



The Uniting Church in Australia
SHEPPARTON UNITING CHURCH

Order of Service for
Sunday 10th October 2021

INTROIT : TiS. 716 'Father, we adore you.. Jesus, we adore you.. Spirit, we adore you...'

CALL to WORSHIP : God, you look on us and love us.

Your heart beats with our hearts. You spread mercy on our journey.

You hear our every cry, and breathe in our every longing.

We come to worship you, in Spirit and in truth.

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. 477 "Jesus calls us here to meet him."

PRAYERS of PRAISE and CONFESSION : Great God, we're in awe of your love which is as high as the sky, as wide as the sea, and as deep as the earth. We come to worship you and praise you.

We know that the presence of your Spirit is never limited to the sanctuaries we build, or even the sanctuaries of our hearts. Your Spirit is at work throughout all creation. We praise you for the wonder of the plans you have, for everything you have made...

Thank you that you always watch over us, as we strive to live as your people - even as we ask our hard questions and make our mistakes.

Thank you that you help us to dare, to trust, to walk in your way - just as you have walked with your people of every age. We're grateful to have their stories to reassure us on our own journeys. Today, with our sisters and brothers across the world, we gather to celebrate your love; and to trust your comfort in our pain.

Thank you most of all for Jesus Christ your Son, whose life reveals your nature to us.

He challenges our superficial understandings of people around us, and invites us to respond always in love.

God of mercy, you know every part of our life and being.

Our life is not as straightforward as we would like. Rather than assessing others' actions with certainty, and making judgements about them, please help us to see them through your eyes....

We know none of us can ever earn your wonderful gift of salvation. Please forgive us if we become self-satisfied in our discipleship.

We humbly open ourselves to you: to know more fully who you are; and who we can become in relationship with you.

This we pray in the name of Jesus Christ your Son. Amen.

ASSURANCE : Friends, Jesus came not to condemn us, but to save us from our sinful ways, and to show us how to live. Hear anew his gracious words: *Your sins are forgiven..... **Thanks be to God.***

EARLY WORD : 'Strength' Isaiah 40 : 31



SCRIPTURE READINGS : Mark 10 : 17-31; Job 23 : 1-9, 16 & 17.

MESSAGE : Do you have favourite Bible characters? 2 of mine are the apostle Thomas, and **Job**. I appreciate people who ask tough questions when things go pear-shaped....

Before we explore Job's story, let's look at another rich man – the one whose encounter with Jesus we heard in today's gospel reading. In that era, people would presume his wealth was a sign of God's blessing; a reward for good living. [**Deut. 28 : 1-2**]: *'If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands ... all these blessings will come upon you.'* [children, crops, livestock etc.]

But this rich man feels there's something missing. So he seeks Jesus out, asking what else he must do to earn life with God that lasts forever. *'You've kept the law'* Jesus says... At least in relation to other people – note there was no mention of *'Love the Lord your God, and serve only him.'* !!

Jesus points out what is needed – *'Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor; and you will have treasure in heaven... Then come, follow me.'*

Now we realise what this man may have lacked. Not only was his wealth seen as a sign of God's blessing; it was also his security. When he was called to let it go, and trust God's provision, he wouldn't take that risk. So he *'went away grieving..'*

One contrast with **Job**, a rich patriarch, is that Job used his wealth to benefit others. But - let's rewind. Many scholars propose that there was an ancient tale about Job. We heard Scene 1 last week: after a debate in heaven, God allows Satan ['adversary'] to test Job's faithfulness. It seems Job has led a 'perfect' life. [Note the numbers in the story : 7000 sheep+3000 camels = 10,000; 500 oxen + 500 donkeys= 1,000; 7 sons+3 daughters=10 children. All the 10's indicate perfection, completeness.] [A clue: rather than an actual person, Job is a representative character – a wealthy, generous, God-fearing man, who has it all.]

In scene 2 of the original tale, Job loses his flocks, herds and children... then finally his health. Job's 3 friends visit and initially sit with him in silence. They're stunned at the level of his suffering; and amazed that Job doesn't curse God because of it... Fast forward to the final scene: Job's fortunes are restored – 10 more children [!!!]; twice as many flocks and herds. Job suffers, he's patient, he's rewarded. Neat and tidy.

Then into this ancient tale, scholars suggest that the Biblical writer inserts a long debate between Job and his friends. They discuss God, suffering, and evil. Does living a righteous life make any difference in God's sight?

We're not sure when this section was added, but it seems the setting is a time of great suffering for God's people. It may well address issues raised by their exile in Babylon. Why were so many suffering, for the sins of a few? And why for so long [70 years]? Had God forgotten them?

The debate between Job and his 3 friends reflects the theology of the era, already mentioned – blessings for those who walk with God, curses for those who disobey. So Job's friends frame their argument like this: God is in charge of every event. Job has suffered huge losses. Obviously he must have done great wrong.

But Job protests ; 'Not so!' **Job 29 : 13**-*'I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.'* & **16** -*'I was a father to the needy, and I championed the cause of the stranger.'*



How could this life deserve God's punishment? In our reading from **Job ch. 23**, Job feels abandoned. His desperate pleas for an explanation from God have received no response. [Like today's **Ps. 22:1** 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me?']


Job's friends are stuck in their world view, and can't be persuaded that his cause is righteous. In his desperation, Job decides that he needs to present his case in court, before God as judge. Job is sure that God will decide in his favour – he has loved God and loved his neighbours. Surely God will agree that his punishment is uncalled for.

While Job waits for God's response, his friends continue challenging him to search for his hidden sins so his suffering can be understood, and he can repent. [Very poor pastoral care!!]

The author has used an ancient story as a basis to open up serious debate about this huge issue for humans: why does suffering exist in a world God created?

Aren't we still asking this question? Think of devastating bushfires in our own country; overwhelming floods in Europe; the world-wide pandemic killing millions of people. For those of us with comparative wealth and access to technology and health care, this has been a rude awakening. - - -

Some years ago, I attended a seminar where the question of God and suffering, in relation to creation, was illustrated like this:

3 points of a triangle represent – **God is loving, good;** **God is all-powerful;** **suffering exists.**
The challenge is to hold the 3 points together: if God is **good**, and  is **all-powerful**, then **suffering** wouldn't exist.

If God is **all-powerful** and **suffering** exists, then God isn't **good**... or-
If God is **good**, and **suffering** exists, then... God isn't **all-powerful**?

Remember, this is in relation to what God has created. In the last option, God 'makes space' for creation. John Polkinghorne, a British physicist & Anglican priest, puts it like this: God chooses to '*let the universe patiently unfold itself.*' God doesn't intervene to change natural laws, even when disaster follows. And to complicate things further, we humans also are given freedom to make good or bad choices! Why did God allow this??

Over the next weeks we'll see how God deals with Job's questions. Job will be challenged by the mystery of God's ways. But - he will NOT be condemned for his questions, his doubts; even for calling God's bluff! Job has never walked away from his relationship with God.

Although we haven't suffered like **Job**, currently we're not sure what we can rely on any more. Where is our security coming from?

As Jesus said to the rich young man, ultimate security is not found in material things; but in relationship with God; in trusting God's grace to see us through.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, we've discovered that we're not insulated from the troubles of our world. Please help us to grow in trust; to recognise that our ultimate security is found in you alone. For you are the One who has lived among us; you understand human suffering from within. And you promise never to leave us or forsake us, in any experience. Amen.

HYMN : TIS. 691 "Faith will not grow from words alone."

OFFERING DEDICATION : Generous God, please receive all we bring to you – the gifts of money, and of our lives. May we be good stewards of all you have given, so that we live to your glory. Amen.



NOTICES ; JOYS and CONCERNS

PRAYERS of the PEOPLE : Eternal & loving God, you have invited us to come to you boldly, 'so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need'.

Hearing again the stories from your word, we realise others don't yet know the difference you can make in their lives. So we bring to you our prayers for others....

For people across the world who mourn the loss of loved ones in the pandemic. And for all health workers to have the strength and courage to continue offering care....

For those in government, whose daily decisions affect so many lives. Give them wisdom in determining which advice to follow. May their decisions bear in mind future generations; and the future of this planet..

We pray for those who lead your church across the world, in its many expressions. Guide us as we try to discern your way among the choices we face. Thank you for those who challenge us in our journey of discipleship. And help us also in relating to people of other faiths, that we may more and more recognise your life in them...

We pray for our Presbytery leaders; and the congregations of Emmanuel West Wodonga, and Kergunyah. Please bless the Uniting agencies seeking to live out your good news in their local areas.

For those in our community, who suffer pain, whose minds are disturbed, or whose loneliness is soul-destroying, we pray. And for those who realise their lives are shallow - who know their need, but do not know of Jesus who can meet their need...

Help us, as we offer these prayers: may *our lives* be part of the answer to our prayers. May our living bear the fruit of the Christ's presence within us. We pray in his name, and say together the prayer he taught us..

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 from 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. 588 "In heavenly love abiding."

WORD of MISSION and BLESSING :

Go into the world in joy, as people who experience God's salvation in everyday life.

Go in hope, to share this good news with those around you.

And may the saving hands of the Creator surround you, the saving life of Christ hold you fast, and the saving grace of the Spirit open the way before you. Amen.

BLESSING SONG: TIS. 782 "Go now in peace."

