

**SERVICE OF WORSHIP FOR SHEPPARTON UNITING AND SHEPPARTON RURAL
CONGREGATIONS – 22nd November 2020.**

Welcome/Introduction:

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

Acknowledgement:

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

Call to Worship:

The reign of God is seen when the little and the least are loved. There is no call toward prestige and power, but to an embracing of all creation.

The creation groans and grieves as it longs for that day to come when the signs of Christ's kingdom are spread across all the earth.

When the planet and its people and creatures their eyes in hope to welcome the Christ of costly love, the celebration will resound in songs of joy.

Let us worship God.

Hymn: 152 (AHB) 'Come, O Fount of every blessing'.

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Confession:

We bring you our thanks and praise, O Christ, for a godliness which is founded on compassion and justice, rather than might and prestige. We thank you that you call us, again and again, to reflect on a grander understanding of your reign.

We thank you that it is not expressed in what we say we believe, but what we do in your name and that our salvation is forever linked with that of those around us.

O Christ we look at your life in awe and know full well that ours do not match your hopes for us.

The vulnerable still cry around the world, and, even when we hear them, we often fail, to respond in ways which bring about true change.

Call to us in love Jesus Christ, challenge us if we become complacent or self-righteous, we pray.

Often, we are aware that we only give what is left over to those in need. We satisfy our own wants first, even if they are excessive, before we look carefully at what is happening to others.

We forget that your reign only prevails when we follow you towards life which is profound and costly.

Call to us Jesus Christ, challenge us if we become complacent or self-righteous, we pray.

Amen.

Declaration of Forgiveness:

Grace lies at the heart of the life of Christ. When we face that, in our humanness, we become the little and the least, and our lives are open to receive that grace.

We are forgiven!

Thanks be to God.

Doxology: 772 (TiS) 'Worship, honour, glory, blessing'.

Readings: Ezekiel 34: 11-16, 20-24; Mathew 25: 31-46

Hymn: 228 (TiS) 'Crown him with many crowns'.

Message:

Our Old Testament from Ezekiel chapter 34 is addressed to the people of God in exile in Babylon. The harsh words of God proclaimed by the prophet is directed at the "shepherds", the leaders who have failed God's people.

The leaders have failed in their responsibilities to care for and look after the people of God. Instead of feeding their sheep, they have been fattening themselves. They have failed to look after and care for the sick, the injured and the lost.

The rulers have ruled with harshness and they have been unkind and lack compassion. The people are scattered BUT there is hope declared the prophet.

The hope is in a shepherd who would reverse the unkind treatment and the neglect of the scattered people of God. We know of the story of the good shepherd in Luke 15: 3 – 7. That is exactly what God would do in order to save and rescue his people.

The good shepherd will not forsake his sheep or leave them in the dark and gloom of the exile. That shepherd will bring his sheep home (13-14), that shepherd will make them lie down in green pastures and will care for them (15-16). And they will be fed with justice.

This reminds us who are in leadership positions in the community and in the church about our responsibilities to the people of God.

The psalm for today (Psalm 95) puts it this way – "For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand Ps. 95:7.

As we celebrate the kingship of Jesus Christ today, we reflect on this rescue mission by God. Christ is king because he is our shepherd. He will gather people from all nations, those in exile. He will feed them and bind their wounds; he will ultimately separate the goats from the sheep. He will rule with power and great authority (Mathew 24: 30).

The good shepherd is in the service for the least, the servant for all who suffers and who bears witness to a new empire of servanthood.

One commentator puts it this way, 'The divine reign of God has invaded the world and it is good news – especially to those on the margins of society'.

The kingship of Christ was earned through servanthood. Every time a hungry person is fed, Christ rules. Every time a sick person is visited, Christ rules. Every time a stranger is welcomed the kingship of Christ is recognized and affirmed. **Amen!**

Hymn: 145 (TiS) 'The king of love my shepherd is'.

Notices and Joy/Concerns:

Offering:

Prayers of the People:

Jesus Christ, true ruler of the created world, we pray for the people of the world: for victims of war, brutality and oppression; for victims of unjust economic and political systems; for the hungry, the homeless and the refugee.

We give thanks for leaders who serve the common good, and for all who work for an increase of justice and peace.

Make us a people whose hearts are ruled by your mercy and compassion.

Jesus Christ, true shepherd to all your sheep, we pray for your church: for courage in places of persecution; for renewed zeal in places of apathy; for unity in places of discord and division.

We give you thanks and pray for all who are shepherds to your people, for priests and pastors, and all who minister in your name.

Jesus Christ, true companion to all who seek you, we pray for those to whom our lives are bound; for our families, our friends and all whom we love; for these congregations; for those with whom we work and play.

Jesus Christ, true comforter to all who suffer, we pray for all in special need: those lost in grief or loneliness or hopelessness; those imprisoned by pain or guilt or despair; those sick in heart or mind or spirit.

We give you thanks for all whose love or care or daily work enriches our lives.

Jesus Christ, true ruler of earth and heaven, we give you thanks and praise for your faithful servants of every age. Help us to follow in the footsteps of your saints that we, like them, may be gathered into your eternal presence, a people after your own heart, the sheep of your fold.

Jesus Christ, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Hymn: 629 (TiS) 'When I needed a neighbour, were you there'.

Blessings:

779 (TiS) 'May the feet of God walk with you'.