

**SERVICE OF WORSHIP FOR SHEPPARTON UNITING AND SHEPPARTON RURAL
CONGREGATIONS – Sunday 2nd August 2020**

Welcome/Introduction: 'May the peace of the Lord be always with you'.

Acknowledgement: I pay my respect to the traditional custodian of this land. To all the members of the Yorta Yorta nation, past, present and emerging.

Call to Worship:

In the midst of your rich creation, people live in poverty. In the midst of plenty, people are hungry. Your freedom is freely offered, but people live in bondage.

There is love too great for words, flowing towards us from the heart of Christ. There is hope made real in the life of Christ.

Let us worship God!

Hymn: 505 (TiS) 'Jesus invites his saints'

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Confession:

O God of abundant love, to think of your love makes our hearts warm in love for you Jesus Christ. We praise you for freely choosing to become one of us, to live and enter all that we experience. We are grateful for satisfying our needs and for the grace that surrounds us and sustains us. We thank you for your gifts of friendship and friends, and for the beauty of creation that delights us with food and flowers, with songs of the birds and creatures of the sea.

Thanks be to you, O God. Amen.

Merciful God, we come before you in confession, for within the bread of your life, lies all that we need for forgiveness and renewal. Your love does not enslave us with guilt but sets us free from the ways of death. We stand before you with all our frailty and failings that we may know who we are, and whose we are.

O God, it is often hard for us to believe in your boundless love. We labour in vain, trying to earn our salvation, or trying to close our eyes from the realities of hope and trust in Jesus Christ.

Forgive us, O God.

Become the bread of life for us now, we pray.

Then, if we ask selfishly for our own forgiveness but refuse to forgive others, confront us with our lack of love and become the bread of life for us now.

In the name of Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Declaration of Forgiveness:

The manna from heaven falls gently from the sky, it restores life and transform communities.

We are forgiven!

Thanks be to you, O God.

Amen.

Doxology: 771 (TiS) 'Now to him who loved us...'

Readings: Mathew 14: 13 – 21

Message: "They need not go away; you give them something to eat". (v. 16)

- When Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself... (v. 13) He had heard that John the Baptist who was put in prison by Herod for telling him that it is not lawful to have his brother's wife, had been murdered by Herod.

This is John, his second cousin. The one who came to prepare the way of the Lord. Now, he has done that not only with his message of repentance and baptism in the wilderness, but with his life, his head presented on a platter to Herodias and her daughter.

This is John who declares in John 1: 27 "The One who comes after me, I am not worthy to untie his sandals" and in Luke 3: 16 "I baptize you with water, but He who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of his sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire".

This is John the forerunner who declares in John 1: 29 "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world". He is now dead, and not only dead he was murdered and not only murdered, he was beheaded, and not only beheaded his headless body was taken away by his own disciples to be buried.

- When Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. Broken hearted and grief-stricken, Jesus withdrew. He wanted to be by himself, maybe to contemplate the consequences of his mission and message about the kingdom of God and its impact on the lives of ordinary people like you and me. Or, maybe Jesus is acknowledging that John's mission is complete.

Though heart broken and grief-stricken, he was not overwhelmed. But the crowd, when they heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. And, when Jesus came ashore, from his wilderness and deserted place, he saw them. He had compassion for them and cured their sick.

The heart that was broken and full of grief is now filled with compassion, the Jesus that withdrew from the crowd is now crowded by villagers with their sick. And, he cured them! His 'deserted place' withdrawal may have reminded Jesus, and us too, that God's mission begins in the deserted places of people's lives. It flows from broken hearts to broken hearts, and that in the midst of grief, compassion overflows.

- Evening came, there was Jesus, the disciples and the crowd. All 5000 men plus women and children. No one is planning to go home. The disciples were concerned

and rightly so. It is a deserted place; it is getting dark and the crowd may be hungry, and there are just too many of them. It is not dissimilar to the mission of the church today. We often find the tasks we are called to too great and we want to send people away, we want people to find food for themselves. We often look at the crowd and look at our resources and we can be easily overwhelmed by the enormity of the tasks.

So, the disciples brought their concern to Jesus, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves."

If you are caught up in the emotion of the story, you are like me. I feel sorry for the people if they are asked to go to the villages and buy food for themselves. I feel sorry for the disciples, their sense of inadequacy gave them a good enough excuse for sending the crowd away. But Jesus, when he heard the disciples, he said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat."

Why would Jesus insist that the crowd need not go away? Does he know how much food is needed to feed five thousand people plus women and children? Of course, he knew! There is more here than what is being said. Jesus is teaching his disciples that if there is place where people are hungry and need to be fed, it is in the deserted places of their lives. Jesus knew that if ever there is a time for people to be fed, it is when darkness threatens their well-being.

But the disciples were not ready to give up their sensible and rational argument. "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." Jesus replied, "Bring them to me."

Then Jesus ordered the crowd to sit down on the grass. Then he took the five loaves and the two fish, looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples. The text reminds us of Psalm 23 v. 2 'He makes me lie down in green pastures', and the story of how God fed the Israelites in the wilderness with manna from heaven in Exodus 16.

This is the ministry of Jesus Christ and the mission of the church. We meet people in their deserted places, cure their sickness and when evening comes, we feed them. The 5 loaves and two fish in our own hands may not feed too many, but in the hands of Jesus, he will bless them then broke them and gives them back to us to feed the hungry.

Jesus remembers that this is what he was sent for. To become the bread of life for us in our deserted places. His body is to be broken on the cross and given to a darkened world – in the Eucharist, when the bread is broken, we remember "The body of Christ broken for us", and we say Amen!

Prayers of the People:

Jesus, bread of the world, receive our prayers for all your people: for those who hunger for freedom, for justice, for release from poverty and disease; for all who struggle for the peace and welfare of the world. When we are greedy and take what is not ours, put a right spirit within us, that we may share the resources of the earth and feed your hungry people.

Jesus, food of pilgrims, receive our prayers for your body, the church: for all who hunger to know your forgiveness and love; for all teachers and ministers and all who bring your good news to others. When we preach a message that neither satisfies nor disturbs, when our divisions and discord make your gospel hard to hear, empower your church anew, that we may be strengthened for your ministry and feed your hungry people.

Jesus, true and living bread, receive our prayers for this community: for those whose daily needs for food and shelter are unmet; for those whose longings for recognition and love go unsatisfied; for our neighbours and families and all whom we hold dear. When we turn away from the needs of those around us, when our relationships with others are unforgiving and unkind, help us grow into your likeness, that we may bring your love to others and feed your hungry people.

Jesus, bread of life, receive our prayers for all who are in need: for all in anguish, sorrow, confusion or fear, for all who are sick or in pain. When we wander into the deserted places of life, when we abandon ourselves to your goodness, fill our emptiness and satisfy our longings; make us courageous and ready to offer what we have in compassion, that all your people may be fed to the glory of your name.

Hymn: 537 (TiS) 'Let us talents and tongues employ'.

Blessing:

Go out into the world in the power of the Holy Spirit; in all things, at all times, remember that Christ is with you; make your life your worship to the glory of God.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.