

## Easter 4 - 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2020

CALL TO WORSHIP : Christ is risen. Alleluia!  
Across all our differences we worship God as followers of Jesus,  
The one who embodied love and showed us how to be the presence of God.

HYMN: TIS 465 Father in heaven

Father in heaven, grant to your children, mercy and blessing, songs never ceasing,  
love to unite us, grace to redeem us –Father in heaven, Father our God.

Jesus, Redeemer, may we remember, Your gracious passion, your resurrection.  
Worship we bring you, praise we shall sing you -Jesus, Redeemer, Jesus our Lord.

Spirit descending whose is the blessing, Strength for the weary, help for the needy;  
make us your temple, born a new people - Spirit descending, Spirit adored.

PSALM 23

PRAYER

God of mercy, God of joy - we praise you for your faithfulness and your love.  
We pray that you would open our eyes to the marvellous evidence of your presence among us.  
Open too our ears to the one who calls us by name and seeks to lead us in the path of righteousness.  
Link us together in a true and abiding fellowship of sharing and caring and of prayer and of devotion.  
Gracious God, forgive us for where we have failed to trust you for our needs and have been too busy to enjoy  
your presence with us. Forgive us for all the ways that we have failed the people around us, for where we have  
failed to love as you would love them. As we offer you our worship may our faith deepen beyond personal piety  
and mere tradition to become the story we tell with every breath of our lives. Amen

**Words of Assurance:**

Held in a common Love that is within, between, and beyond all,  
We know forgiveness and are formed into a community of love in all things.

READING: ACTS 2: 42-47

MESSAGE: **GLAD AND GENEROUS HEARTS**

Psalm 23 **“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want”**

**Jesus - "I have come that you may have life and have it in all its abundance"** (John 10:10)

That Life was expressed in and through a community that lived out the teachings of Christ and cared for one another.

The early disciples devoted themselves to teaching and fellowship, to worship and prayer and to acts of caring.  
Still part of the Jewish worship at the Temple they experience christian fellowship in homes here they “broke the bread” together. - Communal life shared over Messy meals in homes.

As Christians we are called to pray together, to share the stories of our faith, to share good times and bad, celebrating, grieving, and supporting one another through these times.

As we do so we become the community God wants us to be.

In that early church community we see a Spirit of rejoicing and generosity. Amazing things were happening as part of the ongoing work of God. The same work of love evident in Jesus was now evident in his followers on whom the Spirit of God was breathed.

#### SHARING WHAT WE HAVE TO MEET THE NEEDS OF OTHERS

- Gratitude expressed in giving and service.

John Wesley preached that our happiness can be summarized in two words, gratitude and benevolence; Giving thanks for what God has done and is doing and helping others in their time of need.

We read that those early Christians would “sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.” This spirit of generosity arises out of trust in the one who said “I am come that you might have life in all its abundance”

This theology of abundance, and the ability to trust in that abundance, are the main things that make such radical sharing possible. It is when we are anxious that resources might be scarce that we get possessive and begin to jealously guard our own stash. As long as we think that everything is in limited supply, it is the quick and the dead and we have to look after our own interests. We have to make sure that everything is always available to us, and that means making sure others can't get their hands on it.

It's mine, and I don't know when I might suddenly need it, so no, it is not available to you.

We saw this played out in the early days of COVID 19 restrictions.

This attitude extends far beyond material possessions. We can get jealous and acquisitive about all manner of things, because our whole culture is built on a mindset of scarcity and possessiveness. We can get jealous of some-one else's gifts or abilities, or of the high regard that another person is held in in the community because somehow we have come to believe that reputation and esteem are in short supply and the only way I can rise in the estimation of those around me is at the expense of someone else. They must get less if I am to get any more. And so jealousies and rivalries and resentments fester, and any possibility of embracing a lifestyle of generous sharing is dismissed as threatening and impossible.

As long as we are seeing everyone else as rivals, we are not able to be truly gracious to them or offer ourselves freely and generously to them. Jesus came that we may have life, and have it in all its fullness.” We do not need to compete with one another for resources or possessions or attention or love or giftedness or reputation or acceptance. The economy of God is not an economy of scarcity, but of abundance. There is nothing we really need that is in limited supply. Love, grace, freedom, acceptance, hospitality, mercy, understanding, humour, peace. Nobody else's possession of these things threatens or limits our access to them. God pours them out in rich profusion, in outrageous abundance. If they seem scarce or limited to us, it is not because they are, but because we are so conditioned to believing that everything is measured out in meagre handfuls that we have to fight and scrap for them. If we can trust Jesus, and trust the abundance he came to bring us, then we will be set free from the resentments and rivalries and jealousies and possessiveness that bind us and enslave us and rob us of all joy and community and love. We discover that there is enough to go around.

Gratitude for the gift of abundant life is expressed in giving and service.

“we make a living by what we get, we make a life by what we give” Winston Churchill

Methodist financial principles were expressed in this way “From each according to their ability to each according to their needs.”

John Wesley's motto was

Do all the good you can,  
By all the means you can,  
In all the ways you can,

In all the places you can,  
At all the times you can,  
To all the people you can,  
As long as ever you can.

In our materialistic individualistic culture we have a lot to learn about making what we have available to others. Utilising not just for our own needs but for others. We have seen where fear of scarcity has led to hoarding. But we have also seen incredible acts of generosity in response to the Bushfires and acts of kindness toward those isolated by COVID 19. Sometimes our desire to give is not always appropriately directed and people end up with stuff they don't need. It is important to actually recognize what the needs are and respond appropriately. Standing with people, sharing their pain supporting as "needed". It is easy to say we are all in this together when some are obviously impacted to a much greater degree than others. What are we willing to sacrifice and let go in order to alleviate the suffering of those doing it the toughest?

My brother in East Gippsland came across a young couple living out of their car. They were from overseas here on a working holiday visa but the work they were doing had finished. They had been told by police that they couldn't stay where they were and needed to return home. But it is not as easy as that. My brother and wife have taken them into their home and found a little bit of work they can do in order to fulfil the visa requirements.

It is important to care for the physical material needs of people but what about their emotional and mental health needs? I think a lot of us feel more comfortable with the former than the latter. Our current situation of physical separation and isolation acerbates those emotional and psychological needs. The other day one member of our congregation was in a very low spot emotionally and mentally and late that night she reached out to another member with a phone call. I was thrilled to know that in reaching out she found some-one who was there for her ready to listen and support in her time of need.

Sadly not everyone's experience of the church is what we hope for and long for. Sometimes people can feel that their particular needs have been left unmet. This was the case even in those earliest of days. The story in Acts of the early church it is exciting one, where we see a young Church going out into the world empowered by the Spirit, acting in life giving ways, loving people and preaching the Good News of Jesus -but it's also full of stories of embezzlement, church conflict, racial exclusion, leadership failures, congregational self-destruction, and infighting.

It is easy to look at the failings of the church community both currently and throughout history where we've been hurt, where Christians have been lacking in grace and generosity. We acknowledge that the church hasn't always lived up to our expectations of care and giving. It is easy to finger point at where the church has failed to be that community of love and grace for us. We also acknowledge that we have at times failed to be that community for others. -Where we have been more focused on making sure our needs are met than reaching out in response to the needs of others.

As the One body of Christ we are called to enter into relationship with people often very different from ourselves. When we fail to live into that unity the whole suffers. The good news is that God is still at work both in the structures and institutions and in the individual people that together make up this Body of Christ. The Spirit is still at work even when other people fail us and when we fail other people. The horrible, heartbreaking failures of the early Church didn't stop the Spirit from continuing to move and spread the Good News of the fullness of life in Christ. Our current heartbreaking failures cannot stop the grace of Jesus Christ from continuing to move in us and between us.

Rev. Dr Sally Douglas (Crosslight) reminds us that "The church is being refined right now. We are being called back to our purpose of becoming dynamic pockets of grace through whom Spirit can breathe, communities in

which all ( including ourselves) can discover and share the healing and freedom and meaning that emerges as we draw closer to the Source of all.”

While we mourn the pain the Church has caused us and others, here we are again, through Christ and in the Spirit creating a place for others and ourselves that we can serve and love in all our beautiful messiness.

As we learn more and more what it is to be a community that devotes itself to the teaching of Christ, to know the real joy of wholeheartedly singing and praying together and sharing food with one another, as we seek to respond to one another’s needs, not only will we experience for ourselves the abundant life that Christ offers but we will see others also, drawn to share in this community of life and love.

HYMN: TIS 468 We are your people vs 1,2, 6

We are your people;  
Spirit of grace, you dare to make us to all our neighbours, Christ’s living voice, hands and face.

Joined in community, treasured and fed,  
May we discover gifts in each other, willing to lead and be led.

Christ as we serve you in different ways,  
May all we’re doing show that you’re living, meeting your love with our praise.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE (Adapted from “Let us pray Pray” by Janet Nelson)

Good Shepherd, hear our prayers for all the peoples of the world.

We pray for all who are hungry and without shelter;

For those who are frightened or bewildered;

For those in the clutches of unscrupulous and uncaring leaders.

Lead us in the paths of righteousness, that your people everywhere may be freed from want.

Good Shepherd, hear our prayers for your worldwide church.

We pray for all who are shepherds to your flock,

For all who have lost their way or strayed from your path,

For all who have heard your voice and come at your call.

Guide us in your ways, that following you we may tread the path that leads to abundant life.

Good Shepherd, hear our prayers for the communities in which we live.

We pray for the very old, at home or in aged care facilities, the very young who are at risk of neglect and abuse, and those unable to care for themselves;

For the unemployed and those who cannot provide for their families;

For all whom we love, for our families, our friends and for ourselves.

Protect your people from all danger and harm, that they may know your goodness and mercy in their lives.

Good Shepherd, hear our prayers for all in trouble or need.

We pray for those who are anxious, those with no clear direction in life;

For the lonely and those who grieve for loved ones;

For the sick and the dying and for all who give them care.

Comfort us on each dark and stony path, that in your presence we may not be afraid.

Spirit of God, stir our hearts to grow in faith, and encourage our hands to work for the good of community and life together in the Body of Christ. Enrich our lives through the grace and presence of others. Amen.

## BENEDICTION

Embodying a community of hospitality  
Responding in acts of generous compassion  
Encouraging a life-giving freedom and creativity  
We are called to be the people of God wherever we are.

We witness to the love of God.  
We witness to the way of Christ,  
We witness to the work of the Holy Spirit.

May the grace, hope, peace and Love of God be with you at this time and always. Amen