



Order of Service
25th September 2022

Welcome

Acknowledgement of Country

Call to Worship

Leader: Help us O God of Chaos and Calm
to move through deep waters
and lashing waves.

People: *When storms rock our world,
when the rains are harsh,
when the floodwaters rise,
guide us through, Loving God.*

Leader: Let us know your presence
in monsoons and sandstorms,
guarding us and guiding us
towards actions that promote a better future. Amen

Hymn 464 TiS – Seek O Seek The Lord

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

One: Thunder roars.
Mighty waves crash.

All: *We listen for you O God.*

One: Yours is a voice that shatters the trees
and causes us to tremble in fear.

All: *We listen for you O God.*

In the whirl of chaos, we seek
steady calm and peace.

All: *We come to listen for your voice of calm again.*

One: God of wind and rain,
of lightning and snow,
of wildfire and flood:
sometimes we are overwhelmed
by the forces of nature around us,
that seem to rail against us.

People sometimes say
that storms and disasters are
sent to teach us things,
or even as punishment.

Help us to discern the truth,
and to know that you, our Creator God,
are not seeking to destroy us,
but are inviting us
to co-create with you,



that the world might be a place
where all can live in harmony and safety.

**All: *Help us to trust in you
and in your ways, Loving God,
that we might be a people who bring
your peace, hope, and love
to a world troubled by the storms that life brings. Amen***

Loni's Letter

Dear friends,

After my appointment at Peter Mac this morning, (Monday) the Oncologist has confirmed that I have lung cancer and it has spread to my bones - in her own words "It is the equivalent of stage four cancer and the most aggressive cancer of the lungs".

Peter Mac is organising with the cancer team here in Shepparton for an aggressive approach which will include both chemotherapy and immunotherapy in 21 day cycles.

I know that this is probably not the best time to ask for leave but I'm asking you for sick leave approval to undergo my treatment which will start (everything going to plan) next (this) week.

I would also like to thank you for your prayers, phone calls and messages. It is very much appreciated as the family is going through a very tough time at the moment.

Blessings to you all in the name of Christ,
Loni

A Prayer for Loni and his family

Loving God
today we feel as if a sudden storm has overtaken us
with the news that our friend and minister Loni
has an aggressive cancer.

Lord God, we pray for Loni;
may he know the comfort of your presence
may he be uplifted by the knowledge
that he is in your hands
may he feel the presence of your Spirit
in his body.

God of healing and hope,
we pray that you will bring healing to Loni -
that the cancer be stopped, reduced and banished
from his body, and that Loni be returned to full health.

We pray for all who will care for him:
oncologists, nurses, family and friends.
May they be given wisdom, compassion and hope
by the constant presence of your Spirit.

We pray for Loni's family.
May they know the peace of your presence
the hope that faith brings in times of trouble
and the love of a family who care deeply for each other.
May they be strengthened so that they may be able to offer
the support to Loni that he needs.

We pray for one another;
may we too know the peace of your presence
may we hear your call to step in



to continue the work of your ministry
while Loni is undergoing treatment.
We pray for his colleagues
Glenys, Joan and Tanya
and for Kerrie as she prepares to commence her work amongst us.
We pray for our elders and leaders
as they seek to lead us in this storm time.

Lord hear us.

Lord hear our prayer. Amen

Hymn 647 TiS – Comfort, Comfort

Bible Readings: 1 Kings 19:1-18

Luke 8:22-25

Sermon – In the Midst of the Storm: Faith

We are entering what the State Emergency Service calls the storm season; a time of unsettled weather, with rain and high winds that can appear almost without warning. Even in these days of sophisticated weather radars and prediction systems, we can get caught out.

I have been a member of the SES in NSW and Victoria for the last 10 years. Chris and I joined up relatively closely together, and got to know each other driving up to Nowra from Ulladulla for the storm and water training. One night our team was tasked to a job in the middle of a storm. The skylight had been blown off in a gust of wind, and rain was pouring into the house. Our team rigged the roof kit with a mainline going over the roof with 2 working lines secured by a carabiner. Chris and I harnessed up and clipped onto a working line each, and up we went. It's a relatively simple job involving a small tarpaulin being placed over the skylight, and being tied securely with a rope. A ten-minute job, or so we thought.

No sooner had we got into place on the roof than a windy squall hit us. If we had opened up the tarp 10 seconds earlier to place over the skylight, we would have risked being blown off the roof. So we laid down on the roof and just let the wind blow over the top of us and the rain pelt us. We looked at each other and grinned. What on earth were we doing? Instead sitting at home in front of the fire with our families watching the telly, we were in this mad and unpredictable place. But this was what we had trained for, and we just had to wait until the worst had passed. A few minutes later the squall passed over us, and we got the tarp out and secured in record time.

Lake Galilee is notorious for the ferocity of the winds that can come down off the heights above it, tearing down the hillside, and across the lake, whipping its surface into a frenzy. The fishing boats that Peter, Andrew, James and John used for fishing were shallow draught flat bottom boats that could easily capsize in high winds and large waves. The fact that the boat was pretty full of people might have helped to stabilise it, but it clearly was a very unpleasant experience even for the experienced fishermen on board.

Jesus was clearly exhausted by the day, and had fallen into a deep sleep as soon as the boat pushed out from the shore. For some reason, the terrified disciples woke Jesus up from his sleep in the midst of this storm. What they expected him to do about the situation, is unexplained, but wake him they did. Taking in the wind and the waves, Jesus rebukes them, and the wind dies down and the waves settle down. He then turns to the disciples and asks, "Where is your faith?"

This is a good question. There are times in all of our lives when storms seem to break in upon us without warning. Sometimes it can feel as if God is asleep in the bottom of the boat, oblivious to what's going on. Sometimes it can feel as if God is far away and doesn't care that things are really bad, or we can feel as if we have been abandoned to face the catastrophe alone. However, the story of Elijah in 1 Kings 19 tells us that this is not so.

Having smashed the prophets of Baal in a contest, you would think that Elijah would be feeling strong and confident. However, when queen Jezebel sends him a message that she is coming for him, Elijah sits under a broom tree and falls into the deepest depression and wishes that he could die.

It's at this point that God takes over. Elijah is in such a bad state that he can no longer take care of himself. So God sends an angel to give him water and food. And that is all Elijah is able to do – to drink eat and sleep. Once he has regained his strength, God wakes him and leads him for 40 days into the wilderness of Horeb, the place where God had first made the covenant with the people of Israel through Moses.



Once there God asks, “What are you doing here Elijah?” It isn’t that God doesn’t know why, it is more than he wants Elijah to know why he is there. And so Elijah offers the narrative as he sees it.

1. I have been zealous for the Lord.
2. The people of Israel have forsaken you.
3. I alone am left.

God’s response is to tell Elijah to go out onto the mountainside because the Lord is about to pass by. Then comes a great wind, followed by an earthquake, and then a great fire. But God is not in any of these great calamities. These are merely noises of distraction, the noises of a busy and sometimes catastrophic world. Then there is the sound of sheer silence.

Now I have read and heard all sorts of interpretations of what the sound of sheer silence is and how it effects Elijah, but not one of them has ever satisfied me. The reason is all of these interpretations have been written by scholars or preachers who live in big cities. They have never heard the sound of sheer silence, because they have never travelled 40 days and nights to be alone on a mountainside.

During the early 2000’s my family and I lived in Alice Springs, and I worked with Frontier Services as a Patrol Minister (Bush Chaplain). In travelling around central Australia visiting people in extremely remote places, I would try and camp out alone for at least 2 or 3 nights on each 8 day patrol. I often wouldn’t light a fire, and almost never turned on the HF radio to listen to the ABC and only rarely watched a DVD on the computer. Mostly I would sit, or mostly stand, in silence and watch the stars.

It is only then that I could see things as they really are. Here was I, a man alone in a harsh environment, with the nearest human company anything up to 200kms away, standing on a tiny planet whizzing through space at some phenomenal speed looking out at stars that were millions of light years away. In the vastness of that moment, I would hear the sound of sheer silence, and be awestruck by the fact that the God who made all this knew my name.

This is the God I serve, but like Elijah I often become “zealous for the Lord” and so miss the real narrative. God did not require Elijah to be zealous for God. God required Elijah to stop and listen to the sound of sheer silence for a while so that he might see the God who called him through all the busyness that Elijah had created from himself.

It is only now that God has Elijah’s full attention that God describes a different narrative.

1. Elijah is not alone. YHWH the God of Israel is with him.
2. There are in fact 7,000 others like Elijah who have not bowed the knee to Baal.
3. Elijah is to now go and anoint 2 new kings, and then Elisha as his successor.
4. The work of the Lord, for which Elijah had been so zealous and tried to do in his own strength, is not finished. It will continue through his successors and never cease.

Today we have received some devastating news. Loni, our much-loved minister and friend is unwell. The journey that faces him and his family is difficult. But we have listened again to the story of Elijah, and heard that God is always present with us, that God never abandons us. In the midst of the storms of life, millions before us have reached out in faith and found the Lord of life and hope right there beside them. Loni too knows this and has stood beside many, many people in their “storm times”, and given them hope. Now it is our turn to stand beside Loni and his family, to remember the faithfulness of the God who has called us, to pray for them, and to be there together with them. May God give us all the strength we need in the midst of this storm.

Hymn 687 TiS – God Gives Us A Future

Offering

Notices

Prayers of the People

Leader: Let us pray.

Ever-present God

there has never been a moment
when you have not been there,
beside us, behind us, in front of us,
below us or above us.

All: *We pray for our world*

*Where so many do not know you
or acknowledge you,*



The Uniting Church in Australia
SHEPPARTON UNITING CHURCH

and are lost without you.

Leader: We pray for those who
have become lost on the way,
those who are searching desperately for meaning and purpose,
those who have no-one,
those who have been misled,
those who have been abused
and those who have given up hope.

**All: *God of love and hope
today we remember people across our world
where the political oak tree is being shaken to its roots.
We pray for peace, for your calm voice of hope and mercy to be heard
and for anger and fear to abate.***

Leader: God of healing and wholeness
we remember the people around your world
who are being affected by storms and floods this week;
those who are cut off from the rest of the world
and those whose homes are being threatened or have been washed away.
We pray for rescuers, helpers and aid workers
as they seek to bring people to safety
comfort and hope for a new beginning.

**All: *We pray for your Church
that you would guide us this week
to those who need our help the most.
May we bring comfort, hope, and encouragement
to the broken, the lost and the lonely.***

Let us now share together the prayer Jesus has taught us, saying together:

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 for ever. Amen.

Hymn 690 TiS – Beauty For Brokenness

Benediction

Blessing song – 779 TiS – May the Feet

