – nourished – and miraculously fed.

Miracles are not confined to New Testament times – they happen whenever people exercise what I believe is the God-given gift of compassion. When that gift is truly put into practice, people are miraculously fed and built up – in countless and even unknown ways. We might never know the results, we only have to believe that our connection with God through Jesus Christ, enables its happening.

SING: Jesus Hands were Kind Hands TIS/236

Jesus' hands were kind hands, doing good to all,
healing pain and sickness, blessing children small,
washed tired feet, and saving those who fall:
Jesus' hands were kind hands, doing good to all.

Take my hands, Lord Jesus, let them work for you,
make them strong and gentle, kind in all I do;
let me watch you, Jesus, till I'm gentle too,
till my hands are kind hands, quick to work for you.

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OFFERING:

We bring what we have to Jesus, trusting that he can do more than we would ever have imagined with our simple contributions.

OFFERTORY PRAYER

Jesus, take what we bring, bless it, and use it to feed hungry mouths and fill the world with hope. What a joy it is to share in your work. Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS

We picture you, Jesus, surrounded by the crowds.
Among them are some who are hungry and unsure how they will make ends meet.
Some are living with despair and grief.
Some are sick and in pain.
Some wonder if they have a place where they can belong and if anyone really cares.
We hold this image of you before the crowds and extend your compassionate heart to those in this room today,
to those we care about in our wider networks and in communities.

We allow situations and circumstances to come to our minds and hearts now, and we pray specifically for...

We hold this image of you before the crowds,
and extend your compassionate heart to those beyond,
those close by,
and those across the globe.

We allow situations and circumstances to come to our minds and hearts now, and we pray specifically for... our brothers and sisters from the Greenacre Uniting Church.
They are without a minister; we know how that feels and pray that you will guide and watch over them.

Jesus, invite us to see how we might have some part to play in your blessing, reconciling, healing, and compassionate ministry. Take the little we have to offer and make something beautiful out of it.

May your compassionate care come to all people,
meeting human needs with your abundance,
with your overflowing love and goodness. Amen.

SING: Here I am Lord TIS/658

I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin
my hand will save.
I who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them?
Whom shall I send?
Here I am, Lord; is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night;
I will go, Lord, if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.

I the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne my people's pain;
I have wept for love of them.
They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak my word to them.
Whom shall I send?
Here I am, Lord; is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night;
I will go, Lord, if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.

I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame;
I will set a feast for them.
My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide
till their hearts are satisfied.
I will give my life to them.
Whom shall I send?
Here I am, Lord; is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night;
I will go, Lord, if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.

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BLESSING:

God joins us in our struggle and refuses to let us go,
and something happens in the process –
We see God face-to-face,
we see ourselves,
we see our belovedness,
and we become ready to meet our fellow brothers and sisters,
with closeness, grace, and joy.
May you know deeply the God who strives with and for you,
the God who is on your side,
and the God who defines
your life with overflowing love and blessing.
Go in peace.

SENDING SONG: Teach Me to Dance Source /469

Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart,
teach me to move in the pow'r of your Spirit,

teach me to walk in the light of your presence,
teach me to dance to the beat of your heart.
Teach me to love with your heart of compassion,
teach me to trust in the word of your promise,
teach me to hope in the day of your coming,
teach me to dance to the beat of your heart.

You wrote the rhythm of life, created heaven and earth,
in you is joy without measure.
So, like a child in your sight, I dance to see your delight,
for I was made for your pleasure, pleasure.

Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart,
teach me to move in the pow'r of your Spirit,
teach me to walk in the light of your presence,
teach me to dance to the beat of your heart.
Teach me to love with your heart of compassion,
teach me to trust in the word of your promise,
teach me to hope in the day of your coming,
teach me to dance to the beat of your heart.

Let all my movements express a heart that loves to say 'yes',
a will that leaps to obey you.
Let all my energy blaze to see the joy in your face;
let my whole being praise you, praise you.

Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart,
teach me to move in the pow'r of your Spirit,
teach me to walk in the light of your presence,
teach me to dance to the beat of your heart.
Teach me to love with your heart of compassion,
teach me to trust in the word of your promise,
teach me to hope in the day of your coming,
teach me to dance to the beat of your heart.

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