

# Parramatta City Uniting Church

**14 November 2021**



**Combined Worship**  
**Parramatta City Uniting Church 9.30am**  
<https://uca-nswact.zoom.us/j/95778738282>

**Leigh Fijian 11.15am**  
<https://uca-nswact.zoom.us/j/9134913679>

**WELCOME**

Welcome to Worship this morning.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the Burrumattagal people of the Darug Nation, the first inhabitants of this place, as the traditional custodians of this land and pay our respect to their ancient culture, their elders past and present and their emerging leaders. We acknowledge the presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who now reside within this area. We honour them for their custodianship of the lands on which we gather today.

### CALL TO WORSHIP and LIGHTING OF THE CANDLE<sup>1</sup>

Let us be awake.

Let us live awake.

Today is the day of the Lord.

God is present and alive in God's world.

in this moment we welcome the presence of God in our midst. Let us rejoice and give thanks for this day, this moment.

As we light this candle we give praise to you, our God.

We remember that Jesus is the light of the world, present with us as we join together in worship today.

### SONG – “Shine Jesus Shine”

*Used with permission, Graham Kendrick CCLI 70307*

Lord the light of your love is shining  
in the midst of the darkness, shining.  
Jesus, light of the world shine upon us  
set us free by the truth you now bring us  
shine on me shine on me

#### *Refrain*

*Shine Jesus shine  
fill this land with the Father's glory  
blaze Spirit blaze set our hearts on fire.  
flow river flow flood the nations with grace and mercy  
send forth your word Lord and let there be light*

Lord I come to your awesome presence  
from the shadows into your radiance  
by your love I may enter your brightness  
search me try me consume all my darkness  
shine on me shine on me.

#### *Refrain*

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<sup>1</sup> This liturgy, except for parts otherwise acknowledged, is based upon liturgy provided from “Words for Worship” © Mediacom 2021.

As we gaze on your kingly brightness  
so our faces display your likeness  
ever changing from glory to glory  
mirrored here may our lives tell your story  
shine on me shine on me.

*Refrain*

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

Loving God, to ask you to be present with us  
is like a bird asking for the air to be present under its wings.  
You are, always have been and always will be with us  
in ways so much deeper than our knowing.  
Like the sun lights the sky,  
like the oceans surround the earth,  
like breath fills our lungs you are with us and in us.

We, who seek to be your people of peace,  
give you thanks for the signs of your love, your hope and your peace all around us and  
among us.  
For all your great blessings, we give you thanks.  
Amen.

### **PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Today, God of infinite patience, we seek that patience.  
We who act as if we know what is going on.  
We who are so sure of our actions and sure of our motivations,  
we who are so sure of being right.  
We need your graciousness.  
We do not know as much as we like to think.  
We do not hear all that we should.  
We do not see as far as we need to.

Forgive us for not resting in the great mystery of your love. Amen.

### **WORDS OF ASSURANCE**

Friends of God, God is with us, God is within us, we need only quieten our minds to know  
the presence and the forgiveness of God in this and in every moment. We are forgiven.  
Thanks be to God!

### **ALL AGE MESSAGE**

Hannah's Waiting

I'm looking at the ocean today and it is very calm. Hardly any waves. The surfboard riders  
who were sitting on their boards earlier have given up waiting and gone to do something  
else.

Over on the railing is a seagull. This bird is waiting too. I wonder if it is waiting for some fish, or for other birds to join it or perhaps it's waiting for someone to come along with some chips. The seagull is waiting, just waiting.

Waiting is a part of life. Sometimes we wait for things that we know are going to be good – like waiting for Christmas day. Sometimes we wait for things that are a bit concerning, like waiting in the dentist's waiting room. Sometimes we wait for things to change, sometimes we wait for things that we hope for but are never sure if they will happen.

There's a story in the bible about a young woman called Hannah. She was a wife of Elkanah and she was waiting to have a baby. She had been waiting for such a long time but there was no baby for her. This made her very sad. To make it even harder Peninnah, who was also a wife of Elkanah had lots of children. Even though she had lots of children she was till jealous of Hannah because it seemed that Elkanah loved Hannah the most. Peninnah was mean to Hannah, calling her names and making fun of her with the other women. This made Hannah very sad.

Hannah could have been mean back to Peninnah, but she wasn't.

Hannah could have run away and shut out Elkanah and her friends, but she didn't.

Instead Hannah prayed and she hoped and she waited. In the meantime, she got on with doing all of the things she was meant to do. Even though she was very sad it didn't stop her from being her best self.

I wonder how we go when we are waiting? What choices do we make while we wait for God's kingdom. Perhaps, we are like the seagulls doing nothing but waiting? Perhaps we are like the surfers and Hannah who get on with doing what we can while we wait?

I think I know which kind of waiting I would like to do. What about you?

### **SCRIPTURE READING**

#### **Hebrews 10:11-14; 19-25**

*New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised*

And every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, 'he sat down at the right hand of God', and since then has been waiting 'until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet.' For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke

one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

### **Mark 13:1-8**

*New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised*

#### **The Destruction of the Temple Foretold**

As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, 'Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!' Then Jesus asked him, 'Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.'

When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, 'Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?' Then Jesus began to say to them, 'Beware that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name and say, "I am he!" and they will lead many astray. When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.

#### **RESPONSE**

*O God our nurturer,  
may your word live in us.  
**And colour our living. Amen!***

#### **REFLECTION**

As anyone who listened to my daily chats online will know, Hebrews is not my favourite book. I have found the images of temples, sacrifices and high priests unhelpful, but as I reflected on the passage today I think there is a really important message which the writer wants to get across – everyone has access to God, everything has been done to heal broken relationships with God. It is God's gift to us. God's grace and compassion are enough. Take hold of it!

Maybe the context was one in which there was doubt or debate stirred up by those wanting to suggest that one needs more than God's grace. Jesus was challenging systemic practices which supported a priestly caste, a whole way of being and maybe there was something of a backlash and the writer to the Hebrews was wanting to say, "Jesus is enough, Jesus who embodies the grace of God in life, teaching, actions and dying." There may have been those who wanted to say that there has to be some cost, some sacrifice, some mediator. The writer wants to say, "no, no, no..."

The text tells us that there were problems in the Christian community being addressed in this letter, a letter that really is a sermon. It would appear that there was waning zeal within the community, decline in numbers, as indicated in the passage we have read today. There is a suggestion that this decline reflects a tendency to think that there is no need for community, possibly that the church

has entered the doldrums, nothing is happening, as had been expected by many Jesus has not returned. Christians maybe are experiencing ridicule, feeling isolated from the culture around them.

The writer to the Hebrews is seeking to turn this around, the preacher of this sermon has 3 points to make which are set out in this passage, each beginning with the words “Let us...”

Let us approach (or as the NIV has it “Let us draw near to God”

Let us hold fast...

Let us consider how to provoke one another...

As you read the words you think, surely this preacher had to deliver these words in person and this document that we have preserved in our New Testament was the text sent out to the congregation after the Sunday service. Maybe not, but it has that feel doesn't it?

*Let us approach ...God... with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

So, let us have faith in this Gospel message of grace, knowing that God lets nothing stand in the way of our relationship. Our baptism reminds us that this is a gracious and free act of God – pure water – God's love. Believe it brothers and sisters believe it!

Let us not let go now. In these troubling and difficult times more than ever it is important to hold fast to the hope you have. God who has promised unconditional love, does not let go. Live out this hope in a God who does not shut the door on us or anyone, does not put a price or conditions on our engagement with the spiritual reality all around us, the gift of God for all, for the good of all people and all creation. We don't need to make an appointment with God, we don't need to pay for an insurance policy, we do not need to pay for the blessings of the spiritual life God offers.

Let us be the people who provoke, encourage one another to reflect or embody in our lives and community the way of this God we believe in, participating in God's vision for the reconciliation and renewal of all creation, both a present reality and a future hope.

In the reading from Mark we read about the “birth pangs”. Yes, this moment may be painful but the hope and promise of the new life that is to come is what we need to hold onto. As with the child who is to be born, who knows what that child will be like. Who knows what God is going to bring to birth? But surely it will be a blessing. In Mark's Gospel Jesus predicts that the Temple will fall. Actually it is not just about a building, but a whole way of being that will pass away but through the pain of it all something new can arise, something new did arise, something much more than the temple could ever offer.

Don't you hear the preacher in this letter to the Hebrews, this preacher that I have never had much time for, don't you hear this preacher speak to us today. In our church this is a time when many have begun to doubt and wonder about the faith they have been brought up in, many have fallen

away, and those who stay have lost confidence, in a world in which we have to justify our existence, in a world in which we and our faith so often are held up to ridicule.

More than ever, we need a church context in which we can encourage, and indeed provoke one another, openly share together our fears, our concerns and our hopes, delve into what it means to believe in this God of unconditional love, what it means for us as we relate and react to what is happening in the world around us. We can't do this on our own. This is a message pertinent in our time when the temptation is to say we do not need to meet together, we can just watch something on a screen and stay isolated in our homes. Zoom has helped us not to do this, but we also know it is not enough. We meet together to encourage one another in our faith, building confidence, and together work out how we are going to live it out, give expression to it in the good deeds – one might say our action and activity in and for the wider community.

But as we gather again over the coming couple of months don't let us become complacent, don't think we can keep doing the same as we have always done, be assured that the old has to pass away for the new to come and yes these are the birth pangs and this regathering time one might like to think of as the relief that comes between contractions. When Paula was in labour in between contractions we played Scrabble. A game we often played – even in labour she still won. It was a pleasant interlude but it was not the reality of what was to come, another contraction, and another but finally through pain and struggle, a reluctance to be born, the birth of a child, amazing, a blessing, a new life to be lived.

I know that many people do not get the idea of micro-churches, but for me it is a way in which as a community of a faith, in these troubling and difficult times, we can create an environment in which we participate together, every one of us, in articulating and building up our confidence in the faith and hope we have and then determining how this will play out in transformative ways in the wider community.

But whether it is micro-churches or something else this is a time when we have to come together, not to do the same old same old but rather to listen to what the Spirit is saying to church today about how we are to articulate our faith. It is not about high priests, temples and sacrifices. Those images were relevant in a different world, but the message of God's unconditional love is still the same, what that means for us and the world is still the same.

Remember the birth of a child is a wonderful thing and with it world changes forever.

### **SONG – “If not us, Who?”**

*Used with permission for use online throughout time of lockdown. Written by Tash Holmes and performed by Tash Holmes and Glen Spencer*

[https://vimeo.com/showcase/8776115?fbclid=IwAR2k4kaF6qzmbVU69LefjqkxjL8an6im\\_VvXnHNGtIFP6anRV7YYIjhLL0](https://vimeo.com/showcase/8776115?fbclid=IwAR2k4kaF6qzmbVU69LefjqkxjL8an6im_VvXnHNGtIFP6anRV7YYIjhLL0)

Already I hear the music  
A victory drawing near  
Freedom has arrived  
Rejoice  
And from my lips a cry of praise

*Here I am  
Send me out  
Give me strength enough  
To lift my voice and shout  
Against poverty  
Honestly  
Against the injustice in our society*

Let this to us be true  
If not us, who?  
Already I hear the laughter  
Of hungry souls starved no more  
I have changed forever my ways  
And I am no longer afraid

*Here I am  
Send me out  
Give me strength enough  
To lift my voice and shout  
Against poverty  
Honestly  
Against the injustice in our society (Repeat)*

Let this to us be true  
If not us, who?  
*Open my eyes again  
Open our hearts as we pray (repeat 3 times)*

Here I am  
Send me out  
Give me strength enough  
To lift my voice and shout  
Against poverty  
Honestly  
Against the injustice in our society  
Let this to us be true  
If not us, who?

## **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

God, Jesus's disciples longed to know what was going to happen and when. We often long for the same.

All of us know that anything might happen in our lives at any time but for some, the uncertainty of what might happen next is a daily, hourly concern that overwhelms with anxiety and disconnection

Today we pray for all who live in dread and in trepidation.

We pray for all those in our community who cannot rely on the routine of their lives;

those who live in insecure housing,

those who live in broken relationships in which violence can flare at any moment, those who must live from poorly paid shifts,

those for whom surprise and the unknown is experienced only as shock and fear.

We pray for a world, not where everything is predictable, but where every individual and family can live in dignity and in the care of the world community. That we might care for each other as you care for us. Amen.

### **THE LORD'S PRAYERS**

**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.**

### **WORDS OF MISSION AND BLESSING**

The regenerating earth is a sign of God's love.

The hospitality of the faithful community is a sign of God's generosity.

The Scriptures we have heard are a sign of God's continued presence with us. The prayers of this day are a sign of God's hope within us.

Let us go today to be signs to ourselves of God's love, signs to each other of God's grace, and signs to our communities of God's justice.

Amen. Amen.

## **BLESSING SONG “THUMA MINA”**

*Used with permission OneLicense #A-727308 from South Africa arranged by Anders Nyberg*

1. Thuma mina.  
Thuma mina,  
thuma mina,  
thuma mina,  
Somandla.
  
2. Send me, Lord.  
Send me, Jesus,  
send me, Jesus,  
send me, Jesus,  
send me, Lord.
  
3. Lead me, Lord.  
Lead me, Jesus,  
lead me, Jesus,  
lead me, Jesus,  
lead me, Lord.
  
4. Fill me, Lord.  
Fill me, Jesus,  
fill me, Jesus,  
fill me, Jesus,  
fill me, Lord.
  
5. I will go.  
I will go, Lord,  
I will go, Lord,  
I will go, Lord,  
Lord I'll go.