

**SERVICE OF WORSHIP FOR SHEPPARTON UNITING CHURCH AND SHEPPARTON RURAL  
CONGREGATIONS – 8<sup>th</sup> November 2020.**

Welcome/Introduction:

May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all now and for evermore.

**Amen.**

Acknowledgement of the traditional custodians of the land:

I pay my respect to the traditional custodians of the 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:

Let us be truly present as we wait to meet our God. Let us lay down our worries and concerns, our planning for the next days and our agendas for life and work. For here will come the Prince of peace, the one who renews all that is truly of life and who holds us in love, so that we may be healed and restored.

There is no God like this God of all eternity, the Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit.

**Let us worship God.**

Hymn: 477 (TiS) 'Jesus calls us here to meet him'.

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Confession:

Gracious God, we thank you for inviting in us the dream of a life which full and free, which embraces the Human One who visits us with hope.

We thank you for wedding feasts of life to which you invite us, and the bread and wine of joy which enriches all that we do.

Thanks, and praise to you, O God, for those who lead the people with wisdom and courage, challenging in ways which demand our listening.

Thank you for the promise which lies in each future. Make us ever ready and waiting. Praise be to you, Holy God.

O God, even though we affirm our faith in you and come to this holy place to worship you, we know we too often live our lives unaware of all that you want for us.

We fill our minds with anxious thoughts or are too tired to concentrate. We begin planning without you to guide us towards your will for us.

Forgive us, Loving Christ.

Fill the lamps of our lives with the sweet oil of your kindness, we pray.

Sometimes we are tempted to believe that we have little more to learn about godly life. We close our eyes and minds to new ideas and fail to enter more deeply into your word for us.

We allow our minds to sleep, believing that we have done all that is needed, O God.

Forgive us, loving Christ.

Fill the lamps of our lives with the sweet oil of your kindness, we pray.

This we pray in humble faith. **Amen.**

Declaration of forgiveness:

The bridegroom of love and grace has arrived! We are never left alone in guilt and grief. A warm hand touches our lives again and again. We are forgiven!

**Thanks be to God.**

Doxology: 768 (TiS) 'Praise God from whom all blessings flow'.

Readings: Joshua 24: 1-3, 14-25; Mathew 25: 1-13

Message: 'When you are invited, be wise, be prepared, and be awake'.

Our old Testament reading from the Book of Joshua chapter 24: 1-3 and 14-25 reminds us of two things that Joshua himself reminded the people of Israel. First, he invites them to Shechem and narrated to them the long history of what God had done for Israel. He reminded them of God's promises to their ancestors, the deliverance from slavery in Egypt and God's provision in the wilderness.

The later part of the reading (vv. 14-21), Joshua urges the people that based what they have heard and see God doing, to put away the gods of their ancestors and to serve the LORD. He also gave them a choice, that is they choose to serve the gods of their ancestors, he, Joshua and his household will serve the LORD.

This invitation by Joshua was accepted by the Israelites and they were wise to do so. They declared "We will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24: 15). You might think, at this point of the story there is cause for celebration but that did not come. Instead, Joshua sternly replied, "You cannot serve the LORD!" God is jealous for your love, and God will not forgive you endlessly and without consequences. If you forsake God, God will "consume you, after having done you good" and the people urgently answered back, No, we will serve the LORD" (24:21).

The formal ritual of renewing the covenant between Israel and God at Shechem followed. The people's own words of their commitment to serve God alone would be written down and remembered as witness against them if they fail.

The people of Israel have been invited, they have been prepared with the renewal of the covenant, now they must be awake in their relationship with God.

We read from the gospel of Mathew a parable that is supposed to teach the followers of Jesus about the importance of being prepared and being awake.

Jesus is addressing his disciples on the Mount of Olives (24: 3), the place that the prophet Zechariah look forward to seeing the Lord stand there and being recognised as the king over all the earth (14: 9, 16-17).

It is there that Jesus told this parable "The kingdom of heaven will be like this...". The coming of the day of the Lord is certain as to the hour and the day, we do not know.

In the story, the bridesmaids are invited and expected that they would be prepared and awake as they wait for the bridegroom. Five of them were wise, they prepared in that they brought extra oil for their lamps because they did not know what time the bridegroom will come, and they were awake. The other five were not wise, they were not prepared as they did not bring extra oil with them and they were sleepy. They thought that what they had was enough.

All ten were waiting in anticipation and expectation for the arrival of the bridegroom. When the arrival of the groom was delayed, they went to sleep. Five were confident in their sleep because they knew they would have enough oil to last. They all knew that the groom was coming and left their lamps burning, but only five knew that or anticipated that the waiting in the dark might be longer than expected.

When the groom's arrival was announced, all the maidens were awakened to trim their lamps ready for the procession. Five of them discovered to their horror, they would not have enough oil to keep their lamps burning. The other five maidens refused to give them any oil and suggest that they go to the dealers and buy some oil.

We know from our reading that they did go, they did get the oil, but when they returned and knocked on the door, but their request was denied by the groom. Those bridesmaids were unwise, unprepared, and not awake.

We learn from the last verse of our reading what Jesus said, "Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour" (v. 13). Jesus is saying, be vigilant as you wait for the groom. Be alert at all times and know you have been invited. Because you are invited you must be wise, prepared and awake.

We must be wise in knowing that we do not know the hour nor the day, therefore we prepare by keeping our lamps full and some more, we must stay awake that we may hear the announcement of the coming of the groom.

In our day and age, it is easy to run out of oil. The oil of mercy, forgiveness and justice. The oil of loving unconditionally because we are so used to having things at our fingertips. Shops are open 24 hours, there is no shortage of dealers nearby. It is easy to take things for granted, being sleepy, we can get tired of doing good because our lamps are running low on oil.

Do not be found with little or no oil. Be wise, be prepared, and stay awake for we do not know the hour nor the day of the announcement that the groom has arrived.

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

Hymn: 266 (TiS) 'Wake, awake, for night is flying'.

Notices:

God who loves all people, we pray that our gifts will serve your gifts of love for the world.  
Guide us as we use them in your name. **Amen.**

Offering:

Prayers of the people:

Ever-loving God, in every generation you have cared for your children, and your mercy is everlasting: hear the prayers we bring for your world and for your church.

We pray for the peoples of every land; for all who suffers the horrors of war, for soldiers, civilians and refugees; for all who endure the effects of famine, disease and natural disasters; for all who govern and those who administer law.

We give you thanks for all who work to bring an end to oppression and suffering, remembering especially those who have given their lives that others might live.

Loving God, we wait for your coming, for your reign of justice and peace.

We pray for your church throughout the world: for all ministers, priests and pastors, teachers and youth workers; for the newly baptised and for those whose faith has grown cold; for all who worship or minister to others your gospel of salvation, remembering especially those who work in places that are dangerous, remote or unresponsive.

We pray for the communities in which we live; for those without work and those with too much responsibility; for those who are forgotten, unwanted or abused; for our families, our friends and all whom we love.

We thank you for all whose work enriches this community, remembering especially all who give their time to care for the needy, the elderly and the young.

We pray for all who are in trouble or distress: for the destitute and those who despair for the future; for the broken-hearted and all who mourn for loved ones; for those in mental torment, for the sick and for the dying.

We give you thanks for all who bring comfort and hope, and relief for your people, remembering especially all medical staff, chaplains and pastoral workers.

We give you thanks for all who have served you faithfully to their life's end. Keep us ever watchful and ready for the day of your coming, that we may hear with joy the archangel's call, and with all who have died in Christ, rise to meet you.

Loving God, we wait for your coming in glory; in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Hymn: 687 (TiS) 'God gives us a future'.

Blessing:

781 (TiS) 'Father, bless us as we go'.