

Order of Service – 12th September 2021

Welcome and Acknowledgement – Niall Reid

We gather together today with people we know and people we do not know, we gather sitting not on pews or seats in a church building but on all sorts of chairs and lounges in many different spaces, family rooms, living rooms, studies, bedrooms, decks and balconies scattered all over the place and yet we gather as one to acknowledge

- God who holds us in creation,
- our love of Christ whom we seek to follow,
- our dependence on the Holy Spirit who gives us the courage to be who we are called to be.

As I light this candle and you light your candle, if you have one, may we be aware that the light of Christ shines for us and in us and from us. It is the light of Christ that reveals the way.

As we come, we acknowledge the first inhabitants of the places where we are present, for me the Burrumattagal people of the Darug Nation... we pay our respects to their elders past and present as well as those emerging, recognizing and giving thanks for their stewardship of the land since time beyond memory.

I acknowledge, welcome and pay my respects to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders sharing in this service today.

Let us come, holding ourselves before God...

Spirit of God, unseen...

free flowing as the wind which rustles the leaves in the trees and rattles our windows in a storm,

as omnipresent and enticing as the aroma of hot bread fresh from the oven

Spirit of God, unseen...

accessing the cracks and crevices, the tiny places of our souls,

blowing life into the hopes and dreams of our imagination

Spirit of God, unseen...

may we sense your stirring in our midst,

may we open the windows, eat the bread, live the dreams

Song: - You are Holy

Per Gunnar Harling 1948 With permission One License #A727308

**You are holy you are whole
you are always ever more
than we ever understand
you are always at hand
blessed are you coming near
blessed are you coming here
to your church in wine and bread
raised from soil raised from dead.**

**You are holy you are wholeness
you are present
let the cosmos praise you Lord.
hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah
hallelujah our Lord**

Word of Jesus, Jesus present to us, may we hear you, understand who you are and what you ask of us.

Forgive us when we listen to your words but do not hear, when we know that you are the one, the one who shows the way and yet we are too resistant, too afraid, too comfortable, to even consider following in your way.

Let us take a moment to reflect on all the reasons we hold onto that we know, if we are honest with ourselves, prevent us living into the way of Jesus...

This is the best of all:
when we are empty God fills us;
when we are disheartened, God is compassionate;
when we are wounded, God brings healing;
when we confess our sin, God forgives.

Take hold of this forgiveness
And live your life in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Song – Don't be afraid (WGRG Iona Community With permission CCLI 70307)

**Don't be afraid
my love is stronger
my love is stronger than your fear
don't be afraid
my love is stronger
and I have promised
promised to be always near**

Reading: Mark 8:27-38 (NRSV)

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that I am?' And they answered him, 'John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.' He asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Messiah.' And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.'

This is the Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ

Sermon. Rev Niall Reid

Sometimes I look back over previous years to see what I have preached on a particular passage, not necessarily to preach it again – occasionally I will use it as the basis of my sermon but often that would be inappropriate in a different time and context. The last time I preached on Mark 8:27-38 was on 14th September 1997, just

short of a quarter of a century ago, I had just turned 40, it was my first year as minister of Gordon Uniting Church and it was a planning day. I am a little staggered to discover that what I was saying a quarter of a century ago actually is relevant to where we are today as we, the congregations of what we are calling for the time being Parramatta City Uniting Church, embark on a year of exploration, discernment and experimentation. So, I am going to share much of that sermon word for word. The sermon starts like this:

Planning Day

(for our purposes swap in “year of exploration, discernment and experimentation”)

What will we do this day? Worship God as followers of Jesus Christ - like Peter? With Peter, come up trumps with the right words? With Peter, follow our intuition? Peter was on the right track. Jesus by saying, “don’t tell anyone” confirmed that to be so. Why Jesus didn’t want anyone to know is probably not important for today. What is important is that Peter was on the right track. As a follower of Jesus, Peter was making headway.

What will we hear Jesus teaching us today? Peter, Peter who was on the right track suddenly wanted to get off the track, he did not like what he heard. It did not fit in with his comfort zone, with a comfortable idea of Messiah. “Come on Jesus you are meant to make us feel better, not to depress us.” I wonder what image Peter had of Messiah - obviously not one that was going to risk his life by going to Jerusalem, not one who was going to achieve his purpose through suffering. I suspect Peter had an image of someone a little bit more successful than that, of someone who would be sure not to make himself vulnerable to the dangers that lurked in Jerusalem.

The response from Jesus was a rebuke: “...you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” Will Jesus rebuke us today? Are our visions and hopes for the church inspired by our human desires, our all too human comfort zones, our human ideas of Messiah, our human understanding of the possibilities... or will there be some Messiah qualities about our decisions, some vulnerability about our decisions, some willingness to head into the danger zone?

Jesus then tells Peter, the disciples and the crowd what is needed to become his followers. When I first looked at this passage, set for today in the lectionary, I thought what does this say to us about planning day?

...for our purposes swap in “year of exploration, discernment and experimentation”... what does this say to us about our year of exploration, discernment and experimentation

What does it say to us about mission? Then it struck me. Jesus tells us that we have got it wrong. He tells us... not the disciples... today he tells us, in words which so often I think we listen to but don’t hear and at the end say, of course, “this is the gospel of the Lord” but in silent brackets, “but not for us.”

What are the words? "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the Gospel, will save it."

You see it don't you? Our tendency is to say, "Let us secure our own life, save our own life, and then we will get on with saving others, then we will get on with mission, then we will get on with God's work." All the time, when we do this, our life blood is draining away. First, we must determine the mission, which may be beyond the resources we apparently have, and then we do the mission at the risk of the life we have and then the promise is that we will live, we will be alive. If we determine to secure our life then, surely, we will die. Following Jesus is not about achieving comfort and security, it is not a blue-chip investment, it is not a holiday in Bali, it is about living on the edge, it is about taking risks. Jesus says to us today that our priority is the mission, and the mission is bigger than our resources and the mission will always be bigger than our resources. If it is not, then be sure about what you are investing in in the life of this church, you are investing in some sort of funeral scheme so as we can lay our church to rest.

But it seems to me that as a church we are on that wavering edge and the question is are we with Peter in this - we've been on the right track and the temptation for us now is to pull into a rest area, off the track, for a comfortable snooze.

In my sermon in 1997, I then go into some of the history of the congregation that went back to 1855 and some of the brave actions taken in the past.

I particularly like the story I have shared at Northmead on a previous occasion, the story of Miss Irene Callaghan, well into her eighties, worshipped in the church all her life, her mother had set the foundation stone in the new church building in 1903 and she herself had set the foundation stone in the building of the new church hall in the 1920s. In the 1980s there was a proposal to build a new community centre and it would mean the demolition of both the old church and hall, buildings which must have meant so much to Miss Callaghan and on the day of decision Miss Callaghan was the first to offer \$1000 towards the building the new community centre. Who else could object?

Surely hers was a wonderful demonstration of what Jesus said was required of a follower - a giving of one's own life, one's own sentimental attachment, one's spiritual home that there might be life, not just life for oneself but life for others.

I went on to say in that sermon:

It was a great insight in the life of this church to observe... that to be in mission takes a lot more human resource than simply providing the spiritual and pastoral care for those who belong - it was a brave thing for this church to expand its staff to enable us to be more intentional about mission...

...it was a costly endeavour. In all these things we have been on track - in all these events we can see that the church has had to risk its life, risk its comfort zone.

In the context of our congregations here in and around Parramatta I wonder what we would say are the brave things we have done in the past that have risked our life, that have kept us on track?

Back in 1997 I go on to say what I also want to say today:

All this has been done not so as we can be comfortable but so as today, we can offer our life yet again. Today I believe we are poised on the edge, we have been on the right track, we have followed Jesus to this day and he has brought us to this point and yet again he asks us "are you prepared to risk all this, all that you have built up and treasure, are you prepared to risk it for my sake and for the sake of the gospel." Miss Irene Callaghan said "yes."...

here we might swap in some brave experience as an example from the past in our congregation ...

With Peter the temptation for us is to say "No!"

But you know in this church you have done it before and you have discovered life - we have so much life as individuals and as a church to offer - we have resources which I believe the Holy Spirit has given to us through our own stewardship and the faithfulness of others so that today we can be strong in mission, so that we can go out into a world which no longer comes to us, indeed is no longer aware of us, aware of the gospel of healing and renewal in Jesus Christ. We live in a world no longer full of prodigal sons, but a world full of orphans who have never known the father or his love. In the church we have not been preparing for retirement these past 150 years - churches don't retire - we have been preparing for when God calls us out of the comfort of Christendom into the mission field of orphans.

Can you believe it, I was saying that 25 years ago?

Are we prepared with our forefathers and mothers in this church to risk the way of Jesus? I hope this planning day...

for our purposes swap in "year of exploration, discernment and experimentation"...

is about sharing in the foolishness of Jesus and not in the wisdom of Peter.

"For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the Gospel, will save it."

"This is the Gospel of the Lord," and the people answer, "Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ"

Prayer for others – Suzanne Stanton and Vladimir Korotkov

Carry us deeply into your offer of life, Jesus Christ.

Remind us of all the ways
in which you have shown us what we can do, if only we will believe and act
from that faith.

silence

***Expand our vision for the present and the future
so that we may lift high your cross
and plant it in our lives,
as a sign that anything is possible,
if we will truly follow you.***

In this time, we pray that,
as we reflect on our community and our world,
we will see, through your eyes,
which people are waiting for honesty and courage from us.

We pray for these people now:
prayers for the people

Hear our prayers, Jesus Christ.
May we be those who accompany and restore hope
in and to the world around us,
challenging helplessness, cynicism
and the shrugging of shoulders
in the face of inequity, oppression and suffering.

***May the sharp challenges in your words lift our lives
to new heights of adventure and strength, Jesus Christ.
Amen.***

Adapted: Dorothy McRae McMahon

Invitation

You are invited to the table, the table of welcome, the table that speaks of thanksgiving and sacrifice in the sharing of wine and bread, the cosmic table around which we gather unlimited by time or space, the table to which Jesus invites us to share with us the story of the way.

Come, all are invited to share at this table...

Communion Song – Feed us now

Robin Mann 1949- With permission OneLicense #A727308

Feed us now, Bread of Life,
in this holy meal;
let us know your love anew:
we hunger for you.

Feed us now, Bread of Life,
come and live within;
let your peace be ours today,
Lord Jesus, we pray

Piece of bread, cup of wine:
Lord, this food is good:
love and mercy come to us -
your promise we trust.
Piece of bread, cup of wine
who can understand
how his mercy works in these?
Yet, Lord, we believe.

God is here, O so near,
nearer than our thoughts.
stay with us where'er we go;
Lord, help us to grow.
God is here, O so near
in this heaven's meal.
May we always feed on you -
on the bread that is true.

We bring our offerings to this table, our offerings of bread and wine, together with all that we are and all that we have.

The Lord be with you
And also with you
Lift up your hearts
We lift them to the Lord
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God
It is right to give our thanks and praise

We give thanks for the Gospel message...
We give thanks for the way of Jesus...
We give thanks for the community of faith...

You have shown us a way to live,
given us a word to proclaim,
a church for the nurturing of disciples
and a world into which they are sent.

And so we praise you

with the faithful of every time and place,
joining choirs of angels
and the whole creation
in the eternal hymn

**Holy holy holy Lord,
God of power and might
heaven and earth
are full of your glory
hosanna in the highest
blessed is the one who
comes in the name of the Lord.
hosanna in the highest.**

Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed,
took bread, gave you thanks, broke it,
and gave it to his disciples, saying:
Take this and eat it.
This is my body given for you,
Do this in remembrance of me.

In the same way, after supper,
he took the cup, gave thanks,
and gave it to them, saying:
Drink from this all of you.
This is my blood of the new covenant
poured out for you and for everyone
for the forgiveness of sins
Do this, whenever you drink it,
in remembrance of me.

So today we do as Jesus commanded:
We take the bread and the cup
A prayer, a promise
an offering to follow in his way.

Holy Spirit in creation, Holy Spirit in Christ
Holy Spirit in our presence
Bless this bread and this wine
That they may be for us the body and blood of Christ
That we might be the Body of Christ
existing for the sake of the world.

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name
Your kingdom come your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven
Give us this day our daily bread
and 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**

Breaking of the Bread,
The Body of Christ broken for you

The blood of Christ poured out for you

Words of Mission and Blessing - Niall

Go now into the world and wherever you go
and whoever you are with, seek to:
walk the walk of Christ
live the way of Christ
speak the word of Christ

May you know
The blessing of the one who created you
The blessing of the one who has lit the way
The blessing of the one who is with you always
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Blessing Song – May the feet of God (Christmas Blessing)
Aubrey Podlich 1946/TIS 779 With permission One License #A727308

**May the feet of God walk with you
and God's hand hold you tight
may the eye of God be on you
and God's ear hear your cry
may the smile of God be for you
and God's breath give you life
may the child of God grow in you
and God's love bring you home**

Questions for discussion in break out groups on Zoom or for contemplation at home

- **Where are you in this story?**
- **Can you recall a time when your church community took a brave step of faith?**
- **What does your intuition tell you that Jesus is saying to you/us today?**