



Sunday morning service – 11/07/2021

CALL TO WORSHIP: Psalm 25:1-7, 16-21

- ¹ *In you, LORD my God, I put my trust.*
² *I trust in you; do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me.*
³ *No one who hopes in you will ever be put to shame,
but shame will come on those who are treacherous without cause.*
- ⁴ *Show me your ways, LORD, teach me your paths.*
⁵ *Guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my Saviour, and my hope is in you all day long.*
⁶ *Remember, LORD, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old.*
⁷ *Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways;
according to your love remember me, for you, LORD, are good.*
- ¹⁶ *Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.*
¹⁷ *Relieve the troubles of my heart and free me from my anguish.*
¹⁸ *Look on my affliction and my distress and take away all my sins.*
¹⁹ *See how numerous are my enemies and how fiercely they hate me!*
- ²⁰ *Guard my life and rescue me; do not let me be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.*
²¹ *May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope, LORD, is in you.*

SONG: Jesus, Hope of the Nations (a slightly different version than we are used to to!)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5p-qR64P-iQ>

PASTORAL PRAYER (Pam Small)

Psalm 100:4-5
*"Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise!
Give thanks to him; bless his name!
For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations."*

Our Father in heaven, we want to enter into Your presence with thanksgiving and praise this morning. Thank You for this new day, another day in which we can give You thanks and praise Your name.

As the hymn writer put it:

"Morning has broken like the first morning. Blackbird has spoken like the first bird.
Praise for the singing, praise for the morning. Praise for them springing fresh from the world...
...Your re-creation of the new day..."

Why do we do we give You thanks and praise? For You are good; Your steadfast love endures forever, and Your faithfulness to all generations. These are very precious thoughts to us, particularly in these times when everything isn't good, steadfast love is often neither steadfast nor enduring and faithfulness can be short-lived. How wonderful for Your children that, in You,

"We have an anchor that keeps the soul, Steadfast and sure while the billows roll,
Fastened to the Rock which cannot move, Grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love."

Thank You, Jesus, for Your love for us. Thank You that, in Your Word, You tell us not to be surprised when we see things going wrong in the world. It is not the same as that 'first morning' which You created. It is a world which has been corrupted by 'sin' sickness. This is a disease far worse than COVID-19 because it still has power over us in the life to come unless we accept Your cure. There is healing and eternal life available for those who recognise that they have this 'sin' disease and realise there is no 'home remedy' or vaccine available for THIS disease! We need to come to You, the 'sin' doctor, the One who can heal, restore, forgive. Jesus, You are our cure. You took our 'sin-sickness' onto Yourself on the Cross. You died in our place, but You rose again to show Your power over this disease. In You alone is eternal healing found. Your Word says that 'as many as received You, You gave them the right to be called Your children through believing on Your name'. You are our medicine. By faith, we receive You into our 'sin-filled' bodies and then, by Your Holy Spirit living inside us, You bring new 'resurrection' life and transformation to us. Your Word tells us again that, "If we are 'in You' we are a new creation. The old has passed away and, behold, the new has come!!" How can we thank You enough for so great a cure for our 'sin-sickness'?

We also know that, when You walked this earth, You showed Your power over earthly sicknesses as well as over sin. We thank You that You still have power to bring healing and hope into our 21st century lives today...

We continue to bring Liz Martin to You, Lord. You know what's going on in her body and in her family situation because of this cancer which has been found in her brain. We know that You are merciful and compassionate. We know that we can trust You even though we don't always understand Your ways but know that, ultimately, all of this will work for good, because You are good and *'Your steadfast love endures forever and Your faithfulness to all generations'*.

We pray, too, for others in our church family who have ongoing difficult situations that they are dealing with whether it be health issues or fractured family situations or other concerns. Please continue to be their strength and encouragement to face each new day.

We pray for those we partner with in ministry overseas or here in Australia. We thank You for a 9-month paid position for Grace with CARE International in South Western Uganda, working among Congolese refugee women. We thank that this location is about two hours closer to home than her previous position. Please watch over her and keep her safe at all times and may she be a blessing to the women as she not only helps them physically but also goes there as Your representative. Please guide her to those women who have become disillusioned with life and need to know about You and the hope You bring for now and eternity.

Please be with Caleb who writes that, through some financial support they received from us, they are looking to start a new idea that they believe You gave them to reach out to the people in the community with a 'Word of God' through a radio program, encouraging them as we go through these challenging times.' Father, please use this program to bring people into Your kingdom.

Thank You that the Newby family is recovering from COVID. Thank You that, after three months of restrictions, Howard and Michelle have been able to meet again with their church family face to face, even though the children are not able to join them yet.

We thank You that Colin and Jill have been given the 'all clear' from SIM to head off to Spain on the 31st July. Thank You for providing everything they needed for this to happen. We know that, in the current climate, nothing is certain. However, we know that, if this is in accordance with Your will, You are able to make a way. Please strengthen them as they pack and say their final goodbyes to family and friends.

"What a friend we have in Jesus, ALL our sins and griefs to bear.
What a privilege to carry EVERYTHING to God in prayer."

*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.*

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us in the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

SONG: Servant King

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zCAdWs-ZyEk>

BIBLE READING

Leviticus 19:9-18

⁹ "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. ¹⁰ And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God.

¹¹ "You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another. ¹² You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD. ¹³ "You shall not oppress your neighbour or rob him. The wages of a hired servant shall not remain with you all night until the morning. ¹⁴ You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the LORD. ¹⁵ "You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbour. ¹⁶ You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbour: I am the LORD. ¹⁷ "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbour, lest you incur sin because of him. ¹⁸ You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the LORD.

1 Peter 4:8-11

⁸ Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹ Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: ¹¹ whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

REFLECTION: We Need Each Other! (Becky Douglass)

Video: <https://youtu.be/GRSBU0qDPoU>

COVID has changed our perspective on many things, hasn't it? I used to jump into the car and head to the shops or a cafe or to the doctor's without thinking twice, but now I must think about masks, and sign-ins and hand sanitising, etc. In the end, I often choose to just stay home and do what I need to do via the internet. It is also difficult to plan too far in advance at the moment as things are always changing. We've had to change the date of our church lunch three times now!

But I think the hardest thing is the disruption in relationships. Not being able to visit family members. Not being able to be a part of a larger group – not even seeing some people for weeks at a time. I am an introvert and I like my time alone, but even I have been craving personal interaction. I miss just exchanging smiles with people. I miss those casual conversations which strengthen our “togetherness” and the camaraderie of working together on a project.

This pandemic has made us realise anew that God made us to live and work as a part of a community. That is why He chose to work primarily through a group of people rather than individuals – Israel in the Old Testament and the church in the New Testament. When we become Christians, we enter into two relationships – our relationship with God and our relationship with other members of God's family. And these relationships become one of the key ways that we are able to endure hard times and even flourish – to have green leaves in the drought.

Last week we looked at one of the Kings of Israel who was facing a hard time. He turned to God in prayer and trusted God to take care of Him. Hezekiah gave us a good example of a prayer of faith which is able to sustain us in difficult times.

Today we are going to move forward several centuries to the time of the early Church. Under the Roman Caesar Nero, the Christians were persecuted and the those in Rome were forced to flee their homes. The Apostle Peter wrote his epistles to some of these people who had settled in modern-day Turkey. He talked to them about ways they could stand firm under trials and persecution. Towards the end of his letter, we find the passage we read today.

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly ... (v.8)

If they forgot everything else he told them, they must not forget this! If they are going to live well in this difficult circumstance, they must work hard at loving one another. Think of an athlete straining hard with focused concentration and maximum effort in order to win a competition. This assumes that loving one another is not always easy, but it is important! And this love will be displayed in at least three ways – grace, generosity, and gifting.

1. Grace

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. (v.8)

Now, we need to state right at the beginning that this does not mean that we should cover-up serious sin. The church hasn't always gotten this right and has at times not only covered-up seriously bad behaviour, but even enabled it. But that is not what Peter is talking about here. Here he is talking about those every day, minor annoyances that come from living and working together.

When life is going great and we are full of energy and optimism, it is easy to overlook those little annoyances. We can laugh at the minor quirks of others and even find them endearing. But when we're under pressure, when we're tired, when every step forward takes effort, even little things can become major irritations to us. Think of how a tired, hungry child reacts to the slightest disturbance! We need God's love to enable us to extend grace to others in these situations – to enable us to go beyond our natural reactions and to “*Love one another earnestly*”.

And it is two-way process, isn't it? When we are feeling a bit bruised by life, we value a bit of softness from others. Their forgiveness of our tired reactions, their love for us when we are not very

lovely, can be like a cold drink in the desert. We need mutual grace, which is only possible when God's love binds us together and is a "buffer" between us.

2. Generosity

Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. (v.9)

The dictionary defines hospitality as "receiving and treating guests and strangers in a warm, friendly, generous way". We tend to think of hospitality as having people over for a meal, or welcoming newcomers to church. I think it also covers such ideas as charity and benevolence. The word "hospital" was originally applied to an institution run by a religious order which helped needy and suffering people. In showing hospitality to each other, Paul is calling us to be open-handed with what we have – whether that is a meal, or money, or our time, or a listening ear. And we need show hospitality willingly and warmly so that the receiver knows we are happy to share.

An example of God-directed generosity is the instructions in the first few verses we read from Leviticus.

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God. (Leviticus 19:9,10)

Basically, this is telling people that when they harvest their crops, they are to leave some in the field for the poorer people to gather for themselves. The story of Ruth gives us a glimpse of how this worked out. Ruth would follow behind the harvesters and pick up the bits they dropped. This became a major food supply for her and Naomi. We also see in the story of Ruth that she was not despised, but treated well and made welcome among the harvesters. I think Boaz's welcoming attitude towards Ruth was as important to her as the grain she gleaned.

So, how can we show generosity and hospitality to one another as we face at least another week of lockdown on top of any other issues we might be facing? First of all, can I encourage you to keep in touch with each other? Just a short call or brief email can make someone's day. And be praying for each other. Pam and Norm do a great job of putting together and sending out the Prayer Updates each week. I find it very helpful to pray through this a couple of times each week.

We also need to remember our ministry partners. All of them are dealing with difficult, uncertain things at the moment. Again, the Prayer Updates are helpful in knowing the latest information that can guide our prayers. We also need to be sure to keep up our financial support of them and even look for ways to give a little more – our generosity will be a tremendous practical encouragement to them. To share one example, Caleb has been struggling to stay in touch with the people in his church during their lockdown because they don't have the access to the internet that we have. We were able to send some extra money to him recently so that their church could host a radio program to connect with their church members and the wider community during their lockdown. They are so appreciative of this help.

Finally, we need to be keeping our eyes open for opportunities for us to extend this generous hospitality to others within our community. We are obviously not supposed to be out in the community any more than necessary. But even a greeting across the road to a neighbour, can be encouraging to them. When do we have to go out, realising that everyone is under extra pressure, we can give grace to others and make a point of saying thank you and praising people for their assistance. Let's be people that others like being around!

3. Gifting

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. (v.10,11)

God designed the body of Christ to be interdependent. God has made all different kinds of people and given them a variety of gifts and abilities. I love the two examples that Paul gives because they show the importance of this variety. When we think of “essential workers” in the church we easily think of the upfront people – those who preach and lead. But Paul also emphasises those who work behind the scenes – the servers. Paul puts these two groups on equal footing – both are essential, and both are reliant on God to do their work. I really believe that those who make our morning tea are just as important as those who lead the Grace Groups – they just have different skills and abilities. Hospitality and Biblical insight are both needed.

I also want to say that extending grace to each other and being generously hospitable will look different for people with different gifting. Some of us are naturally great at getting on the phone and chatting away. Others of us may prefer to write a note to someone. God has given some of us money to share generously and others He has gifted with practical skills which may be needed. Some are naturally good at organising and others are particularly sensitive to people who need a listening ear.

Conclusion

As I was reading the Leviticus passage, I was impressed by the deep practicality of God’s instructions to His people, the Israelites. They were living in a hostile land, surrounded by people who would like nothing more than to eliminate them from the earth. God knew that they would need to support each other – to make sure that they treated each other well – or else they would not survive. But as they worked together honestly and lovingly, they would be able to withstand opposition and be a witness to the character of God to those watching.

The same is true of us as well. It is an incredible blessing to be part of a local family of believers. As we love one another earnestly, we will benefit from each other’s grace, generosity and gifting. And the impact of all this will be a blessing for us, helping us through whatever might happen, it will be a powerful witness to a fragmented, watching world, and ultimately bring glory to God.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I want to thank you for each member of our church family. Each is different and we are enriched by these differences. I pray that you will fill us with your love this week so that we can pass that love onto all around us. We pray that you will show us ways to keep in touch with each other and encourage each other in these difficult times. Amen

QUESTIONS:

1. When have people in our church family showed love to you? What was most helpful to you?
2. How can we earnestly love one another this week as we are not able to meet face-to-face?

SONG: We Are One

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sBKKZtpF9po>

BENEDICTION: Numbers 6:24-26

*The LORD bless you and keep you;
the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you;
the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.
Amen.*