

CALL TO WORSHIP:

In the midst of life,

We affirm life in Christ.

In the midst of our journey,

We affirm our hope in God.

When we face the reality of death,

We trust in the life of the Spirit.

PRAYER

God of life, we worship you.

God of hope, we trust in you.

God who renews life, we look to you.

As we spend this time in worship renew our hope,

Stir us in our depths and call us beyond the confines of our fears.

CONFESSION

The Apostle Paul writes that "to set the mind on the flesh is death,
but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace."

Forgive us God, for where we are so focused on the things of the flesh that the life of the spirit is denied.

Forgive us when our vision is limited by the power of the 'bottom line'
Remind us that all things are possible when our minds are set on the Spirit.

Forgive us if we remain captive to patterns and programmes of the past.
Remind us that newness and future possibilities can become reality when our minds are set on the Spirit.

Forgive us when daily news reports and personal experiences fill us with fear and depression,
hopelessness and despair.
Remind us that when minds are set on the Spirit, you give us the ability to cope because your Spirit, O God,
brings life into the most deadening situations.

Forgive us when our words and actions hurt and destroy rather than give life.
forgive us when we allow the words and actions of others to turn us away from life in your Spirit

A time of silence

Gracious life-giving God, set our minds, our hearts, and our lives anew on the Holy Spirit
so that we are filled with your life and love, mercy and peace.

May all our relationships be so bound together with these qualities
that we are visible reminders that your Spirit, O God dwells in us.

This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

Our hope is in God whose steadfast love surrounds us and in whom "is great power to redeem". (Psalm 130:
7) This power is revealed in Jesus Christ who promises us life where there is death, and forgiveness where
there is sin. The good news therefore is this: In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

Thanks be to God!

SONG: Holy Spirit, Living water ATO 359

1. Holy Spirit, living water, flow in us and set us free.
Cleanse our unbelief and sorrow, wash our eyes and make us see.

2. Holy Spirit, come as wind and blow the dust of death away.
Breathe the gift of life into us, lighten hearts to laugh and play.
3. Holy Spirit, rushing fire, burn with truth and justice here.
Catch our minds alight with passion, perfect love that casts out fear
4. Holy, Spirit, come in silence, wordlessly to heal and bless.
Be the heart that prays within us, fill the void with tenderness.
5. Holy Spirit, blessed Wisdom, teach us all of God's delight.
Offer us the wine of grace and make us children of the Light.

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GOSPEL READING: John 11: 1-45



MESSAGE: If only you'd been here - Rev. Brian Spencer

This is part of a series of meditations on the scripture readings through Lent, put together by people within our Presbytery as a result of the recent bush fires. Our world is now focused on the threat of COVID 19 but let us not forget those who have suffered and continue to suffer because of the bush fires even as we share the new grief of those who are dying not just in our country but around the world in the face of this Pandemic. For others of you there is the ongoing grief over the death of loved ones particularly where that has been under tragic circumstances. I think this reflection on today's Gospel reading by Brian has something to say to all of us.

Meditation:

“Jesus wept” (John 11:35) is the shortest verse in the Bible.

Jesus was reacting to the death of his friend Lazarus. He has arrived some four days after his death. And is greeted by Lazarus's sister Mary who says, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.’

There are so many “if onlys” attached to the mishaps and tragedies of our lives. Mary cries, “If only you had been here.”

Thirty-three people died in the bushfires of the 2019-2020 summer. Residents, young men, women and fire-fighters. Some trapped in their burning homes, some fleeing and some putting themselves into the path of danger. Three American firefighters were killed when their waterbombing aircraft crashed in the Snowy-Monaro region.

“If only” they had taken a different road. “If only” they had been one minute earlier or later the branch would not have fallen on them. “If only”, “if only”.

Sometimes our “If only” is a deep feeling of regret. Wishing things could have been different. Sometimes it's an “If only I”. “If only I had done something different: stayed and fought the fire my house/pets/livestock might have survived.

Regret, guilt and grief are such powerful emotions. Hard for us to admit to, hard for others to hear. Too often we bury our own feelings. And if we tell others how we feel we are quickly told that we should not feel the way we do.

Regardless of what we believe about the afterlife and God, death is awful and our loss of relationship, love, intimacy and friendship should never be minimised or dismissed. Yes, our loved one is in a better place. Yes, they are not suffering anymore but still we grieve, in our own way and in our own time.

Grief is never what you expect it to be. Each death is different and gives rise to its own unique feelings and expressions. Each person who grieves does so from their own experiences and circumstances. There are tragic deaths, unexpected deaths, shocking deaths and good deaths. People die young, in the womb, in their prime and some live long enough to long for death to take them. People die from disease, accident, murder, terrorism, suicide and old age. Some are still caring for a young family, some are children, some are parents, some are isolated and alone. Some are alienated from their families. Some die quickly, some die slowly but all die unexpectedly because we are never really ready to say that final goodbye.

Despite all the differing circumstances of death and all the different relationships we have with the person who died there are conventions and expectations about grief that often leave us feeling that somehow, we are not doing it right. Am I sad? Am I sad

enough? Should I be sadder? Should I be crying more? Should I be crying less? Should I be happy for her? Should I go to work? Should I wear a suit and tie to the funeral? Should I be "over it" by now?

The danger is that we either role play what we think we should be doing and feeling or feel guilty that we are not normal and not doing grief right. The truth is there is no right way. There is only what I feel. I have the right to feel what I feel. Even if it is to feel numb.

The grieving process goes on for weeks and months and years. If you have experienced a deep loss, please be gentle with yourself. Do not be afraid of your grief. It needs to be expressed. You need to get it out. Emotion needs move through the body and be released or it can get stuck and leave us crippled for years.

*As we acknowledge the darkness and pain in our lives.
We bring our regrets, grief and guilt to God -
the emotions that are readily expressed and easily resolved -
and the feelings that are deep and hidden.
We offer and claim peace, forgiveness, and hope and we give thanks.
We give thanks for lives well lived.
Lives cut short in service of others
lives cut short through untimely accidents and inescapable circumstance.
We give thanks for hope
unexpected hope
rising up despite our sorrows,
life-giving and all-loving God. Amen*

Prayer:

**Loving God, we open our hearts to you in this holy season of Lent
we seek hope, peace and forgiveness in our broken lives.
We seek hope where we had ceased to hope.
We seek hope that draws us past our limits.
Hope that defies expectations.
Hope that makes a way where there is none.
Hope that takes us past our fear.
Hope that holds us beyond death.
Hope that carries us forward to new life
Amen.**

SONG: Lord of life we come to you. (Common Ground 76) Words: Catherine Walker

1. Lord of life, we come to you; Lord of all, our Saviour be;
come to bless and to heal with the light of your love.
2. Through the days of doubt and toil, in our joy and in our pain,
guide our steps in your way, make us one in your love.

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS

- For our leaders in Government the Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Premier Daniel Andrews
- For those impacted by the Corona Virus world wide
- For medical and hospital staff, police, teachers and those who are most at risk while serving our community.
- For those continuing to rebuild following the fires and those who are continuing to work on behalf of these communities
- For the work of our Presbytery particularly in this region of greater Shepparton and the work of Uniting Goulburn NE.

Quote: Bishop Oscar Romero"We are living in a black night but Christianity discerns that beyond the night the dawn already glows. The hope that does not fail is carried in the heart. Christ goes with us."

COMMISSIONING AND BLESSING

In all you do and say affirm the love of God,
Spread the message of hope, and help others to life in Christ

May the God of steadfast love give you hope in believing,
Christ the Son lead you to resurrection life and the Holy Spirit enliven your being.