

**Kogarah Uniting Church
1 February 2026 @ 10am
Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany**

Blessed Ways

Welcome

We light the Christ Candle to remind us of God's presence in and among us here today.

And we light the candle ...

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God is here!

God is always here!

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God is with us!

God is always with us!

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Acknowledgement of Country

Australia

Since time immemorial, the Indigenous people have been caring for this land. They watched for the seasons, knowing when to harvest and when to plant, knowing when to stay and when to move, knowing how to read the signs of the time. As we gather today, we acknowledge the wisdom of the traditional owners of this land, the Bidjegal People of the Eora nation. We pay our respects to their elders, past and present, and acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded.

Introduction to Theme

Throughout this Season after the Epiphany, we listen for echoes of God's call—to follow, to shine, to live in God's light. Today, our scriptures from Micah and Matthew present a vision of God's reign—a world where life is lived with justice, love, and humility. As we gather, we are invited to listen, to wonder, and to consider how we might walk in that vision together.

We say who we are

Our vision is to be a loving and caring community, sharing God's love with the world.

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.

Call to Worship

Come. Now is the time we have set aside to worship together.
Let us take a moment to prepare ourselves.
Let us take a deep breath, mindful of the Spirit that breathes through us.
Let us close our eyes and empty our minds of mindless chatter.
Let us open our ears so we are ready to hear God's message.

Provide a moment of quiet to allow participants to perform these actions.

**Sing: GOD, YOU SPIN THE WHIRLING PLANETS Jane Parker
Huber, Franz Hayden**

Verse 1

**God You spin the whirling planets
Fill the seas and spread the plain
Mold the mountains fashion blossoms
Call forth sunshine wind and rain
We created in your image
Would a true reflection be
Of Your justice grace and mercy
And the truth that makes us free**

Verse 2

**You have called us to be faithful
In our life and ministry
We respond in grateful worship
Joined in one community
When we blur Your gracious image
Focus us and make us whole
Healed and strengthened as Your people
We move onward toward Your goal**

Verse 3

**God Your will is still creating
Calling us to life made new
Now reveal to us fresh vistas
Where there's work to dare and do
Keep us clear of all distortion**

**Fashion us with loving care
Thus new creatures in Your image
We'll proclaim Christ everywhere**

Opening Prayer

In the name of that Holy One who is beyond all names,
all joy be with you!
And also with you!

Happy are the pure in heart,
For they shall see God.

Wonderful is the God who shapes creation with beauties and fruits
beyond numbering.

*Wonderful is the God who wears our humanity and redemptively bears
our sins.*

Wonderful is the God who indwells us with light and leads us into all
truth.

*Most wonderful is God in whom we trust, and to whom we are drawn by
grace.*

Prayer of Confession

My friends, in repenting our sins, we put ourselves on the side of
healing.

Let us pray.

Great Creator Spirit, awesome beyond all other glory, before you we are
like insignificant specks on one small satellite in your cosmic scene.

What are we, that you should notice us?

*We need to confess before someone who understands,
and who is able to pronounce
the word of forgiveness and renewal.*

*You, Holy Counsellor,
are the only one to whom we can turn with full confidence.*

*According to your loving kindness,
have mercy on us, and upon all humankind.*

We take heart knowing that you not only notice us, but your love aches over each of our small lives. We thank you that Jesus has taught us that our hairs are numbered and all our names cherished by you.

*Therefore in trust we confess to you
our fumbling and stumbling, our stalling and falling,
our hurtfulness and our heartlessness.
Our achievements in goodness and mercy are many,
but they seem to be outmanoeuvred and outnumbered
by compromises, failures and indifference.*

Continue to save us from ourselves, O God. Forgive all our sins, rinse away our shame, and lift us out of apathy. Give us the confidence born of your free grace in Christ Jesus, and enable us by faith to live boldly and joyfully to your glory. Through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen!

Words of Grace

My friends, in the name of the Son of God, take up your healing. In Christ we are transferred out of the kingdom of sin and shame and despair, into the kingdom of grace, mercy and peace.

I declare to you:

Our sins are forgiven!

Thanks be to God.

Peace

Readings from the Hebrew Scriptures

Micah 6:1–8

6 Hear what the Lord says: Rise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. **2**Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the Lord, and you enduring foundations of the earth; for the Lord has a controversy with his people, and he will contend with Israel. **3**“O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me! **4**For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. **5**O my people,

remember now what King Balak of Moab devised, what Balaam son of Beor answered him, and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the saving acts of the Lord.”

⁶“With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? ⁷Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” ⁸He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Psalm 15

¹O Lord, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill?

²Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right, and speak the truth from their heart;

³who do not slander with their tongue, and do no evil to their friends, nor take up a reproach against their neighbors;

⁴in whose eyes the wicked are despised, but who honor those who fear the Lord; who stand by their oath even to their hurt;

⁵who do not lend money at interest, and do not take a bribe against the innocent. Those who do these things shall never be moved.

Sing: *Let Justice Roll Like a River*, by Marty Haugen

https://youtu.be/cHNE3S8rSJg?si=xE2vHaKu_kZ0vYSG

<https://youtu.be/MfsiMIHlltc?si=NXcjnYwmlqSOMJ0i>

https://youtu.be/lgZcX2UF_SU?si=fbf7ZxkyUon8ktdl

Let Justice Roll Like a River

Refrain

Let jus - tice roll like a riv - er, and
wash all op - pres - sion a - way; Come, O God, and take us,
move and shake us, Come now, and make us a - new,
that we might live just - ly like you.

Verses

1. Take from me your holy feasts, all your off' rings and your music;
Let justice flow like waters, and integrity like an ever-flowing stream.
2. How long shall we wait, O God, for the day of your mercy to dawn,
the day we beat our swords into ploughs, when your peace reigns over the earth?
3. Hear this, all of you who use the poor in your thirst of power and riches;
the Lord will turn your laughter to tears, on the wondrous Day of our God.
4. Even now return to me, let your hearts be broken and humble,
for I am gracious, gen'rous and kind; come and seek the mercies of God.
5. You have been told the way of life, the way of justice and peace;
to act justly, to love gently, and walk humbly with God.

Tune: Amos 5:21-24, 8:1, Micah 6:1-4, 6:8, Joel 2:12-14; Mary Haugen, b.1890
Text: Mary Haugen, b.1928
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Readings from the Christian Scriptures

1 Corinthians 1:18–31

¹⁸For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” ²⁰Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. ²²For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, ²³but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength. ²⁶Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, ²⁹so that no one might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹in order that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

Matthew 5:1–12

⁵ When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ²Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

³“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ⁵“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ⁶“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. ⁷“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. ⁸“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ⁹“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. ¹⁰“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’

sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Sing: *Make me a channel of your peace* TiS 607

**Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there is hatred let me bring your love;
where there is injury, your pardon, Lord;
and where there's doubt, true faith in you.**

**O Master, grant that I may never seek
so much to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved, as to love with all my soul.**

**Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope;
where there is darkness, let me bring your light;
and where there's sadness, ever joy.**

**O Master, grant that I may never seek
so much to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved, as to love with all my soul.**

**Make me a channel of your peace.
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
in giving of ourselves that we receive,
and in dying that we're born to eternal life.**

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Offering

Offering Prayer

Gracious God,
for these good gifts, we give thanks.
May they be used to further your work of justice in this place. Amen.

Reflection

SERMON 1: STAND BY FOR A REVOLUTION Bruce Prewer

Matthew 5: 1-12

Stand by for a revolution.

Jesus in his sermon on the mountain breaks new ground and calls people to put down their roots and revel in it.

Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up on the mountain, and when he had sat down, his followers gathered around him. And he opened his mouth and taught them saying:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth

Something radically new is happening here. It is a revolutionary manifesto. And yet, it also has strong echoes of something old.

SOMETHING OLD

To begin, let's look at the "something old." Every sentence in the beatitudes has echoes of Old Testament passages. The mind that thought up these new Scriptures was saturated in the old Scriptures.

Moreover, Matthew wants us to recall the story of Moses. Moses went up the mountain and came back to the gathered people with the commandments of God; the law by which the people of Israel were to live. Jesus on noticing the crowds that gathered, went up the mountain a little way to deliver his own manifesto. He is the new Moses.

Matthew says Jesus sat down like Rabbi. Rabbis always instructed their disciples from a seat.

Jesus was making it quite clear that he was about to deliver teaching. Maybe Jesus sat down on a protruding ledge, from which vantage point he could look out over the crowd and address them.

Much of what follows through chapters 5, 6 and 7, is ethical teaching. It is about how to live the good life, loving God and loving one's neighbour. Much of it goes much higher than Moses. Jesus goes from the external; obedience to law to the matters of feeling and thinking; from outward observance to motives and intentions.

***"Thou shalt not kill"* is extended to "You shall not harbour anger and resentment."**

***"Thou shalt not commit adultery"* is elevated to "You shall not harbour lust."**

***"An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth"* is surpassed by "Turn the other cheek, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."**

Jesus raises the religious/ethical bar to a new height.

So much so, that if this were all there was to the so-called "Sermon on the Mount" then Jesus would be just an extremist law giver, who made the burden of goodness even greater for us to carry. In fact, this extreme teaching would make the devout person even more anxious and desperate about pleasing God.

SOMETHING NEW

But that is not the whole truth about this Jesus. There is something new here. A deeper and more hopeful message is present in the "Sermon on the Mount."

I said earlier that there are Old Testament echoes everywhere in what Jesus had to say. But it is all with a new twist and a new message.

The bulk of the sermon is placed between two liberating passages.

He starts his sermon with that remarkable statement which we know as "The Beatitudes". *"Blessed are the poor, the sad, the*

meek, the thirsty, the merciful, the sincere, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted for their faith in Christ.”

Near the end of his sermon, Jesus speaks with winsome, poetical words about the carefree birds of the air and the wildflowers in the field, followed by the admonition: *“Your heavenly Father knows your needs before you ask him. Therefore don’t be anxious. Don’t worry.”*

This is a call for complete trust in the graciousness of God. Jesus concludes the sermon of highest possible ethical values, with an affirmation of the gracious of God.

The same emphasis occurs in the beginning of the sermon. Maybe we have so often heard the Beatitudes that they no longer surprise or enlighten us. But for those first listeners, the words of Jesus must have hit them like the proverbial ton of bricks.

CONGRATULATIONS

Jesus pronounces God’s blessing on certain groups of people. *“Blessed are…….”*

That word blessed in the Greek text is *makarioi (makarios)*. For Greeks it was originally used for the happiness of the gods. In the New Testament it is a God-given happiness.

It is hard to find a contemporary word to bring out the impact of this blessing.

Maybe it could be translated, *“The meek have struck it rich!”* or *“How lucky are the meek, for they have hit the jackpot.”* This would be okay as long as we see this kind of luck, not as chance but as coming from God’s overflowing generosity.

Others have suggested *“O so happy are the meek.”* Or *“Divinely happy are the meek.”*

Maybe the word *“congratulations”* gets close. Like announcing a bonus from a generous boss: *“Congratulations you meek, poor, pure and merciful folk! You shall inherit the earth, etc.”*

Whatever word we employ, the key point is that it describes the boundless joy which comes to those who follow Christ and completely trust the kingdom of heaven.

THE KEY: BLESSEDNESS OF FREE GRACE

Now to one of the key points in this sermon: Have you noticed that the blessedness which Jesus affirms is a bonus? The blessedness is a free gift of God. They do not have to do anything to earn this blessedness. They are pronounced winners because God chooses to bestow this happiness on them.

The Beatitudes are therefore, about God's grace. You don't have to do something to earn this happiness. In truth, it cannot be earned but just received as a gift from God. Pure gift. Grace.

This is in sharp contrast to the blessings of the Old Testament. There the happiness is conditional. People are urged to act or pray in a certain way, and only then they will receive blessedness. The typical form is: Blessed is the man who..... does this or that.

In its exact form Psalm 15 offers a happiness which is totally dependent upon conditions. It depends on living blamelessly, speaking the truth, never gossiping, not seeking revenge, shunning reprobates, honouring God-fearers, never taking a bribe, and keeping promises even though such integrity proves costly. Conditional blessedness.

The beatitudes of Jesus are not like that.

To quote the eminent N.T. scholar Eduard Schweizer:

“Jesus proclaims blessings on all who are poor, who hunger, and who weep, without the addition of any conditions that men must first fulfil.”

“There are no conditions to be met before someone can be called blessed.”

This is the “something new” which Jesus proclaims. Without lifting a finger, congratulations! You are a winner! God has chosen to bless you. There is abounding grace for those who are poor, thirsty, sincere, merciful, and humble enough to simply receive it.

Accept the gift of divine happiness. That is where things commence for the Christian- with God's free, uncalculating love. Nothing else, but sheer grace!

Like the section near the conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount (with that winsome theme about the birds of the air and the flowers of the field and God's care for us all) this introduction is a liberating creed that Jesus offers. It is about a God who is already doing far more than we could ever expect, and certainly wonderfully more than we could ever earn by moral or religious rectitude. Legalism breeds anxiety. Grace grants peace.

Anxiety is out. Trust and peace and joy are in. Congratulations!

SUMMARY.

As I hear it from the lips of Jesus, the central section of the sermon, where Jesus lifts the bar to new heights, must always be taken in the context of God's free grace. Grace is like bookends between which Christ's "sermon on the mount" is placed.

We are to aim at far exceeding the legalistic righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, but only without the context of God's saving grace. We dare to aim high and dare to fail sometimes, maybe fail often, within the certainty of saving grace. This God of Jesus has blessings for you that are not dependent on attaining an honours degree in the practice of faith and ethics, or maybe not even obtaining a 51% pass mark. God's constant love is the fundamental reality, on which we build our security.

**Stand by for a special kind of revolution!
Away with legalism, in with grace. Away with anxious religion, in with beatitude! This is the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Saviour.**

Congratulations! You have won the first prize. You are the recipients of the happiness of the gods!

Announcements

Prayers of the People

Loving God,
we know you long for justice on earth.
Help us to be your partner in this work.
God in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Let there be justice for the refugee and migrant.
God in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Let there be justice for the environment.
God in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Let there be justice for those facing financial challenges.
God in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Let there be justice for queer people.
God in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Let there be gender justice in our communities.
God in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Let there be justice for Indigenous peoples, here and all over the world.
God in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

God, you know all the ways that justice has failed.
help us to be your partner for good.
In Jesus' name we pray.
Amen.

Sing: *For everyone born / A place at the table* (Shirley Murray)
Seasons 4-14)

**For everyone born, a place at the table,
for everyone born, clean water and bread,
a shelter, a space, a safe place for growing,
for everyone born, a star overhead,
and God will delight when we are creators**

***of justice and joy, compassion and peace:
yes, God will delight when we are creators
of justice, justice and joy!***

**For woman and man, a place at the table,
revising the roles, deciding the share,
with wisdom and grace, dividing the power,
for woman and man, a system that's fair,
*and God will delight when we are creators
of justice and joy, compassion and peace:
yes, God will delight when we are creators
of justice, justice and joy!***

**For young and for old, a place at the table,
a voice to be heard, a part in the song,
the hands of a child in hands that are wrinkled,
for young and for old, the right to belong,
*and God will delight when we are creators
of justice and joy, compassion and peace:
yes, God will delight when we are creators
of justice, justice and joy!***

**For everyone born, a place at the table,
to live without fear, and simply to be,
to work, to speak out, to witness and worship,
for everyone born, the right to be free,
*and God will delight when we are creators
of justice and joy, compassion and peace:
yes, God will delight when we are creators
of justice, justice and joy!***

**For gay and for straight, a place at the table,
a covenant shared, a welcoming space,
a rainbow of race and gender and colour,
for gay and for straight, the chalice of grace,
*and God will delight when we are creators
of justice and joy, compassion and peace:
yes, God will delight when we are creators
of justice, justice and joy!***

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Blessing/Benediction

Like the servant who speaks with wisdom and Jesus who blesses the humble, we are called to walk humbly, love kindness, and live God's justice.

May the Spirit of justice fill you today and always,
tempting you to speak for truth,
calling you to stand up for what is right,
encouraging you to act with loving-kindness towards each person,
animal and every part of God's good creation.
Amen.

Every day your lives will be surrounded and supported by
The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.
Amen!

Exit Song: *When you walk from here* Linnea Good

<https://youtu.be/Qvd2PUoEj9g?si=83EdvpqCOwXgblmn>

When you walk from here

When you walk from here

Walk with justice, walk with mercy

And with God's humble care

When you go from here

When you go from here

Live with justice

Love with mercy

Humbly walk in God's care