

ORDER OF SERVICE KOGARAH UNITING CHURCH 4/2/24

FOR THE SAKE OF THE GOSPEL

WELCOME:

This is the fourth week of thinking about Paul's words to the Corinthians. We have been thinking about our bodies, food choices, actions, and how our actions can impact those around us. Today, we continue journeying with Paul and think about how we might engage with the cultures around us.

OPENING PRAYER:

Jesus enters into the places where we experience intimacy and closeness.
Jesus enters into the places where we experience stress and strain,
those parts of us that are unwell.
Jesus takes us by the hand,
streaming love and goodness into the places that need it most.
And we become free to serve, free to worship.
Jesus enters into this place today.
Come, let's ready our hearts to sing!
The Freedom-Bringer is here,
The reign of God is near!

God of all power, you are the One who called this world into being and we acknowledge that you have no equal in the extent of your power. Yet, you want to share your power -your strength - with those who are powerless; you ache to heal the broken hearted and to bind up the wounds of the lost and rejected folk of this world. Such radical love leaves us speechless, but you gave it human form and shape in the person of Jesus, in whom your promises of healing and empowerment were fulfilled. We give you thanks and praise for blessing our lives in this way, and we pray that in Jesus and through the power of the Holy Spirit, we too can become radical lovers of the powerless, and passionate bearers of hope to those whose lives are filled with despair and hopelessness. May this time of worship be a true expression of our desire to praise and glorify you, O God, for the many ways in which you bless us, and may our lives reveal our gratitude in all we think, and do, and say. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen

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 Bidjigal 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.

MISSION STATEMENT:

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: Come O God of all the earth - TIS/181

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.

Chorus

*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.

Chorus

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.

Chorus

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.

Chorus

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

Chorus

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PRAYER OF CONFESSION AND ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS:

Merciful God,

we know you are with us and present to us always,

which means there are always opportunities to welcome and embrace Life in all its many and varied forms.

And yet, we are often stressed and overwhelmed;

we avoid the places of the heart.

We're sorry for the times we live so disconnected, distracted, and numb.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

God understands the challenge of being human,

and how easily we take our leave from the rhythms of grace we are invited to participate in.

But there is always a fresh invitation to return –

made especially easy by God's grace and forgiveness.

Here's another one –

another extension from God to you to be forgiven,

to return to the place of the heart where God is always present

and always ready to embrace you lovingly.

You are forgiven. Thanks be to God.

PEACE

SING: As the deer pants for the water - TIS/703

As the deer pants for the water,
so my soul longs after you.
You alone are my heart's desire
and I long to worship you.
You alone are my strength and shield,
to you alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire
and I long to worship you.

I want you more than gold or silver,
only you can satisfy.
You alone are the real joy-giver
and the apple of my eye.
You alone are my strength and shield,
to you alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire
and I long to worship you.

You're my friend and you are my brother
even though you are a king.
I love you more than any other,
so much more than anything.
You alone are my strength and shield,
to you alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire
and I long to worship you.

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READING FROM THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES: Isaiah 40: 21-31

²¹Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? ²²It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to live in; ²³who brings princes to naught, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing. ²⁴Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows upon them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble. ²⁵To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal? says the Holy One. ²⁶Lift up your eyes on high and see: Who created these? He who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name; because he is great in strength, mighty in power, not one is missing. ²⁷Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God"? ²⁸Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. ²⁹He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. ³⁰Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; ³¹but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

READING FROM THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES: Mark 1: 29-39

As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.³⁰Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once.³¹He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

³²That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. ³³And the whole city was gathered around the door. ³⁴And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. ³⁵In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. ³⁶And Simon and his companions hunted for him. ³⁷When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." ³⁸He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." ³⁹And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

REFLECTION: Isaiah 40:21-31, Mark 1: 29-39.

If I asked you what your favourite part of the Sunday morning worship is, I would probably get answers like, "I like singing and hymns, I like the special music (Choirs etc..), I like the prayer time, and so on." One minister actually asked some of his congregation that question and one person said it was the prelude to the worship that he liked most. The minister looked at this person and was surprised. "You mean it is not the sermon?" "Oh no, preacher. It's definitely the prelude." So, he asked what made the prelude so meaningful. He said it was because his whole week was so full, and so busy, and so intense. But when he came into the church and the prelude to worship began, it was the only time all week when he could just sit back, be quiet, and be with God. Most of us are simply too busy to stop and do nothing for even a few moments each week. Most of us feel like we need to be active every minute of the day. We confuse busy-ness with being productive, successful, effective and meaningful.

So, it comes as a surprise to read our Gospel reading and to find Jesus, not being so busy with life. In fact, in the midst of a very busy time in his life, he goes off to a solitary place and prays.

Can you imagine the pressure that Jesus must have experienced? He was faced with masses of people every day. People that had needs. People that were hurting. As Jesus moved forward with his ministry the pressure must have grown even greater and greater. The crowd must have grown bigger and bigger. We know after Jesus' first healing experience in the temple that his reputation spread throughout the countryside. That must have brought people from everywhere. The lepers, the outcast, the lame and the blind. All the hopeless of society. The press of hurting people must have been overwhelming at times. Imagine most of the citizens of Capernaum gathered at the front door waiting for a healing touch. Here what we have to know is that Jesus went to a quiet place to pray even though he was too busy everyday with people coming for healing touch.

Quiet time – doing nothing but talking to God. Most of us are too busy to do anything like that! Most of us feel like we need to be busy doing something. And for some reason, prayer just doesn't feel "busy" or "active" enough. We are a people and a society in which being busy makes us feel like we are worthwhile. If we are not doing something, there is something within us that makes us feel like we are lazy, or that we are wasting our time. Anyone of you remember the time people use the automatic washing machine first time? Up until then, washing the family's laundry literally took an entire day. People referred to one day of their weekly routine as wash day. Then technology came through with the washing machine, and you could throw the clothes into a machine, and then leave it and go do something else. What a time saver. So, what happened? Did we get more time to relax? No, we filled our time with other duties. The computer was the same way. It enables us to do more work in a lot less time. But do we get off work early? No. We simply do more work. There is something within us that compels us to fill up every moment of our time. Even if we are not talking about work, our families are stretched to the limit with activities as

we go from music classes, to football, to outings at the beach, to concerts, to this and to that. It is as if we are afraid of what might happen if we would just be still for a moment.

In our Passage today, Jesus is very busy. In fact, Mark's Gospel is the most 21st Century-compatible Gospel there is. Because Mark gives the impression that everyone is always in a hurry – always busy. The word "immediately" appears over 50 times in Mark's Gospel. Mark tells the story of Jesus being baptized and then he says, "And immediately the Holy Spirit sent him into the desert." Then Jesus encounters Simon and Andrew fishing and invites them to be disciples and Mark says, "Immediately they left their nets." Jesus heals people and casts out demons, and "immediately and quickly the news spread about Jesus." And finally, after a fast-paced beginning, Mark says that "very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed." Even in the fast paced, and very successful and meaningful life of Jesus, there was the need to sometimes retreat to a quiet, lonely place for reflection, meditation, prayer and communion with God. This is absolutely necessary in our busy lives. It makes our busy lives worthwhile and bearable. More than bearable – times of being in a solitary and quiet place with God enable us to do the work we are to do. Jesus doesn't just go to that quiet and solitary place and stays there. He goes there to recharge his spiritual batteries. Being there enables him to then get up and move on to find other places to preach his message. Our world is so busy, our lives are so full. Wouldn't it be nice if we could slow down just a bit, and be still, and simply experience the presence of God in our lives. Wouldn't it be nice if we could, in the midst of work, family pressures, school work, and just turn off the television, turn off the mobile phones, and just pray. Being still and quiet from time to time is God's will for our lives. We need to rest from our work, and find that solitary place of quiet.

When we have that time in a solitary place, we need to pray. I often come to church during the week and sit in the church and enjoy praying quietly feeling God's presence with me. I pray for those in our prayer list and for our church and our leaders and for the congregation members etc. This is my solitary place. That's what Jesus did. He went to his solitary place to pray. Prayer is not always a matter of talking to God, or giving God a list of things that we need for him to do. "Heal me from my headache, make my car last another week, bring down the petrol prices, do something about the problems and difficult situations we have, etc." But prayer is spending time with God. It might involve asking for things. It might involve thanking God for things. It might be simply being with God. Have you ever simply spent time with someone, and you are both just quiet? Not really saying anything. Just quietly being together. Perhaps with your spouse. Or holding your child. Or at the bedside of your sick parent. We need more of that time spent with God. Quiet time with God. We will rarely find God in the hectic moments in our lives, but we will often find him in the quiet moments. The Psalmist tells us (Ps 37:7), "Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him." The Psalmist tells us, (Ps 46:10), "Be still, and know that I am God." But we are too busy and distracted and upset by many things. There are times when we need to just stop and be quiet and still, and rest in the simple presence of the Lord. It is good for our own soul, it is good for our relationship with others, and it is good for our relationship with God.

Then comes the next step, ACTION! Now, there are those who spend lifetimes in their quiet places of solitude and prayer. But for most of us, prayer needs to end with action. There are times when you should not just do things in life, but you should sit there. Be still. Be quiet. Be in prayer. But at the end of the prayer, when you say AMEN, that should be a word that calls you to ACTION. You should not just sit there in life, but do something. That's what Jesus did. In our passage today, He goes off for prayer in a quiet solitary place. The disciples find him and at the end of the prayer

time, Jesus gets up and gets on with life. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples, "Let us go somewhere else-- to the nearby villages-- so I can preach there also. That is why I have come."

At the end of your prayer, when you say AMEN, what action do you do? Do you pray for the sick and then leave it at that? Or do you pray for the sick, and then pick up the phone and call them to let them know you are thinking about them? Do you ask if you can do anything for them? A hot meal brought to their home? Medicine they need to have picked up? Do you pray for the poor and hope God does something about the poor? Or do you pray and ask God to use you? Do you pray that God would help our church grow and then hope that God inspires someone else to do something? Or do you pray and then say as Jesus said, "I have to go somewhere so I can tell someone about the Good News of Christ." That's the point of this message. Our lives are so busy.

Brothers and sisters in Christ! We need to stop from time to time and go to that quiet place for prayer. And then at the end of the prayer, let's say Amen and get up and get busy with the things that are most important – the work of God. Amen.

SING – Faith will not grow from words alone - TIS/691

Faith will not grow from words alone,
from proofs provided, scripture known;
our faith must feel its way about,
and live with question-marks and doubt.

The pattern Jesus showed, we share:
life comes through death, hope through despair.
God is made known in brokenness,
and faith feeds on God's emptiness.

The church still tells how Jesus came
through death to glorious life again –
the strangest story! Yet, maybe,
our faith will thrive on mystery.

Faith takes the little that we know,
and calls for hope, and tells us: Go!
Love and take courage, come what may;
Christ will be with us on the way.

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OFFERING:

The giving of our offerings is one way we join in Jesus' generosity and freedom. Your offering will now be received.

O God, we offer these gifts and the service of our lives in response to the many blessings you have bestowed on our lives. You graciously bless our lives with the Holy Spirit who enables us to experience and proclaim the good news of the living Christ. Help us to be bold and faithful witnesses to the gospel this day and every day. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS:

Loving God, compassionate God,
We long for your love and your compassion to flow through us, but often, we are tired or stressed –
worn out from the challenges of life.
And when we can't access those places of care and empathy within us, we can feel guilty.
We act out of duty and obligation.
Or we check out, avoiding people and responsibilities,
hoping that they all go away.
Jesus, lowly and humble one, draw us into your care.
Draw us into the true rest that only you can offer.
Draw us into silence and grace.
Meet us in this quiet space right now.
Help us to breathe.

A space for stillness.

And as we rest in this quiet place with Jesus,
we search our hearts for the burdens we have been carrying –
for those in our households and families,
for those in our church,
for those in our neighbourhoods and nations,
and all around the world.
We name these aloud or inwardly in this prayerful space with you, Jesus.

Space for prayerful response.

Loving God, compassionate God,
bring grace and healing love to all the burdens of our hearts
and continue to meet us in the not-so-quiet moments of our week. Amen.

SING - From heaven you came helpless babe - TIS/256

From heaven you came helpless babe,
entered our world your glory veiled;
not to be served but to serve,
and give your life that we might live.
 This is our God, the Servant King,
 he calls us now to follow him,
 to bring our lives as a daily offering
 of worship to the Servant King.

There in the garden of tears,
my heavy load he chose to bear;
his heart with sorrow was torn,
"Yet not my will, but yours," he said.
 This is our God, the Servant King,
 he calls us now to follow him,
 to bring our lives as a daily offering
 of worship to the Servant King.

Come see his hands and his feet,
the scars that speak of sacrifice,
hands that flung stars into space
to cruel nails surrendered.
 This is our God, the Servant King,
 he calls us now to follow him,

to bring our lives as a daily offering
of worship to the Servant King.

So let us learn how to serve
and in our lives enthrone him;
each other's needs to prefer,
for it is Christ we're serving.

This is our God, the Servant King,
he calls us now to follow him,
to bring our lives as a daily offering
of worship to the Servant King.

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BLESSING:

Our God meets us in the quiet places
and goes before us wherever we might go.
Trust that the everlasting God lives deep inside of you.
May you wait on God and have your strength renewed.
May you rise up with the grace of an eagle.
May you run and not be weary.
May you walk and not faint.
Go in grace. Go in peace.
Amen.

SENDING OUT SONG – Sent by the Lord am I - AT/412

Sent by the Lord am I; my hands are ready now
to make the earth the place in which the kingdom comes.
Sent by the Lord am I; my hands are ready now
to make the earth the place in which the kingdom comes.
The angels cannot change a world of hurt and pain
into a world of love, of justice and of peace.
The task is mine to do, to set it really free.
O help me to obey, help me to do your will.

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