

**WORSHIP SERVICE FOR SHEPPARTON UNITING AND SHEPPARTON RURAL
CONGREGATIONS - 1st November 2020**

Welcome/Introduction:

May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all now and forever more.

Amen.

You are warmly welcome to our worship service this morning in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy spirit. **Amen.**

Acknowledgement of traditional custodians:

I pay my respect to the traditional custodians of this land in which I live, work and worship. To the elders and members of the Yorta Yorta nations past, present, and emerging.

Call to Worship:

God is spreading a canopy of peace that we may shelter from the worries of this moment.

Come in hope, come without fear.

Come, let us worship God!

Hymn: 215 (TiS) 'You servants of God'

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Confession:

Praise and thanksgiving to you O God for always calling us to a fuller life in faith. You part the waters when we are threatened with drowning.

We rejoice in the wonder of unexpected moments when we find ourselves gathered into your company.

Thank you for saving us from lives lived in triviality and self-indulgence, inviting us out into a life of adventure in your good news.

Call to us again and give us the wisdom to accept your invitation.

Jesus Christ, we know that we are sometimes tempted to see ourselves as those who should lead, and we turn away from the ideas of others.

When the going is tough, we stand back in anxiety, rather than stepping into the waters where Christ our leader has trod.

Challenge us as you did those who have gone before us. This we pray in faith. **Amen.**

Declaration of Forgiveness:

The Christ treads through the depths of our frailty and failure, understanding our fears and our mistakes. Grace is always offered to us.

We are forgiven!

Thanks be to God, Amen.

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

Reading(s): Joshua 24: 1-3, 14-25; Mathew 25: 1-13

Hymn: 453 (TiS) 'We limit not the truth of God'

Message: 'Praise God for Saints'

This Sunday, the 1st of November is traditionally remembered and celebrated as the Feast of All Saints. A Sunday in which we thank God for those saints named and unnamed, men and women who responded to the call of God to serve God in others with the whole of their lives.

We remember many of them by names like St Peter, St Mathew, St John, St Andrew, St Nicholas, St Mark and St Mary. And of course, we remember later church leaders like St Augustine, St Gregory, St Barnabas and many more.

They were people who served God faithfully with humility. At all times they acknowledged their need of God and were blessed with God's presence in every step they took even for some of them, to their death.

I looked up the definition of a saint and found that 'A saint is a person acknowledged as holy or virtuous and regarded in Christian faith as being in heaven after death.'

If you use that definition and think of those you would like to add to the list of all saints, who would you include in that list?

I know I would include my mother Lavinia who died when she was only 50. A person that served God and community selflessly against all the odds. She gave her whole life to her family and her faith, and I believe that even we, the children could feel the very presence of God in her life. I also believe that she is in heaven right now. She is a saint.

I have no doubt that you would have names that you would like to add. Some from the family, from our community, a father or mother, a grandfather or grandmother, even a friend or someone whom you have always admired for their faith and commitment to God and to others, and you believe they are now in heaven. They are saints.

I would also like to suggest that another definition of a saint, to add to the one above comes from our Old Testament reading today. Joshua 3: 7 The Lord said to Joshua, "This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, so that they may know that I will be with you as I was with Moses..."

A saint in that sense is a person whom God is exalting or raised up so that the people may know God's presence. God's exaltation of Joshua included many victories against many nations and the possession of the land that was promised to Moses.

In our New Testament reading (Mathew 23: 1-12), we hear an uncommon tone in the voice of Jesus precisely because the religious leaders have done nothing but to serve themselves and for their own glory. They are hardly the saints that Jesus expected.

“They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. They do all their deeds to be seen by all the others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. They love to have the place of honour at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have people call them rabbi.” (Mathew 23: 4 - 7)

Jesus’s disappointment is not with their intentions in relation to God but with their lack of obedience to the very law (Torah) that they are teaching (23: 2-4) and their motivation in doing the Law as a way to gain human favour and accolades. (23: 5-7)

We read earlier in Mathew’s gospel that Jesus criticised them for interpreting the Torah along with their oral tradition because the oral traditions provides them with a way out of obeying the law.

In 23: 4; the yoke/burden image would have brought to mind the teaching of the Torah and the slavery in Egypt. This, of course is in stark contrast to what Jesus is teaching about the Torah/Law.

The way Jesus is teaching the Law/Torah is not burdensome. It is an easy yoke; it is light to be carried (11: 28-30). His interpretation of the Law is based on the centrality of love, mercy, and justice. His interpretation of the Law brings life and rest (11: 28 – 30).

Jesus is calling his followers to faithfulness with the assurance that his teachings are easy loads to bear. He is also calling for Christian leaders to reflect upon their own teaching: Are we placing too much burdens upon those entrusted to us without lifting a finger to help? Or do we share the teaching of Jesus that brings a promised rest?

When we look back at those saints in our lives, we may discover a common thread in that they were faithful, they would not put heavy loads on us, they did not seek places of honour, and they would rather praise god then to be praised.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Hymn: 470 (TiS) ‘Rejoice in God’s saints’

Notices:

Offering:

O God, we know that there are many who long for support and help. May we use the gifts that your people have given to bring your love to them and to those who are in need.

In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. **Amen.**

Prayers of the People:

Gracious God, we pray that we will hold and cherish all that is holy in life and carry it forth to the people around us. May we always come in true humility as we meet with others and reflect on what your word tells us and be for us. Then lift the heart of your church, we pray, so that all we do is done in compassion and justice.

We pray for the church and the world: Hear our prayers loving Christ. Open our eyes that we may see more than we have seen before and be stronger and more daring in the steps we take.

Embrace the whole world with your love and your truth, so that all may be given a greater vision in caring for each other and for our planet.

May we never take anything for granted but receive with thankfulness your kindness to us. Be present to those who are anxious, sick and grieving that your peace and comfort may fill their hearts and give glory to you.

Hymn: 136 (TiS) 'There's a wideness in God's mercy'

Blessing:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forever more. **Amen.**

782 (TiS) 'Go now in peace'