



Order of Service

22nd May 2022

EASTER 6: NEW BEGINNINGS

THE GATHERING OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

INTROIT 390. *Alleluia, alleluia, give thanks to the risen Lord v1*

CALL TO WORSHIP

God, show your faithfulness to us,
bless us, and make your face smile upon us!
for then the whole earth will acknowledge your ways
and all the nations know your power to save.

May all the nations praise you, O God;

May all the nations praise you! *From Ps 67*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE TRADITIONAL OWNERS

HYMN 204 *Come let us join our cheerful songs*

PRAYERS OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

You promise a new heaven and a new earth, O God,
so refresh our spirits and our lives.
We are confident that your Spirit, living deep within our souls,
can teach us faithful ways,
and that your Word, Jesus Christ,
speaks of your mercy, your hope, your love.

Thanks be to God. Amen

DOXOLOGY 770 *To him who sits upon the throne*

THE SERVICE OF THE WORD

HYMN 37 *Our God be gracious unto us*

THE READINGS

Your word, O Lord, is a lamp to our feet.

A light to our path.

Acts 16. 9-15

PSALM RESPONSE PSALM 67

May God show kindness and bless us,
and make his face shine on us.

***Then the earth will acknowledge your ways.
and all nations your power to save.***

Let the nations praise you, God,
Let all the nations praise you.

***Let the nations rejoice and sing for joy,
for you judge the world with justice,
you judge the peoples with fairness,
you guide the nations on earth***

Let the nations praise you, God,



let all the nations praise you.
***The earth has yielded its produce;
God, our God, has blessed us.
May God continue to bless us,
and be revered by the whole wide world.*** Based on *The New Jerusalem Bible*

AN EARLY WORD

Revelation 21. 10, 22; 22.1-5
John 5. 1-9

Lord, may your word live in us
And bring much fruit to your glory

REFLECTION NEW BEGINNINGS

Last Sunday we reflected with the Young Adults on new beginnings. We rejoiced with Neo as she shared her new beginning in life, in life in Christ.

Today the beginnings continue! There are three, all separate and distinct, but somehow all part of the same larger picture. So let's explore!

'Do you want to get well?' This has been described as an 'in your face' question, coming right out of the blue. Jesus does not appear to know the man. Jesus does not greet him, pass the time of day, ask how he's feeling. Just 'do you want to get well?' But this profound question could get to the heart of the man's being, of his personality.

The setting? At the pool of Bethesda, near the Sheep's Gate in Jerusalem. Round the pool are five porticos. Various ill, paralysed and disabled people are lying round the edge of the pool, apparently on mats. This man has been lying there for 38 years! Can you imagine that? Lying there since 1984! Can you remember what you were doing then? How long could you bear to lie there in public with apparently little possibility of being moved, much less of being healed? Who would feed you? care for you? tend to your needs? 'Do you want to get well?' Our man doesn't seem to know the answer to this question: did you hear him reply? No. But he does say there's no-one to put him into the water quickly enough when it stirs. He invites pity – but doesn't answer Jesus' question.

If Jesus' question amazed us, further amazement follows. 'Stand up, take your mat and walk,' Jesus tells the man. 'At once,' John says, 'the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.' We remember again that the man doesn't ask to be healed. Is his paralysis so advanced that he has given up even thinking about, dreaming about, a possible improvement for himself? Has his imagination shrivelled up past this point? Interestingly, this time Jesus heals a sick person, he doesn't say anything about believing.

This, the most unusual of Jesus' healing stories, tells us much about Jesus – but also speaks to us. Perhaps Jesus asks you and me 'Do you want to get well?' 'What do you want?' Jesus is asking. And here actually Jesus wants to know what I want – because he really wants me to answer 'yes' to his question. Sometimes I can say I want things – freedom, healing, perhaps from something which holds me back. Do I want it enough to answer 'Yes'? Because ...
Because Jesus is waiting to offer the fullness of his healing – if we are ready. If we tell him!
Years later, towards the east of the Mediterranean Sea in Asia Minor – which we know as Turkey - two missionary heroes are planning their next move. They have travelled north from Jerusalem to Antioch, where they stay three years; they visit other churches they have started. They plan to go further north to Bithynia. But at every turn there's a NO ROAD sign. There's nothing wrong with the roads – Paul and Silas are just learning that the roads to the north-east are not where God's Spirit wants them to travel. They make detour after detour, finally reaching the port of Troas. North, but on the Mediterranean coast.

All is soon clear! In a vision, Paul sees a man in Macedonia pleading with them to come and help. Immediately they set sail, ending up in Philippi. As a Roman citizen, Paul knows about this Roman colony; it is a leading city in the area. As he usually does, Paul sets out on Sabbath morning to find a place of prayer. With 10 Jews in the

colony, there will be a synagogue where Paul and Silas can pray and then spread the Good News of Jesus. However, in Philippi, there is no synagogue. But there are women at prayer – on the river bank. ‘A certain woman Lydia a worshipper of God, was listening to us. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul.’ She and her household are baptised. Then Lydia offers hospitality to Paul and Silas, inviting them to stay at her house. Which they do.

Who is Lydia? She deals in purple cloth. What’s special about purple cloth? It’s extremely expensive, because the dye is made from some very rare marine snails. The actual dye is as valuable as the same weight of silver. Purple dye was made well over 2,000 years ago, in Tyre, now in Lebanon. Much later, purple cloth was so valuable that only the Emperor could wear purple; VIP Romans might have a purple strip or two on their togas to show their rank. We note, too, that Lydia isn’t a local: she comes from Thyatira, in Asia Minor. She’s made a business move, perhaps?

Paul is called by a vision. He expects to meet a Macedonian man. But it is Lydia, her friends and family whom he prays with, bringing the gift of salvation. God’s act has human responses. And so the gospel spreads further, as Paul and Silas are guided by the Spirit.

Paul’s love for God means that his ears and heart are open to God’s voice. Because of Paul’s obedience, the gospel spreads very profoundly, in new places and new ways.

I wonder what you – or I- would do with a vision today?

We may well hear a voice. But we need to open our eyes, ears, heart, to see and hear God calling.

And what surprises might we find waiting? Who might we meet somewhere by the river out of Shepparton who would change the course of the mission of this congregation, the mission for each one of us? How could we all be more open in this way?

Two new beginnings! Told in two short stories. But you must read further – because there is a sequel to each. You’ll need to make up your mind about John’s healing story. But the sequel to the visit of Paul and Silas has consequences which are part of God’s plan. Being a follower of Jesus into the world can be risky – but we’re following because of God’s vision for us there, in this amazing world, in its brokenness. You’ll hear more about this next week.

We can see God’s vision for the church and world and us. We can act on it, like Paul and Silas did. Or we can ignore it...

But there’s one thing to remember: God goes with us!

The third new thing?

OUR RESPONSES

HYMN 587 *God gives us a future*

OFFERING AND DEDICATION

We give this offering to you, generous God.

We give ourselves as well.

Bless us as we give.

Move us to help others and to love them, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

NOTICES

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

God of new possibilities,
we give thanks for your constant reminder
that you have a vision for our world
that far exceeds our present realities.

Easter God,
you call us up out of our apathy and fear into your kingdom.



Keep our eyes and those of your Church
always on the life you would have us live.
Wee feel so helpless at times.
Help us to live by your command
to love and feed your sheep.

Easter God,
we are grateful for the courage and determination
you make available to us to sustain our efforts
to work for better relationships, justice and peace.
Help us to find the language and the courage
to share our own faith stories with each other,
and to be open and honest and humble in all of our interactions.

Easter God, we pray for this world and those nations
where violence and tyranny cause so much suffering.
We pray for Ukraine and people driven out of their homes and their homelands,
And all struggling to survive in refugee camps.
We pray for those who do not have enough food to sustain them
or water to quench their thirst.
Bless those who are victims of slavery,
even in this century;.
Bless Winter Night Shelter
and all who share in it.

Easter God, for those who are suffering in body, mind or spirit,
we ask for healing and peace.
Be our light in this world, God.
In Jesus' name we pray; Amen.

*Adapted from the **Presbyterian Church in Canada***

HYMN 446 *Glorious things of you are spoken*

BLESSING

May God's face shine on you with favour,
may Christ Jesus mark you as his own,
may the Spirit lead you in peace and grace. **Amen**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ. Amen

DISMISSAL 390 *Alleluia, alleluia.* v5

