

SHEPPARTON UNITING CHURCH

AFTER PENTECOST 21 OCTOBER 25, 2020 REFORMATION SUNDAY

MORNING WORSHIP

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS Jen Shields

GATHERING OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

CALL TO WORSHIP

The Lord calls us to the mountaintop
to see the view of God's promise
laid out before us.

From this vantage point
God's kingdom offers inspiration
for the journeys still to be made. *MaryAnneRennie*
Let us worship God.
We come to hear and see God's promise.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This is God's land and God's Spirit dwells here.
We acknowledge the Bangerang and other Clans of the Yorta Yorta Nations, traditional custodians
of the land and waters. We commit ourselves again to working for reconciliation in this land.

HYMN *TiS 103 A mighty fortress is our God* Martin Luther's great hymn of the Reformation

PRAYERS OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION

Holy God, you are wise and merciful,
just and gracious, steadfast in your love.
For this we praise and adore you
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Lord, you have told us what to do.

But this love thing is hard.

***You've invited us to love you with everything we have
and we instead have fallen in love with our jobs, houses and electronic toys.***

Lord, you have told us what to do.

Loving you is intimately scary, and we often opt for another way.

***You've invited us to live in loving relationship with everyone we meet,
but there are people who are downright hard to love.***

Lord, you have told us what to do.

We confess our inability to love as we should.

We need your forgiveness and help living out the love thing.

Free us to love as you do. Amen Confession from *Africana Resources, United Methodist Church*

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS AND DOXOLOGY

God sent God's Son into the world so that all people might share God's salvation.
Hear then Christ's word of grace to us: 'Your sins are forgiven.' ***Thanks be to God.***

Doxology *TiS 768*

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
praise God, all creatures here below,
praise God above, you heavenly host,
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost

Thomas Ken Melody *Genevan Psalter*

HEARING GOD'S WORD

Your word, O Lord, is a lamp to our feet **a light to our path**

AN EARLY WORD

We're going to be talking about tests and grades - or marks. What do grades tell about us?

Did you know Jesus had to do some tests? Do you wonder what sort of grades he got? Then there will be something for you to do in an activity pack delivered to your house on Saturday - if I know about you! Ask for a pack 5812 9320

THE READINGS

Your word, O Lord, is a lamp to our feet ***a light to our path.***

DEUTERONOMY 34. 1-12

Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho, and the Lord showed him the whole land: Gilead as far as Dan, all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, the Negeb, and the Plain - that is, the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees - as far as Zoar. The Lord said to him, 'This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, "I will give it to your descendants"; I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there.' Then Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there in the land of Moab, at the Lord's command. He was buried in a valley of the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor, but no-one knows his burial place to this day. Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died; his sight was unimpaired and his vigour had not abated. The Israelites wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days; then the period of mourning for Moses was ended.

Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, because Moses had laid his hands on him; and the Israelites obeyed him, doing as the Lord had commanded Moses.

Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. He was unequalled for all the signs and wonders that the Lord sent him to perform in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants, and his entire land, and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

Psalm Response Psalm 90. 1- 6, 13- 17

You have been our haven, Lord,
from generation to generation.

***Before the mountains existed,
before the earth was born,
from age to age you are God.***

You sweep away the years
as sleep passes at dawn.
***like grass that springs up in the day
and is withered by evening.***

Balance our past sorrows
with present joys
***and let your servants, young and old,
see the splendour of your work.***

2 You return us to dust,
children of earth back to earth.
For in your eyes a thousand years
are like a single day:
they pass with the swiftness of sleep.

How long, O Lord, before you return?
Pity your servants,
***shine your love on us each dawn,
and gladden all our days.***

Let your loveliness shine on us,
and bless each work we do,
bless the work of our hands. (ICEL)

MATTHEW 22.34-46

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 'Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?' He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question: "What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?" They said to him, 'The son of David.' He said to them, 'How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying,

"The Lord said to my Lord,
'Sit at my right hand,
until I put all your enemies under your feet?'

If David calls him Lord, how can he be his son?' No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

Lord, may your word live in us ***and bear much fruit to your glory.***

REFLECTION

Mountain top experiences are very significant in our lives, probably because we don't often have them. So they colour our lives, often enriching and even transforming them - that is why they are such precious experiences.

One of mine came at the end of a long day, spent travelling north through a desert landscape of amazing starkness and strange beauty. There had been stops along the way - for drinks. We'd been shown a spring, named after a local hero, but couldn't drink from it: it was to refresh the eyes. The journey was much slower than expected, although it was along the King's Highway. At last, late, we left the bus and walked up a fairly gentle slope, an avenue between trees, to a church on the top of a mountain. We explored this ancient building, and the floors of even older ones, revelling in the ancient mosaics there. And then, at five o'clock, we went to the edge of the mountain and gazed down. There below us was a river valley, bordered on either side by the rocks of this ancient desert. A city. Towards the horizon, a range of high hills. In the gathering dusk, the shimmering waters of an inland sea. A huge vista was spread before us. As we held our special prayers, we were amazed to see three tiny lights on one of those distant hills - and recognised a special gift.

'Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho, and the Lord showed him the whole land: Gilead as far as Dan, Naphtali, the land of Ephraim, and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, the Negeb, and the Plain - that is, the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees - as far as Zoar. The Lord said to him, "This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, I will give it to your descendants."

I, too, was on Mount Nebo, looking down on Jericho and its palms, across the Jordan, over the Plain, at the glint of the Dead Sea, and further away, to the hills surrounding Jerusalem. On a clear day you can see all the areas noted in Deuteronomy, though not the Mediterranean... We saw most of it, even as dusk fell - with the blessed glimpse of Jerusalem's TV towers. Like Moses, I looked at the Land of Promise.

This was yet an spectacular mountain-top experience for Moses. There had been others - when Moses was summoned by God to go up Mt Sinai in Egypt, to the south-west - where he stayed for forty days - a long time - and returned, bearing the two stone tablets on which God's Ten Words for the Hebrews were inscribed. Just God and Moses, hearing God's plans for the people. The second time Moses ascended Sinai, he prayed for God's presence with the people the - and was given a glimpse of God's glory.

And now this mountain: not so high - 2,200 feet, but with a huge tract of land visible from its summit. Those Hebrews, former slaves, had dreamt of reaching the land promised by God. And here it lies before them! Just one more river to cross! A very long time since they left Egypt...

But for Moses this is perhaps Mount Disappointment: 'I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there.' Is God unduly hard on Moses: the faithful, courageous leader of those not very promising people? But Moses also has a past, not always filled with obedience and love. In his youth there had been a murder - but while leading the people, he had failed God.

And so the record says that Moses died in Moab, in the country we know as Jordan, not far south of Amman, the modern capital. The people mourned this great leader thirty days.

But the last few verses of Deuteronomy are a wonderful tribute to Moses, written hundreds of years after his death. 'He was unequalled for all the signs and wonders that the Lord sent him to perform in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants, and his entire land, and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.' The description of Moses at 120 underlines this: he was fit enough to climb Mt Nebo; his strength had not abated. Moreover, he could see to the Mediterranean - a cool 220k distant: you'd need more than 20:20 vision! Physically fit he might be, but most significantly we are told that Moses was 'a man whom the Lord knew face to face.'

I wonder whether we have the experience of the Lord knowing us face to face...

It seems to me, that if we do, it is somehow related to the answers Jesus gives his critics about the greatest law. Conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders is escalating - note that it's between members of the same faith. Jesus has already passed three of their tests. At the end of the Great Debate, when the leaders ask him which is the greatest commandment, trying to catch him out about the law, Jesus explains that the most important thing is to love God with your whole self. This leads to loving your neighbour in the same way you love yourself. Jesus is not against the law of Moses: he draws those answers from the Ten Words God gave Moses for the people, from the heart of the law. While the religious leaders are adding extra rules to God's Ten, Jesus simplifies them, makes them succinct. We need to note that nothing Jesus has done - like overturning the tables in the Temple, or has said here - or 'dropping the mic' at the end of today's reading when the leaders can't answer Jesus' question. -nothing violates the law of love: Jesus lives it!

In trying to keep these two laws lie most of our problems. We want to share our love for God with the good things of life. We find some neighbours extraordinarily difficult to love - the Indigenous family a few doors down, the household of young people on drugs... Clearly this love thing is not just something we can do, any more than Moses' leadership skills could weld those quarrelsome ex-slaves into a harmonious, obedient people. Like Moses, we have to rely simply, strongly, overwhelmingly, on God as we grow into, lean into, love for God and neighbour.

OUR RESPONSES

HYMN *TiS* 640 *Kneels at the feet of his friends*

OFFERATORY PRAYER

Generous God,
you call us to love you with everything,
and our neighbour as we love ourselves.
And so we make our offering,
whether cash, cheque or direct debit,
as part of our love for you and our neighbour.

***Take these gifts,
with our love, our faith, our service
and use them for your glory
in Jesus' name. Amen***

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

WCC -Canada, the USA
Presbytery - Alexandra

Loving God,
we thank you that you are always with us,
guiding, blessing, sustaining.

God of love,
you know that we don't find loving easy;
it demands so much of us:
so much commitment and self-denial;
so much thought and imagination;
so much courage and faith,
God of love: ***help us to be loving.***

Help us to love you with our hearts,
to make our relationship with you
the most important thing in our lives,
transforming our other relationships.
We pray for those we know ...
God of love: **help us to be loving.**

Help us to love you with our souls,
committing our very selves to you
and sharing that saving faith with others.
We pray for the mission of the church,
especially for the Alexandra congregation
Shepparton and Shepparton Rural congregations.
God of love: **help us to be loving.**

Help us to love you with all our minds,
to seek your way for this world,
your truths to set all people free,
an end to 'fake news'.
We pray for Canada and the United States,
for all their citizens and leaders.
God of love; **help us to be loving.**

Help us to love our neighbours as ourselves,
to treat one another with respect and understanding.
We pray for all suffering from Covid-19,
for all health workers in their weariness,
all dying without family nearby; those who mourn,
and all seeking to meet the deepest human needs
and to work for the coming of your kingdom of love.
God of Love: **help us to be loving. Amen**

Based on Christine Odell, *Companion to the RCL* Vol 1, p.54

THE LORD'S PRAYER

BEING SENT ON GOD'S MISSION

HYMN *TiS* 217 *Love divine all loves excelling*

Charles Wesley, a reformer of the Church

WORD OF MISSION AND BLESSING

Go now, from the mountain top,
from the view of God's promise.

We go, refreshed and inspired by the Word.

Go, knowing that God is with you,
Deliverer, Answerer of Prayers, Steadfast Companion, Saviour!
the mighty fortress of our faith!

To God be the glory, for ever and ever!

Photo Rev Ann Scull - earlier in the day!



