



**Don't miss God's new thing**

### **Acknowledgement of Country**

We begin by acknowledging the First Nations people of this area who have cared for the land and waterways for millennia. We acknowledge their elders past, present and emerging and pray for ongoing reconciliation between first and second peoples, especially as we draw near to the referendum on the Voice to parliament.

### **Call to worship**

We come to hear the stories  
of other people  
in another world  
long ago.

We come to hear these stories  
that are also about us  
today  
in this place.

God, give us ears to listen.  
eyes to see,  
and hearts to accept  
the new thing you are doing. Amen.

### **Hymn**                      *181 Come O God of all the earth (5 verses)*

Come, O God of all the earth:  
come to us O Righteous One;  
come, and bring our love to birth:  
in the glory of your Son.

*Refrain*

*Sing out, earth and skies!  
Sing of the God who loves you;  
raise your joyful cries;  
dance to the life around you.*

Come, O God of wind and flame:  
fill the earth with righteousness;  
teach us all to sing your name:  
may our lives your love confess.  
*Refrain*

Come, O God of flashing light:  
twinkling star and burning sun;  
God of day and God of night:  
in your light we all are one.  
*Refrain*

Come, O God of snow and rain:  
shower down upon the earth;  
come, O God of joy and pain:  
God of sorrow, God of mirth.  
*Refrain*

Come, O Justice, come, O Peace:  
come and shape our hearts anew;  
come and make oppression cease:  
bring us all to life in you.  
*Refrain*

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**Opening prayer**

Loving God,  
your vibrant Spirit crashes through our ordinary,  
transforming our mundane moments into pregnant possibilities,  
come to us we pray.

You speak to us in tradition;  
speak also in the novel.

We hear you in the Scriptures;  
let us hear you in the affairs of the world.  
We praise you with word and song;  
may we also praise you with screens and movement.

We meet you in Jesus;

may we also meet Jesus in the face of the stranger.

Gracious God, open us to that divine disturbing Spirit  
that ruffles our comfortable contentment  
in order to make us over once more in your love.  
Through the Spirit of Christ we pray. Amen.

## **Confession**

*Confession is not always scraping up a mental list of errors and shortcomings.  
It can also be the simplicity of pausing to see ourselves as we really are,  
acknowledging the breadth of our identity  
and responding to the call to be all that we can be.  
In the silence, may we find ourselves before God...*

This is who we are O God.

Grant us, then, O Lord  
the serenity to accept the things we cannot change;  
courage to change the things we can;  
and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen.

## **Declaration of forgiveness**

On the wind of the Spirit,  
the peace of God's acceptance comes  
to all who cry out in honesty for help.

Christ brings to each of us:  
Love, healing, redemption, forgiveness and more.  
**Thanks be to God.**

## **Welcome**

## **Announcements**

### **First lesson**          Philippians 2: 1-13

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy,<sup>2</sup> make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.<sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.<sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.<sup>5</sup> Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,<sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,<sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form,<sup>8</sup> he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death

— even death on a cross.<sup>9</sup>Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,<sup>10</sup>so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,<sup>11</sup>and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

<sup>12</sup>Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;<sup>13</sup>for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

**Hymn**                      *609 May the mind of Christ (5 verses)*

May the mind of Christ my Saviour  
live in me from day to day,  
by his love and power controlling  
all I do and say.

May the word of God dwell richly  
in my heart from hour to hour  
so that all may see I triumph  
only through his power.

May the peace of God my Father  
rule my life in everything,  
that I may be calm to comfort  
sick and sorrowing.

May the love of Jesus fill me  
as the waters fill the sea;  
him exalting, self denying,  
this is victory.

May I run the race before me  
strong and brave to face the foe,  
looking only unto Jesus  
as I onward go.

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**Gospel reading**      Matthew 21: 23-32

When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, “By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?”<sup>24</sup>Jesus said to them, “I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things.<sup>25</sup>Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?” And they argued with one another, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’<sup>26</sup>But if we say, ‘Of human origin,’ we are afraid of the crowd;

for all regard John as a prophet.”<sup>27</sup> So they answered Jesus, “We do not know.” And he said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.<sup>28</sup> “What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’<sup>29</sup> He answered, ‘I will not’; but later he changed his mind and went.<sup>30</sup> The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, ‘I go, sir’; but he did not go.<sup>31</sup> Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you.<sup>32</sup> For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.

## **Sermon**

At last. A straightforward parable!

A father asks 2 of his sons to go and work in the vineyard.

The first says ‘yes’, but doesn’t end up going;

the second says ‘no’ but changes his mind and does what his father asked.

Jesus concludes by asking which one really did as the father wanted – and the answer is obvious.

I always commented as a younger parent, that I wish there was a third child

who said yes and actually did as they promised!

The parable reminds us to be people of our word, and to be cautious of saying yes too quickly.

It warns us of the danger of good intentions where, in the end, we don’t follow through and act on our words.

This is good and sensible advice.

But sadly for us, we can’t leave it there,

because the context of this parable makes it clear there is more to it.

Jesus tells the parable in response to

the chief priests and elders questioning his authority.

Basically they ask:

*what is the nature of your authority?*

*What gives you the right to enter Jerusalem on a donkey*

*to the praise of children, and to turn over tables in the Temple?*

*Just where does your authority come from?*

Jesus doesn't answer them directly, probably so as not to enflame tensions,

but instead responds to them with a question of his own.

If they can answer his question, then he will answer theirs.

And so Jesus asks the question about the origins of John the Baptist: was he from God or not?

It has the chief priests and elders caught between a rock and a hard place; between their own belief, that John wasn't a prophet from God, and the pressure of the crowd, who strongly believed he was.

Because they want to keep the crowd on side, they decide discretion is the better part of valour and don't answer Jesus.

But in outwitting the chief priests,

Jesus has *indirectly* answered their question

by showing that his authority does indeed come from God.

The parable that follows immediately becomes then a comment on the nature of the chief priests and elders.

They are the ones who say yes to God;

who see themselves as the obedient child;

but who in the end pay no more than lip service to God.

Meanwhile, those who disqualify themselves by their lifestyle –  
the tax collectors and prostitutes –  
they end up doing what God wants  
by their ready welcome of Jesus and his message.

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One of the things we have to note is that we have moved on  
in Matthew since the readings of the last few weeks.

Parables about grace and forgiveness;  
about dealing with conflict in the church are all fine and important,  
but now Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem.

Tensions are rising; and events are moving towards an inevitable death.  
Jesus is no longer sparring with the local scribes and Pharisees of  
Galilee,

he is in conflict with the big guns of the city of Jerusalem.

The chief priests and elders were the leaders of the Temple institution.

They were the ones who had a working relationship with Rome.

In fact, they had been granted a certain amount of authority by Rome  
to manage life around the Temple, so central was it to Jerusalem life.

The chief priests and elders are the Sanhedrin;

the Council before whom Jesus will stand trial in the coming days.

And part of the conflict between Jesus and the chief priests

was that *they* were the *authorised* religious leaders;

*they* were the ones born to the priesthood.

*They* had the Temple and centuries of tradition on their side.

*They* had carefully studied and catalogued the ways that God  
had worked and revealed himself in the past.

And then John the Baptist and Jesus turn up, with no formal training,  
mavericks with no authorisation,  
teaching about God, calling people to repentance  
and announcing sins forgiven.

That was the core business of the Temple.

Both John and Jesus boldly claim they speak directly for God.

No wonder the chief priests struggled with the way

Jesus engaged and taught the people –

he was in effect muscling in on their turf.

And let's face it, if someone came into our congregation

and claimed to speak for God and told us to change the way we worship,

but hadn't been to theological college,

and wasn't authorised by the church,

we too would be reluctant to listen – and perhaps with good reason.

So the issue that I want to raise for us today is:

***how does the institution cope with the Spirit?***

How does the church, which is often at its most comfortable  
with meetings and agendas and regulations and structures of worship,

how do we deal with the nonconformist Spirit of God,

that blows like the wind

sending dust and leaves all over our ordered life?

How do we hear the words of God's prophets,

who are so often untidy, uncouth and unconventional?

How do we remain open to the fresh ways of the Spirit

when we are so comfortable as we are?

One of the challenges we face when we read of encounters



like the one Jesus had with the religious leaders  
is that we tend to think of ourselves in Christ's camp,  
whereas the institutional church is now much more akin  
to the Temple leadership than we are to tax collectors and sinners.  
The church has property and power;  
it has the ear of politicians and receives tax-breaks,  
we run our own banks and  
receive government money to run services on their behalf.  
Of course that influence is waning as our society changes,  
but the church is still a player; we are still a powerful institution.

So we need to be careful not to become hardened to the wind of the Spirit.

We need to be careful not to become like the Temple leadership.

We need to put all those extra things –

the institution, the influence, the property, the structures –  
in their proper place.

And that proper place is a distant second to the mission of God in the world and God's disruptive voice.

For it is that voice that keeps us on the straight and narrow,  
constantly reminding us to reach out  
and welcome to all sorts of people, just as Jesus did.

We need to remain supple and open to the surprising ways of God.

Here are a few suggestions of how we do that...

- Part of remaining open is to be people of prayer –  
especially as we are in a time of significant change for the Church.  
Prayer gets us used to listening for God's voice – it tunes us in –

both individually and together.

- Part of it is reading the Scriptures to become aware of the breadth and diversity of the ways that God has worked in the past – to realise that actually, God has often acted in surprising new ways in amongst the ordinary and traditional.

- And part of it is belonging to the church community so that we discern God's way together, not imagining we are hearing God's voice all on our own.

All these are ways we can remain open  
to the living path of God's Spirit  
and avoid getting stuck in institutional forms of existence.

The strength and certainty of tradition.

The revitalising wind of the Spirit.

God works through both, but today's reading reminds us  
to be careful the former doesn't extinguish the latter.

**Hymn**                      *476 As a chalice cast of gold (tune 314) (4 verses)*

As a chalice cast of gold,  
burnished bright and brimmed with wine,  
make me, Lord, as fit to hold  
grace and truth and love divine.  
Let my praise and worship start  
with the cleansing of my heart.

Save me from the soothing sin  
of the empty cultic deed  
and the pious, babbling din  
of the claimed but unlived creed.  
Let my actions, Lord, express  
what my tongue and lips profess.

When I bend upon my knees,  
clasp my hands or bow my head,

let my spoken, public pleas  
be directly, simply said,  
free of tangled words that mask  
what my soul would plainly ask.

When I dance or chant your praise,  
when I sing a psalm or hymn,  
when I preach your loving ways,  
let my heart add its amen.  
Let each cherished, outward rite  
thus reflect your inward light.

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Thomas Henry Troeger 1945-

## **Offering**

### **Prayers of the people**

Eternal God, our heart's desire,  
pour out in your church the Spirit of your Son, Jesus,  
so that dreams may be dreamt, visions seen  
and new paths imagined.

Open our eyes for the Spirit's work among people,  
so that we may join all those who,  
with hope and humility, pursue your will for our world.

Holy Spirit of God,  
who brooded over the waters long before we were born;  
who inspired people of the earth to praise and trust;  
who lit the fire of the prophets and sustained their faith among unbelief;  
who fulfilled through Jesus, the hope of the generations  
and revealed the dimensions of God;

Eternal Spirit, fill *us* with confidence and make *us* available;  
inspire us with creativity to reach out in new ways to our community  
teach us to pray and to hear the cries of those around us  
remind us of our unity in you.

Help us interpret the sign of the times  
and work alongside us that we might recognise and build a little more of  
the kingdom of God each and every day.

We pause to bring before you, in a moment of quiet,  
the people and situations on our heart and mind this day...

Thank you that you hear our prayers.

Through Christ our Lord.

### **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 for ever. Amen

### **Hymn** *613 Lord of all hopefulness (4 verses)*

Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy,  
whose trust, ever child-like, no cares can destroy,  
be there at our waking, and give us, we pray,  
your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the break of the day.

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.

Lord of all kindliness, 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.

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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### **Blessing**

Strengthened by our worship  
we are sent back into the world  
to live out the love and welcome of God.

So go with the blessing of God,  
who has called you by name  
and knows you by heart. Amen.