



The Uniting Church in Australia
SHEPPARTON UNITING CHURCH

Order of Service for
Sunday 25th July 2021

Welcome/Acknowledgement:

Call to Worship:

Who is this who rides upon the storm, treading in darkness towards those who are troubled and carrying a new light of hope and courage?

Who is this who dares to look into the faces of power and challenge their decisions?

Who is this who bears our burdens willingly, feeds the hungry and lifts our hearts into a new day of hope?

It is the Christ, the Human One. It is the life of God who brings us more love than we will ever know.

Let us worship God.

Hymn: 442 (TiS) 'All praise to our redeeming Lord.'

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Confession:

With grateful hearts we bring you thanks, O God. Again, and again, you look on us with kindness. Day after day, you patiently call us on – pointing us to a different heaven and a different earth, one which shines with the hope of your kingdom.

Forgive us O God, for seeking what is already given and yearning for who is already present. We know that all too often we hear your voice sending us towards those who wait in longing for your love and close our ears to your call.

We stay safely within the walls of our homes and sanctuaries singing our hymns and saying our prayers, as though that is enough for us to be your people.

We are sorry for the times when we fail you, O God.

Forgive us when we do not trust in you to sustain us and guide us, and our neglect of the hungry and those caught in the stormy seas of life. We are fearful for the future afraid to step out onto the daring life of the Spirit.

Forgive us and remind us again of your hopes for us.

This we pray in your name, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Declaration of Forgiveness:

Even as our feet falter, even as we turn back in weakness and humanness, the hand of God reaches out toward us in mercy.

We are forgiven!

Thanks be to God.

Doxology: 771 (TiS)

Readings: Ephesians 3: 14 – 21, John 6: 1 – 21.

Hymn: 164 (TiS) 'The great love of God is revealed in the Son.'

Message: "Dwelling in love".

The theme of the 16th Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia was 'Dwelling in love', which the newly installed President for the next triennium, Rev Sharon Hollis preached a most inspiring sermon. Preaching from Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth, the President encouraged the members of the Assembly and of the church to be "upturned and transformed by the radically inclusive love of God." A "love that is active, tough, resilient and long suffering. This love risks the fragility of human flesh in the incarnation. It crosses boundaries. It raises up those who religion and society have excluded. It endures the cross. It rises again".

If I may continue with that theme 'Dwelling in love' from the lectionary epistle for this morning Ephesians 3: 14 – 21, I would say it is the same love that Paul talks about in his letter to the Corinthians that the Apostle is now writing to the Ephesians about. It is a humbling kind of love. And, as the Apostle says, "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name...". (NRSV)

Here, Paul is bringing the doctrinal part of his epistle to a conclusion with a prayer, just as he did in 2: 15 – 23. The prayer of a humble and devoted servant of God. "For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father". Because of this love Paul has become a prisoner for Christ for the sake of the Gentiles (v. 1). Because God is love, the mystery of Christ was revealed to him. (v. 4) Paul went on to explain grace was given to him to bring to the Gentiles the good news of the boundless riches of Christ in accordance with the divine eternal purpose – that in Christ we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

"For that reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. Paul here is emphasizing that in heaven and on earth there is only one family of God that bears God's name. God the Father, by his love has set his name upon those he has redeemed in and through Christ. God has adopted these as sons and daughters, belonging to same family and of one household. This is what I call the 'reconciling love' of God. God's love is humbling and reconciling.

Then, Paul explains how this dwelling in love can happen through prayer. Paul prayed that the Ephesians may be strengthened in their inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith as they are being rooted and grounded in love, that they may have the power to comprehend the fulness of God's love in Christ which surpasses all understanding and which is filled with the fullness of God. God's love is humbling, reconciling and fulfilling.

The word "dwell" reminds us about a developing theme in Ephesians, that is the theme of "temple". Earlier in this epistle Jewish and Gentiles believers were referred to as stones in God's temple, with the apostles and prophets being foundation stones, and Christ himself being the cornerstone. The dwelling place for God – a place where we can enjoy communion with God, and here in Paul's prayer, that by God's grace we would be strengthened in our inner being that "Christ will dwell in our hearts through faith".

Christ, who is the LOVE of God dwells in the hearts of those who have faith. Therefore, those who believe are rooted and grounded in love and their inner being is filled with power through the Spirit so that when they speak, they speak with love. When they work, they do so because of love. They live their life in love. That love enables us to love one another as sons and daughters of the same household. That love empowers us to seek justice for all in love, it strengthens us to advocate for the poor, the vulnerable and the least in love.

Through the indwelling of Christ, the love of God, we are able to comprehend the love of Christ in his life, death and resurrection. A love that surpasses all understanding. With God's love, we would know something that is beyond human comprehension.

The only conclusion that Paul offers for all this is a doxology: "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever.

The life of a person who's inner being is filled with the love of God is a doxology. A song to the glory of God.

Amen.

Hymn: 217 (TiS) 'Love divine, all loves excelling.'

Notices and Concerns:

Offering:

Receive our offering, O God. Add to it the bread of life in Jesus Christ that all may eat and be filled, we pray.

Amen.

Prayers of the People:

God our Creator, we give you thanks that you disclose yourself to us in all the mysteries of your creation.

We pray for your beautiful broken world: for all who live in places of war, disease, degradation or famine; for leaders of nations and for all who work to alleviate the misery of others.

As you fed your people of old, feed today your people who hunger for food, for security, for wisdom, justice and peace.

Loving God, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

God our Redeemer, we give you thanks that you come to us in the person of Jesus, feeding us with your body and blood.

We pray for your church: for those who eat at your table and those excluded from your fellowship; for the people of this congregation and for all who minister here in your name.

As you fed your people of old, feed today your people, who hunger to know your good news of forgiveness and grace.

Loving God, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

God our Companion, we give you thanks that you come to us in the joy of human relationships.

We pray for all with whom we share our lives: for our families, our friends and those with whom we work and play; for the people of this community, for the homeless, the migrants, the refugees and the unemployed.

As you fed your people of old, feed today your people, who hunger for dignity, acceptance and love.

Loving God, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

God our Lover, we give you thanks that in life and in death you hold us in your embrace.

We give you thanks for all who have loved and followed you.

As you fed your faithful people of old, feed today, who hunger for your presence, and at our life's end bring us, with all your saints, to eat at your heavenly table.

Loving God, in your mercy,

hear our prayer. Amen.

Hymn: 569 (TiS) 'Guide me, O thou great Redeemer.'

Blessing:

Go forth with the taste of the bread of life, filled with compassion for the world as the Christ has given to us.

And may the horizons of hope shine with new possibilities in the Spirit, the depths of life be revealed as the dwelling place of God and our every step be walked in the way of the Christ.

Amen.

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