



**Order of Service**  
**23<sup>rd</sup> October 2022**

**Introit: 121 *God himself is present v.1***

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

The God of hope is with us.

The Spirit of hope flows through us.

Jesus reveals hope in us.

**Come, let us celebrate this wonder  
of three in One and One in three.**

Be open to our God of love

and worship as faith-filled people together.

**God of Hope, settle into our hearts today.**

**Open our ears to hearing your word anew.**

**OPENING PRAYER**

God who created the world,

Jesus the Son given for the world,

Holy Spirit ever present in the world,

be with us in our worship that we may know the fullness of the Holy One.

As God lives in Triune community,

so may we live in communion with God and each other. **Amen.**

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY**

I acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we are meeting today. I pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging, and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of this region.

**WELCOME**

to our service this morning. It's wonderful to be joining you and leading you here in person and online.

**HYMN 106 *Now thank we all our God***

**Responsive Psalm: Psalm 65:1-8**

Praise awaits[b] you, our God, in Zion;|

**to you our vows will be fulfilled.**

You who answer prayer,

to you all people will come.

**When we were overwhelmed by sins,**

**you forgave[c] our transgressions.**

Blessed are those you choose

and bring near to live in your courts!

**We are filled with the good things of your house,**

**of your holy temple.**



You answer us with awesome and righteous deeds,  
God our Savior,  
**the hope of all the ends of the earth  
and of the farthest seas,**  
who formed the mountains by your power,  
having armed yourself with strength,  
**who stilled the roaring of the seas,  
the roaring of their waves,  
and the turmoil of the nations.**  
The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders;  
**where morning dawns, where evening fades,  
you call forth songs of joy.**

#### **PRAYER OF ADORATION AND THANKSGIVING**

Creation sings daily praises to you, God of all.  
From the highest hills to the depths of the sea,  
beauty reveals your delightful creativity,  
new buds reveal your desire for timelessness,  
storms reveal your strength and vitality,  
and mountains reveal your steadfastness.  
We are in constant wonder at the world around us  
in which you reveal so much of yourself.  
Gracious God, we feel and see your Spirit flow  
in and through, around and across all the pathways we travel.  
May we always take time to honour the works of your hand,  
and cherish it with worthy care. **Amen.**

#### **PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

God, creator of all the wonders which make up this world..  
When we treat our part of the world as a commodity to be used rather than  
a gift to be cherished;  
**Forgive us.**  
When we fail to care for and protect this lovely land, with its mountains and ancient rock formations; its oceans,  
rivers and lakes; its unique flora and fauna;  
**Forgive us.**  
God, bearer of our humanity in Jesus Christ..  
When we fail to live out the commandment to love one another as Jesus loves us;  
**Forgive us.**  
When we judge a person by the colour of their skin, by their possessions or their achievements, rather than  
accepting them as persons loved and accepted by you;  
**Forgive us.**  
God, giver of the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us into all truth..  
When we betray the truth of the gospel through our lack of integrity or our  
abuse of ethical and moral principles;  
**Forgive us.**  
God - Creator, Redeemer, Life-giving Spirit - fill us anew with your creative power  
that we may be reborn in your image, glorifying you in and through who we are,  
and what we say and do in Jesus' name.  
As Jesus' disciples and in his name we pray. **Amen**

#### **ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS :**

God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us,  
and God's love for us is demonstrated in this: while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

*(Romans 5:5,8 NRSV)*

The good news therefore is this: in Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

**Thanks be to God!**



## AN EARLY WORD

Let's pray.

Dear Heavenly Father

Thank you for blessing us with the gift of community. You have given us family and friends to help, and to help us. Please remind us that we have many gifts to share with others.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

## HYMN 609 *May the mind of Christ me Saviour*

**BIBLE READINGS:** Joel 2:23-32  
Luke 18:9-14

### REFLECTION:

On the surface, the parable in Luke this morning seems to affirm this view that there are two kinds of people in this world: those who are like the Pharisee and those who are like the tax collector.

Luke describes the Pharisee as having done all the right things: he has kept the commandments. He is not a thief or an adulterer, nor does he cheat people of their money. He participates in the religious rites of fasting and tithing, making sacrifices of his comfort. None of these activities are bad, and they are definitely not sinful in themselves.

In the parable, the Pharisee and the tax collector both go to the temple to pray.

But how the Pharisee starts his prayer gives away his sinful state; when the Pharisee sees the tax collector, he thanks God that he is not like *other* people: he is not like the thieves, the liars, the adulterers, or even that tax collector who is praying in the temple over there. He goes on bragging about how he does not just fast during High Holy Days, but he fasts *twice* a week and he gives away *way* more money than what is required of him – a tenth of all his income.

The details of the tax collector's prayer are in stark contrast. He stands far off, seemingly so aware of his sins in the face of God's holiness that he knows he does not deserve to be near God's presence. Even more so, he is physically downcast, averting his eyes from where his help will come from and making a physical demonstration of his inward sorrow and sense of responsibility for his sinfulness. And when he prays, he prays the penitent prayer heard throughout the Psalms, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!"

He knows he does not deserve it, but this tax collector will get it. He trusts in God to be who God said God is. The tax collector goes home "justified" - illustrating the need to trust in the character of God above all.

What happens in this parable is what many of us might expect would happen. We are so accustomed to hearing that the Pharisees are self-righteous and judgmental of others. And when we think of the tax collectors, we usually just think about how Jesus welcomed them – even though they were considered to be extreme outsiders by the faith community. And so it is not a surprise to us that Jesus finishes his parable by explaining that it is the tax collector who goes to his home justified rather than the Pharisee...

*"For all who exalt themselves will be humbled," Jesus concludes, "but all who humble themselves will be exalted."*

The message we are supposed to take away from this parable seems to be quite obvious. There are two kinds of people in this world: those who are humble like the tax collector, and those who are prideful, hypocritical, and judgmental like the Pharisee.

There are two kinds of people in this world: the good and the bad. The tax collector is humble and therefore good. The Pharisee is self-righteous and therefore bad. Don't be like the Pharisee. Be like the tax collector. End of sermon. Amen. You can all go home now.

And this is a fairly easy sermon to hear and to accept.

Because, let's just face it: it's pretty easy to point out those self-righteous, prideful, and judgmental "Pharisees" we see around us. While we might not have come right out and said this directly to God, haven't there been times when we have at least looked around and thought to ourselves how thankful we are that we are not like *those* other people over there?

And as we have thought these things, haven't we also patted ourselves on our backs... *I am welcoming, I don't judge others. I am involved in church or in my community. I give my money to charity or do acts of service. I speak out when I see injustice.*

But wait just a minute... aren't we doing the very same thing that the Pharisees are doing in Jesus' parable in the first place...?

"God, I thank you that I am not like those *other* people, especially that Pharisee over there..."  
"For all who exalt themselves will be humbled," Jesus says, "but all who humble themselves will be exalted."

No, this parable is not quite as straightforward or as easy to hear as we might have first thought.

And as we start to wonder where *we* might fit into this parable, maybe we need to reshape the way we think about this parable. Maybe the question we should be asking ourselves is not: which of the two people might we be? But rather, maybe the question we should be asking is: *when* do we see ourselves as the Pharisee and *when* do we see ourselves as the tax collector (with all the complexities that make up their stories)?

Because maybe, just maybe, there *are not* just two kinds of people in this world. Maybe there are multiple kinds of people who have complex stories and multiple parts to their identities.

Or maybe there is just *one* type of person in this world: human. Maybe – as humans – we are not *either* one type of person *or* another. Maybe we are both/*and*. *Both* Pharisee *and* tax collector. *Both* created good and in God's image, *and* yet fallen and sinful at the same time.

And each one of us – no matter how great a sinner and no matter how big our mistakes – is a beloved child of God, with the ability to be redeemed and transformed, by the grace of God.

Let us remember too our neighbours - and try to never lose sight of their humanity. To never forget that they – like us – are *both/and*. To remember that they – too – are always – *no matter what* – beloved children of God.

Amen.

**HYMN 398 *Come down, O love divine***

#### **OFFERING AND DEDICATION OF OFFERING**

Loving God, in love we offer our gifts along with our lives for the work of Your kingdom. Through them may Your church be strengthened and further enabled to reach out to our communities and the World.

May they become a sign of Your love and blessing for them. Amen.

#### **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

## **Prayers of the People.**

God we thank you that you are present with us in the world and that you share our concerns we have for others, and sometimes for ourselves as well.

We pray for all who are being adversely affected by the weather during this time of flooding and heavy rain falls. We pray especially for those in flood affected areas. We pray for their safety, and for opportunities to help those who need it.

We pray for the Nations where there is great need of peace. Especially for peace between Russia and Ukraine.

Grant our own leaders wisdom to deal with the challenges of our pacific region, wisdom in building peaceful relationships with our neighbours and in tackling climate change.

We ask your blessing on all of our congregations in this Presbytery and other churches as we each seek to hear your Word and to work in our own specific areas.

We ask that you open our eyes to the needs around us and help us to love others as ourselves.

We pray for the struggling -including the homeless and those suffering from broken relationships.

We lift before you those of our own congregation who need your healing and help in other ways. We ask that they may know you present for them.

We ask your healing for Rev Loni. We thank you God for your strengthening love and the love of this congregation for them during this difficult time.

We pray your blessing for Rev Kerrie and her husband Don as they settle into the Shepparton area and prepare for life and ministry among us.

We conclude our prayers with the Lord's Prayer.

***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 420 Holy Spirit, go before us**

### **BENEDICTION**

People of faith, step forward in hope.  
Open your eyes to the revelations in God's Creation.  
Open your ears to the whisperings of the Spirit of Wisdom.  
Open your hearts to the word of Jesus.  
Before us, behind us, above and below us,  
our Trinitarian God surrounds and sustains us  
on our journey as faith-filled friends.  
Go with peace, work for justice, live in love with God of all.

**Blessing: TiS 781 Father, bless us as we go**

