



**Order of Service for**  
**Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> August 2021**

**INTROIT : TIS. 703** 'As the deer pants for the water.'

**CALL to WORSHIP :**

Jesus Christ, Word of eternal life; **Holy Spirit, source of all truth;**  
Great Creator, beginning and ending of all things: **we come to worship you.**  
For there is none other who will lead us to life;  
**there is none other who is more full of grace.**  
We will be your people, **and you will be our God.**

**WELCOME :** to worship. Thanks to the Young Adults assisting.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT of COUNTRY:** We respectfully acknowledge that we gather on Bangerang country of the Yorta Yorta Nations.  
We honour the custodians of the lands and waterways; and pay our respects to their *elders*, past, present and emerging.

**HYMN : TIS. 156** "Morning has broken."

**PRAYERS of PRAISE and CONFESSION :** Loving God, we give you thanks that now, as always, we are in your presence.  
You are our Creator, Maker of heaven & earth; there is nothing deceitful or shadowy about you; and every good and perfect gift comes from your hand.  
Because of your passionate love, you created the whole universe; and you gave birth to us, your human family.  
Out of chaos you created order; out of darkness you created light. We thank you that you are always creating.

As we watch the earth respond to the caress of Spring - the new leaves and blossoms where once we saw only bare branches - we remember that you can transform *our* lives just as dramatically. May our faith in you blossom and flourish as we worship you and learn of you.

We thank you for the church community into which you've called us, as your people.  
And we trust you for the grace we need to continue in our journey with you.

God of mercy, we bring to you the story of our lives:  
Sometimes we've been ignorant and careless ;  
Sometimes we've been self-absorbed and short-sighted.  
Forgive us when we've become too busy to attend to your still, small voice;  
when we've failed to live in harmony with you and with all your creation. ....

Help us to trust in your gifts of forgiveness, renewal, and understanding.  
For we pray in the name of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.



**ASSURANCE** : Friends, in Jesus Christ we are delivered by the word of truth, and set free from the judgement of the law. Through Christ, our sins are forgiven. **Thanks be to God.**

**SCRIPTURE READING** : *Song of Songs 2 : 8 – 13.*

**EARLY WORD**: ‘Webster the Preacher Duck.’ Hearing and doing.

**EPISTLE READING** : *James 1 : 17-27*; **GOSPEL READING**: *Mark 7 : 1-8, 14 & 15, 21-23.*

**MESSAGE** :

I reacted differently to the gospel reading today – did you? Jesus’ disciples are eating without thoroughly washing their hands! Quick – pass the sanitiser!! I definitely had a Covid-related response to this story about cleanliness. 😊

As told in **Mark 7**, the Pharisees were emphasising a tradition that may well have begun when the Hebrew people wandered in the desert for years. Cleanliness was needed to keep the people healthy.

But bear in mind that centuries later, the first Christian communities were wrestling with how to interpret their new-found faith in light of the Scripture they knew [ the Hebrew Bible]. Christian communities came to different conclusions about how to live a faithful Christian life. [Sound like today’s churches?]

We see these tensions arising in **Mark’s** community. This gospel was written for a mainly Gentile Christian community, for whom Jewish traditions raised difficult questions. Some Jewish Christians believed the Gentiles should keep Jewish traditions, which they thought was pleasing to God. Then there came a tendency to use those traditions to prevent Gentile Christians fully participating in the faith community. This is the background to today’s gospel story.

The ‘big guns’ [Pharisees & scribes] came from Jerusalem to challenge Jesus, because his disciples hadn’t kept the tradition of ritually washing their hands before eating. Basically, they’re saying Jesus has lost control of his followers. But as often happens, Jesus turns the tables on them.

Firstly, he carefully draws a distinction between different parts of their Scripture – between law and tradition.

The heart of the law [ 10 commandments] is to remain unchanged. God gave the law [Torah, or ‘The Way’] to bring about right relationships: with God, and with others. Honour God, honour other people: this brings about spiritual, emotional and physical wellbeing for the community....

But by Jesus’ time, many traditions had been codified alongside the law – now they were used to remind people of God’s holiness, God’s separateness.

Sadly, keeping the traditions became the focus of attention, and people lost sight of the reasons they’d been introduced.

So Jesus challenges the religious leaders - some traditions about purity have put the emphasis in the wrong place. People’s faithfulness is now being judged by whether they can keep these traditions. [ This is why shepherds were looked down on – they lived outdoors, with animals; water was scarce, so they couldn’t purify themselves as the traditions demanded. As a result, they couldn’t attend worship.]



**Mark's** story continues, with Jesus now redirecting the conversation with the Pharisees. He points out that they emphasise outward actions to keep people pure for worshipping God. Jesus quotes **Isaiah** : *'This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.'* It's been a long-standing problem in their relationship with God.

Jesus goes on - *'If you're worried about uncleanness or evil, stop looking outside yourselves. The uncleanness is within.* ' In other words, impurity comes from the heart; it relates to the inner life.

This may be a good reminder for us – at the moment we're necessarily focussed on cleanliness, physical distancing etc. In our busy-ness, is it possible we've neglected our inner lives? Neglected our spiritual health?

The letter of **James**, circulated around the churches ~70-80 AD./CE., speaks about how to nourish our inner, spiritual life. **James** says *'Welcome the implanted word of truth, that gives [new] birth.'*

He goes on to challenge these young Christians: *'Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers.'* [1 : 22 ]. He talks of putting faith into action – in his day, it was *'To care for orphans and widows in their distress.'*

In our Shepp. community, there's no shortage of practical needs calling for our action these days. Many of you are already committed to ways of serving. But let's keep in mind the need to nourish our inner lives. The love and strength that comes from Christ's life within us is what people will be needing, as much as material support.

Our deep conviction is that God is with us in dark times. Knowing that *'Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus'*, is what keeps us going. And it's also the reassurance our neighbours long for, whether or not they realise it.

*Prayer: Gracious God, Creator and Lover of all, you promise never to leave us or forsake us. May these words sink deep into our souls; may they give us the courage to live each day for you, helping to bring your kingdom on earth. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.*

**HYMN : TIS. 453** 'We limit not the truth of God.'

**OFFERING DEDICATION:** We bring you our gifts, O God, remembering that all that we have comes from you. May our gifts and our lives share with our community the power of your transforming love. Amen.

## NOTICES

### PRAYERS of the PEOPLE :

Generous God, we cannot explore you or measure you. We understand only what you reveal to us of yourself. Thank you that you have allowed us to see your grace and truth mirrored in Jesus Christ. We are in awe of his greatness and his humility; his care for the last and least. Through him, we offer our prayers for others...

We pray for shelter and courage for all who suffer from the effects of violence; and for comfort for all who mourn the loss of loved ones from the pandemic.

For families in Afghanistan desperately trying to flee for their safety.

Lord Jesus, your earthly family became refugees to save your life. Help us, as your followers, to work for hope and justice for people who suffer a similar fate....



We remember the people of Haiti, dealing with another devastating earthquake. May the support they need reach them quickly.

We pray for our nation Australia, and for your gift of wisdom for our state and federal leaders. May they work together, as they deal with difficult decisions to protect people's lives, health & livelihoods. Help us recognise the need to share with all people the resources you have provided.

Be present with your church across the world; so that the people of God, in every circumstance, may carry the light of Christ to those experiencing darkness of heart and mind.

We pray for our community. Comfort all who are anxious in this Covid outbreak; and all who are dealing with the challenges of quarantine. We remember the many health care workers who have come to offer their time and expertise in our district.

Lord, please open *our* eyes and ears and hearts, so that we may respond where love and faith and hope are most needed. May we live to the praise of your glory. We bring these prayers in the name of Jesus Christ, who taught his friends to pray: ***Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us in the time of trial, and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.***

**HYMN : TIS. 611** 'God of grace and God of glory.'

**WORD of MISSION :** You are the people of God – as you go into the week, allow the Word of Life to be implanted and grow in your lives.

**BLESSING :**

In our hearts and in our homes, **the blessing of God.**

In our comings and goings, **the peace of God.**

In our lives and our seeking, **the love of God.**

At our end and our new beginning, **the welcome of God. Amen.**

**BLESSING SONG : TIS. 781** 'Father, bless us as we go.'

