

HOLY COMMUNION WORSHIP SERVICESUNDAY, 3RD MAY 2020

CONDUCTED BY REV JIM WINN

NOTE: Have a small piece of bread and a glass of grape juice (or similar) ready for Holy Communion.

LINK FOR VIDEO: <https://vimeo.com/412982032>

LINK FOR DISCUSSION GROUP about 10 am (immediately after video of service finishes)

Seacliff Uniting Zoom Worship (same link each week) <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/3577202589>

Meeting ID: 357 720 2589(should not be needed)

Acknowledgement of Country

As we come to worship let us acknowledge that, from before recorded time, the First Peoples cared for this land we call Australia.

We acknowledge, particularly, the Kurna people, their Elders, past and to come, together with communities who have told the sacred stories and nurtured faithfulness to the Creator.

Call to Worship

As we awake today we have a unique opportunity to bring our fears and anxieties into God's presence. So let us listen for the call of our gatekeeper, our Shepherd, and allow his voice to lead us from any self centred preoccupation to the feast of grace.

May the light of Christ shine into the hidden darkness of our lives and restore us for the service of the Lord.

Come let us worship God.

Opening Prayer

Christ, gatekeeper, shepherd, you know our names; you care for us. When we face darkness and death, you walk beside us even though we may not know it. When we hunger for your love, let us commune with your Spirit. When we are afraid, feed us at your table. Through our worship today may we discover, yet again, that we dwell in the house of goodness and mercy all the days of our lives. ***Amen.***

Hymn *Jesus calls us here to meet him*

1. Jesus calls us here to meet him
as, through word and song and prayer,
we affirm God's promised presence
where his people live and care.
Praise the God who keeps his promise;
praise the Son who calls us friends;
praise the Spirit who, among us,
to our hopes and fears attends.

4. Jesus calls us to his table
rooted firm in time and space,
where the church in earth and heaven
finds a common meeting place.
Share the bread and wine, his body;
share the love of which we sing;
share the feast for saints and sinners
hosted by our Lord and King.

Prayer of Confession and Forgiveness

Lacking self-control,
 hard hearted,
 anxious and troubled;
 too slow to shoulder other people's burdens;
 hiding shabby thoughts
 behind fine words,
 and cold hearts
 behind smiling faces;
 we do not live in the world,
 Lord God,
 as your children,
 full of joyful hope,
 creating hope in others.
 Yet, to our eternal amazement,
 you have not deserted us
 or washed your hands of us.

***We greet your mercy,
 and we claim your love
 which will make us
 what we are meant to be.***

So, hear the good news:
 in Jesus Christ we are sought,
 we are found,
 we are forgiven.
Thanks be to God!

Alan Gaunt, *adapted*

Scripture Reading

John 10:1-10

¹ 'Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. ² The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.'

⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁷ So again Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.

¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

Sermon: INSERTED ON NEXT 3 PAGES

SERMON 1

Our Gospel reading today comes from the tenth chapter of the gospel according to John. Every year, on the fourth Sunday of Easter, we hear from the tenth chapter of John's gospel. And the tenth chapter of the gospel according to John is all about sheep, shepherds and sheep-folds. So this Sunday is, therefore, called "Good Shepherd Sunday." Ironically, in the gospel reading set for today, we do not hear Jesus say, "I am the good shepherd." We have to wait until this Sunday next year to hear those words.

Today we focus on the words of Jesus in verses 7-9a.

So again Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.

I don't think it is terribly clear as to what Jesus meant by this. Gates separate those on the inside from those on the outside, keeping those inside the gate safe from those outside of the gate. Did Jesus think of his followers as belonging in a closed community, able to freely venture out into the wicked world but always returning to the fortress to be protected from thieves and bandits? And who are the thieves and bandits? Are all those who came before him the followers of Abraham and Moses? Many scholars think that, in this context, they are and that this is yet another sign of a deep antisemitic thread that runs through John's gospel. "The Jews", whoever they are, are the enemy, the thieves and bandits. And then, Jesus says that those who enter by the gate that he is, are promised life, abundant life but it's hard to reconcile that promise with living in a barb-wired sheep pen. As I said a moment ago it's not clear what Jesus meant by all of this and the reason for that may well be that the writer of John's gospel is recalling various incidents but using them to pursue his own agenda which may well be, in part, to prove that "The Jews" were responsible for Jesus' death. Such prejudice has no place in our world. By the way, by bringing this to your

attention, I do not wish, in any way, to diminish or justify the evil of the oppression of the Palestinian people. The Jewish nation has much to answer for here.

As most of you know, Vivien and I and our family lived in the United States for eight and a half years. We have many good friends and many good memories from that time. One feature of American society which we got introduced to then and which every time we go back for a visit we are invariably reminded of is a gated community. They have been introduced here in Australia often as retirement communities but not always. Every time you want to visit in a gated community you need to either have a pass or prove an invitation from a resident. Absent the necessary permission, visitors are not allowed to enter, keeping the residents of that community safe from door to door salespersons, wandering proselytizers of various religious or political orientations and curious nosey-parkers!

When John wrote his gospel, shepherds were known to lay down at night at the entrance of the sheepfold. The shepherds were a literal gate, able to protect their sheep from wolves at night as well as keep the sheep from leaving the fold. The sheep within were safe from harm because the shepherd himself became a barrier who would wake if a sheep from within or a wolf from outside tried to pass over him. A good shepherd protected his flock both by day and by night.

For there to be a community, be it of faith or otherwise, there needs to be a gate for entry. Baptism and confirmation have been the usual gateways in our tradition. When, for example, an infant is baptised promises are made to the effect that, for the parents and the church, this child is a gift from God and belongs in a community where the will of God reigns and Jesus is both Lord and Saviour. Confirmation, another gateway, is an adult reaffirmation of those promises made when one was an infant. It follows that the confession made at baptism is not inclusive but, rather, exclusive, as we confess that, for

SERMON 2

us, Jesus is Lord and not the Dalai Lama or Mohammed. None the less, Christian baptism doesn't invalidate the spirituality of non-Christian religions. What it says is that, for us, the locus of God's reality is in this community with its values, its ministries, its outreach and that locus is centred on Jesus, he is the gate.

To say Jesus is the gate, though, does not make the Church a gatekeeper. God is the gatekeeper and in the gospel of John, those who do confess that Jesus is Lord, do so, by the power of God. Many times throughout history, the Church has presumed to be a gatekeeper, making doctrines or morals or cultural customs gates rather than focussing on Jesus. Rather than allow for a diverse and multi-faceted faith community, we have, too often, created litmus tests to separate the orthodox from the heretic. Sadly, our Uniting Church is not free from this tendency. So let us remember that the Church is not a gatekeeper and we do not all have to agree with another to be Church. Neither do we need to like each other to be Church.

So what kind of community with Jesus as the gate are we to be led into?

In preparing for today I found myself spending a lot of time thinking about this question and I kept coming back to the cleansing of the Temple in Matthew's gospel where it is written:

Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold doves. He said to them, 'It is written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer"; but you are making it a den of robbers.'

In the Gospels Jesus often spends time in prayer. Frequently it's private but when it's not it is mostly an opening up of his very being to God either to be in deeper communion with God's Spirit or opening up to God about the anguish in his life. *'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.'*

He often went off to pray after people were healed, in predicting Peter's denial, Jesus said he had prayed that Peter's faith would not fail (Luke 22:32), more than once he told his disciples to pray for strength to withstand the forces which may be arrayed against them. Matthew said that Jesus warned against praying like the hypocrites who love to be seen praying in the synagogues and on the street corners. Instead, he told his listeners that they should go into their room, shut the door and pray to God in secret.

What I think this says to us is that fundamental to being a faith community is prayer which lays our being bare before God so that in some mysterious way there is communion between ourselves and God. So, when you reflect on the Lord's prayer do you interpret it in this spirit? Is this the gate Jesus opens for you?

One of my favourite books is *Psalms of a Laywoman* by Edwina Gateley. It's a collection of psalms which she has written and there is one, in particular, which gets to the heart of prayer for me. When I first found this book quite some time ago I found this particular psalm was like having a gate opened to my spiritual imagination. Let me read it to you.

Glimpsing God

I catch a glimpse,
Now and then,
Of God.
A swift passing
Sweetness
Which makes light
The hour, the day, the week.
Elusive, inconstant,
Yet never totally absent
From the hurtling days
With their shadows.
I grieve
That such a beautiful
Awareness,
Like an unexpected visitor,
Comes infrequently,
Entertains briefly,

And passes
With a whisper.
Is lost then
In the laughter
And the music
Of the night.

Edwina Gateley, Psalms of a Laywoman, Sheedand Ward, 1999, page 37.

Jesus is the gate but the church is not a gated community and we are not gatekeepers. If, then, we are not gatekeepers, what are we?

In the third chapter of Philippians the writer is denouncing those he describes as enemies of the cross.

Destruction is their fate, the belly is their god, they glory in their shame, these men of earthly mind! But we are a colony of heaven, and we wait for the Saviour who comes from heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ,

This idea of the church being a colony of heaven is one that has always appealed to me. If you look it up in your Bible you'll probably find it says that our citizenship is in heaven but James Moffat in his translation says that the essential meaning is, really, that of the church being a colony of heaven on earth.

If we go to the dictionary we'll find a host of definitions for a colony but the relevant one is this:-

a group of people who leave their native country to form in a new land a settlement subject to, or connected with, the parent nation.

A colony, by this definition, does two things. Its members acknowledge its vulnerability by looking after each other and preserving the cultural characteristics of their homeland. Secondly, they expand and begin to colonise the land they have occupied. Now the history of colonisation is rarely a pretty story but that's not the point here. The point, to me, is that as a colony of heaven the church

needs to be that place where members and visitors experience a heavenly love and acceptance which is rooted in God. A place where we could say the will of God is being done on earth as it is in heaven.

It also needs to be a place where colonising in the name of Jesus is occurring. I spent some time looking up church websites that include the idea of "a colony of heaven" in their mission understanding. I must say that the theology of some places made me shudder but there was one summary which appealed to me even though the church concerned didn't. Their summary went like this. "*The Church on earth is a colony of heaven's citizens commissioned to heavenize earth.*" We talked last week in our Zoom meeting about being a transitional church which I take to mean being able to adapt to the social and cultural changes happening in our society so that we are seen and experienced as being relevant. But you don't get relevance if you haven't got a mission and, of course, agreeing on our mission is no easy task.

We need to remember, therefore, that Jesus is also the good shepherd who calls us together to grow and to learn from one another. We often learn more from those who see things differently than we do than from those with whom we share a common point of view. That we all do not see things in the same way is a good thing! Our witness to the world does not depend on our being of one mind, but rather that we all worship the one Lord and respect the diversity of human community.

Finally, then, the real work of the Church is worship, not theologizing. Worshipping together is our witness and our witness occurs in an intransigent world where too many think that all intelligent people think like them. When we break bread and share the common cup in community with folk who do not see things the same way we do, we are bearing witness to our Lord who lived and died not just for us but for the sake of the whole world. Amen.

Hymn *Good Shepherd, We Are Not Alone*

1. Good Shepherd, we are not alone,
for you protect and love your own.
And we, responding, know your voice;
we hear you calling and rejoice.

2. Another shepherd might turn back
and flee at danger's first attack;
but you laid down your very life —
a loving shepherd's sacrifice.

3. A thief may well destroy and steal,
but you, Good Shepherd, save and heal.
You lead your sheep to pasture land,
to life abundant, by your hand.

4. You gather sheep from far and wide —
from folds we know and from outside.
One flock, one Shepherd, there will be —
a loving, blest community.

Tune: Puer Nobis Nascitur 8.8.8.8, (or many other tunes of same meter.)
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Offering Dedication

***Generous, life-giving God,
Jesus' teaching, stories, death and resurrection
are gifts of extraordinary value
which take us to the heart of life's meaning.
In response we find ourselves needing
to share ourselves and our resources.
We offer our gifts so that we, as a congregation,
may speak your word and channel your grace
thereby inviting all people to abundant life
and to join with us in helping create a world
fit for your purposes. Amen.***

Intercessions

You are invited to take two minutes to reflect on people, problems or possibilities which you would like to hold before God and with each prayer you offer take a moment to listen to God's call on your life regarding your response to the need or concern which you have raised.

Holy Communion*freely adapted and added to from a liturgy by Craig Mitchell*

Why have we gathered here?

We come because we have been called to live out a story.

What story shall we live?

The story of saving love.

Where did this story begin?

It was whispered before time began, it was sung in the melody of Creation.

Whose story is this?

This story is God's alone to tell.

It hums in the rivers and the trees.

It whispers in the skies and the seas.

It calls to the people of all places.

It speaks in our hearts, in our lives.

Why then should we speak of this story?

This story calls our name in Creation.

This story claims our lives through the Cross.

This story shapes our future through the Spirit.

We are its telling in this time and this place.

So tell me the story of this night, of this table.

**The Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed
took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it.**

(The minister raises the bread.)

Tell me what he said and commanded.

**This is my body which is broken for you,
do this and remember me.**

In the same way, he took the cup, so tell me what he said and commanded.

(The minister raises the cup.)

This is a new covenant in my blood.

Drink it and remember me.

Yes, this is our common story,
our deep memory, our true destiny.

So let it also be our story-telling, our testimony.

Let us celebrate the way that grace has shaped our lives.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

I invite you to join with me in saying a prayer of thanksgiving.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

We give you thanks, gracious God, for the Spirit which dwells in our hearts, for the resurrection life you have made known to us through Jesus your servant, and for your companionship as we journey through life following in the footsteps of Jesus.

We give you thanks, gracious God, for the fellowship of your church, the technology that enables us still to be your community under these extraordinary circumstances, and the nurture which strengthens us as we pursue mercy and justice for all in Christ's name.

We give you thanks, gracious God, that you have called us to be the Church in a community usually gathered at Seacliff, giving voice to every creature under heaven and rejoicing with all that you have made. Amen.

So, let the storytellers of all ages whisper with us.

***Holy. holy, holy Lord
God of power and might
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed in the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.***

What is our prayer on this unusual day?
***Eternal God, pour out your Holy Spirit on us
and on the bread and wine before us
that our eating and drinking today unites us with Christ,
whose body and blood are given for us.
As your Spirit breaths on us
may we know that you live in us
and that we live in you.
And may we also know that
your world is indeed a gift to us
to cherish and protect.
Living God, this is our prayer.
Amen.***

Breaking of the Bread

(The minister takes the bread and breaks it in full view of the people.)

Christ is the bread of joy, who shares food with sinners.

(The minister lifts the cup in full view of the people.)

Christ is the cup of life, who revives the faint hearted.

Prayer After Communion

The bread has been broken, the cup has been poured, the meal has been shared. Gracious God, we give thanks for bread for the journey, for your wisdom guiding us along the way. May there be friends to share the road as we dare to dream of creation renewed, and hope in the promise of justice for all. Amen.

Hymn *Sent forth by God's blessing*

1. Sent forth by God's blessing,
our true faith confessing,
the people of God from his table take leave.
The supper is ended:
O now be extended
the fruits of his service in all who believe.
The seed of his teaching,
our hungry souls reaching,
shall blossom in action for all humankind.
His grace shall incite us,
his love shall unite us
to work for God's kingdom and answer his call.

2. With praise and thanksgiving
to God ever-living
the tasks of our everyday life we will face.
Our faith ever sharing,
in love ever caring,
embracing as neighbours all those of each race.
One feast that has fed us,
one light that has led us,
unite us as one in this life that we share.
Then may all the living,
with praise and thanksgiving,
give honour to Christ and his name that we bear.

Words: Omer Westendorf, 1916 -
Text copyright ©1964 World Library Publications, Inc.

Tune: 12.11 12.11 D Welsh folk melody; *The Ash Grove* (#531, TIS)

Commission and Benediction

Go now with your trust in the good shepherd,
and let us love, not just in words,
but in truth and action.
Believe in the name of Jesus Christ,
and love one another, just as he has commanded us.

And may God be at your side, even in valleys of death.
May Christ Jesus be the cornerstone of your life.
And may the Holy Spirit abide in you
....and tend you with love and mercy all the days of your life.

***We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
in the name of Christ. Amen.***