

OUR NEWS

5th November 2023



Parramatta City Uniting Church
inc. Parramatta Mission, with its values of *Grace,*
Inclusion, Dignity, Faith & Hope.



Parramatta City Uniting Church acknowledges that we worship, work, witness and serve on the land of traditional owners, the Burramattagal clan of the Darug people. We pay respect to the original custodians of the land, and acknowledge elders past and present, and emerging leaders.

Weekly Reflection

Pentecost 23A, 2023

Matthew 23:1-12

William Loader

This is the chapter of woes, chapter 23. It represents a massive expansion of what Mark brings in 12:37-40. Mark 12 then ends with the account of the widow and her generous meagre



offering to the temple. She stands in contrast to the scribes and Pharisees against whom the woes have been spoken and who rip off widows and the vulnerable. Matthew omits the story of the widow. The result is that the woes against the scribes and Pharisees in chapter 23 lead directly to the prediction of God's judgement on the temple and Jerusalem in chapter 24. In the chapter of woes Matthew has expanded Mark with a large block of material drawn from Q (found also in Luke 11:39-52). Matthew's rule of exposition is that there is no room for smugness. Each of these charges may be just as applicable to the Christian community at some stage and history supports him.

It begins with an extraordinary statement about the scribes and Pharisees. They 'sit on Moses' seat' (23:2). That means they exercise authority for the administration of the Law in the broader social context where Matthew and his communities live, somewhere probably in the area of Galilee or southern Syria. There were not many places where this would have been the case, but it was so here in the late first century and the dominant group in Judaism by that time were the Pharisees. Galilee became their power base not long after the destruction of the temple and from there their influence spread. So Matthew's own situation is being reflected in this opening verse. A few other things are worth noting. The authority of Moses is not doubted; the Law, enshrined in Scripture, abides. Matthew and his community believe that, really, they should be the ones sitting there, but, until that is the case, the Law and its interpreters is to be respected.

A distinction then emerges in relation to the authority of those sitting on Moses' seat. Do what they say, not what they do (23:3). People may need to say this of us at times, but here more blatant hypocrisy is envisaged. There is then another distinction which emerges. These interpreters of scripture also impose unrealistic burdens on people and offer no help to them to fulfil them (23:4). This appears to contradict the exhortation that one should do whatever they say, but the distinction being made is probably in relation to finer points. It is the difference between: here is the Law and this is what it should mean for you in detail. Matthew disputes the latter.

What we wear, where we sit, how we are greeted
- these are elements of the persona we want people to see and respect. Behind it is often a frail yearning for love ...

Matthew's whole approach to scripture is to interpret it on the basis of the love commands. Compassion and love dictate the way Scripture should apply, not a kind of legalistic bureaucracy which assumes God is a control freak. When God is our big ego writ large, then people will be abused in the name of purity or holiness or obedience. In

every generation we can find examples of destructiveness done in the name of Scripture or even by means of Scripture. The challenges of chapter 23 have a way of coming home to roost.

Verses 5-7 take up the charges found in Mark 12:37-39. People bent on power surround themselves with the trappings of power, which are often designed to reinforce their claim. What we wear, where we sit, how we are greeted - these are elements of the persona we want people to see and respect. Behind it is often a frail yearning for love which has been met by such compensatory strategies.

Abuse of others is frequently the result of exploiting others to meet our own stifled needs. The abuse may be as apparently harmless as captivating congregations with our preaching, framing our communities so that we are constantly affirmed, developing dependency on us among other needy people. Sometimes our garments (and what we do and where we sit) may serve the opposite: to remind ourselves and others that we are here to fulfil a task and are not pretending that we are doing it because we have arrived. If so, we will need to be straight about that. We are beggars telling other beggars where to find bread and occasionally it will help other beggars find the way if we wear a red cross, so to speak.

Matthew follows his principle of no elitism by directing similar warnings in 8-12 to the disciples. There is no place for either sitting back in smug judgement of others nor for imagining that being a follower of Jesus automatically protects us from falling into the very patterns we abhor in them. Matthew is very grounded. He hears the word of Jesus for his generation and it has abiding worth. So we, too, are to avoid playing games with titles. It appears that 'rabbi' first became a title of honour in the period when Matthew was writing, so the mention of 'rabbi' is particularly apt. 'Father' and 'teacher' are some of the options; we have plenty more.

If you are in ministry primarily to compensate for a low sense of your own importance, think again. Don't dive into depression and use the thought to put yourself down even further. Believe the importance God affirms in you. Consume it in the eucharist so it becomes part of your being. The more you do so and remain conscious of what you are doing and not doing, the less you will be fussed by the titles and all they symbolise and the less you will stand in succession to the kind of behaviour attacked here. The badges you might have to

wear and titles you might have to carry will, like the vestments, be able to serve their true purpose: aids, if needed, to recognising roles and functions.

It is simply not so that Matthew is kidding the disciples that there is no self interest involved in leadership and so fostering the big lie that goes for piety according to which there is no self interest in what we do - a lie which often has disastrous consequences, especially when we are left with our real self interest ignored which is therefore likely to make itself felt subversively. Matthew's Jesus invites the disciples to think about greatness and what it mean to be lifted up. That is the clear motivation in 23:11-12. We want to be great; we want to do well. We want to be what God made us to be. We want to do what God wants us to do. We want to be so connected with God that what we want and what God wants become one. God wants us to be great. God wants us to rise up.

When we move towards seeing God's interests and our best interests and the best interests of others, when we get in touch with God's being as love, when we see that this is not a distraction from life but being truly in touch with life and the life giver, then we will take a big breath and dive. Let us be great in love. The magic is that here true self interest, God's interests, the world's best interests come together as one. It also means that we can stop playing games to conjure up alternative systems of worth where others are made to serve our distorted notion of self interest and where God and spirituality become a powerful weapon in our arsenal. Perhaps seeing all this first in a setting of ministry - the way Matthew leads us - will help us see that the same kinds of issues confront our hearers as much as ourselves as preachers.

Foster your faith this week

Jos 3:7-17

Ps 107:1-7, 33-37

1 Thes 2:9-13

Mt 23:1-12

Mission from the Inside

**Listening to stories
from inside the communities
surrounding our sites**

ALL PCUC MEMBERS ARE INVITED

Where and When

**3. Northmead community: Wednesday Nov 8, 7-9pm
@ Northmead Uniting**

**4. North Parramatta community: Saturday 18 Nov, 10-12
@ Centenary Uniting**

All events will include a shared meal

Please indicate attendance with Vladimir: vladimirk1@hotmail.com

Enquiries-Geoff Smith, 0407 416 377; Vladimir, 0431 759 573

**A VSAG MISSION INITIATIVE
A PCUC & PN Presbytery Partnership**

Leigh Memorial

WELCOME TO WORSHIP

We look forward to seeing everyone at Leigh Memorial this **Sunday, 5 November @ 9.30am** with **Rev Geoff Smith & Pastor Fil Kamotu** (Onsite + Zoom), inc. **Communion**. All welcome.

OPEN CHURCH

Our new 'Open Church' program at Leigh Memorial will commence next Wednesday 8 November, 1.00 – 2.00pm, and continue on a weekly basis. On Wed 29 November, Open Church time will include Communion. Additions to the volunteer team are needed – please see Vladimir or Liz.

PASTORAL MESSAGE

Our warmest prayers remain with all those in our worship community who are unwell, grieving or facing other challenges at this time. This includes those who join us on Zoom each Sunday morning and who are very much in our thoughts. Please note that Jolame hasn't been 100% lately and is requiring additional treatment. NB: Contact details for the ministry team are in the newsletters.

SCHOOL VISIT

Last week, 25 Year 7 students from William Clarke College, Kellyville, visited Meals Plus and Leigh Memorial Church as part of Parramatta Mission's schools engagement program. The students enjoyed their time with Paul, Jenny & Liz and found it a valuable learning experience. Further school visits – from Barker College and The King's School – are due to take place in November.

KEY PCUC DATES – NOVEMBER 2023

- **Sat 4 Nov** - Worship & CLT meetings @ Centenary UC, 9am & 10am
- **Wed 8 Nov** - 'Mission Engagement' gathering @ Northmead, 7 – 9pm
- **Sat 11 Nov** – PCUC 'Vision' morning @ Centenary, 9am – 12pm
- **Sat 18 Nov** - 'Mission Engagement' @ Centenary UC, 10am – 12pm

MISSION ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM – PARRAMATTA

"Thank you" to everyone who attended the second 'Mission from the Inside' gathering, which was held at Parramatta on Wednesday evening, and to everyone else who contributed to a meaningful and informative gathering. Special thanks also to Paul & all who contributed to the wonderful supper. NB: Northmead's gathering will take place at Northmead UC next Wednesday 8 November, 7pm.



PCUC COMBINED WORSHIP – PARRAMATTA PARK, SUNDAY 29 OCTOBER

A special gathering of the PCUC was held last Sunday and included a Dedication of Congregation Leaders & Church Councillors for the next twelve months. The Dedication utilised words from John Wesley's Covenant: "I am no longer my own, but yours. Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will; put me to doing, put me to suffering; let me employed for you or laid aside for you..."





OPEN CHURCH @ LEIGH MEMORIAL

1 - 2pm, each Wednesday

(commencing 8 November)

*Includes Communion on the last
Wednesday of each month.



Can you spare an hour once every couple of months?

Congregation volunteers are needed for a rotating roster.

An orientation/ information session for volunteers will be held
at 1.00pm on Wednesday 1 November in the church.

General enquiries are also welcome.

Please contact:

LeighMemorialUniting@gmail.com

Westmead

Sharing The Hospitality of Jesus Christ

Sunday 5th November 2023- 09.30am

This Sunday, being the first Sunday of the month, we will be having Communion as part of our worship. A very warm welcome to Pastor Sarah who will be leading the service.

Last Sunday morning approximately 72 people of the PCUC congregation (p lus pets and other fauna) enjoyed a wonderful service at Parramatta Park – the weather was perfect and Reverend Geoff Smith gave an excellent sermon on why love is the most important, yet sometimes challenging, commandment that God gave. It was indeed a spiritual morning gathering.

For anyone who is unable to attend worship in person there are several options-

- * the theme of each week's sermon is in our Newsletter
- * view the online Reflection by Geoff Stevenson
- * view online Northmead Uniting Church service

We keep Carol from No.28 in our prayers as she undergoes further treatment, as well as Indira, Robyn Hallinan, Veitinia's family and others in the congregation who have experienced or are experiencing challenges in their lives. May You be healed, guided and blessed.

Bible Study Monday Afternoons

All Welcome - Meets 2pm via Zoom

Zoom Link: <https://uca-nswact.zoom.us/j/95043695512>



Saturday 11 November 2023

'Vision' gathering at Centenary Uniting Church from 9.00am. On the agenda for this gathering day will be a discussion and vote on the congregation name.

Please read the Newsletter for all events during November.



**uniting
church**
in Australia,
Synod of NSW & ACT

Closure of Ministry



REV. TARA CURLEWIS

Safe Church
Relationship Minister

TUESDAY 14 NOVEMBER 2023
10.00am

St Stephen's Uniting Church

187 Macquarie St, Sydney

RSVP by 7 November 2023

Register Here:

[https://nswactuca.eventsair.com/
closure-of-ministry-service---
tara-curlewis/registration/Site/Register](https://nswactuca.eventsair.com/closure-of-ministry-service---tara-curlewis/registration/Site/Register)

The service will be followed
by light refreshments



Douglas Purnell: Beyond Words

Artist and theologian, Douglas Purnell, presents a suite of paintings working towards his vision of creating a contemplative chapel space.

11AM-4PM Monday to Saturday. Saturday December 2-
Tuesday December 19



H55 CM 183 x 183cm

The exhibition will open, with a conversation between the artist, and fellow artist Chris Wyatt, 2pm Saturday 2 December. There will be a public conversation with the artist each of the Saturdays at 2pm.

McGlade Gallery, Australian Catholic University,

Gate 3 25A Barker Rd Strathfield 2135

dougpurnell@gmail.com 0439867502

Prayer Points

The people of Parramatta City Uniting Church and Parramatta Mission invite you to pray for our Community..

Westmead

- Those that are unwell, undergoing treatment and those dealing with challenges – We lift these up in Your name and ask Your Holy Spirit to renew bodies and minds.
- For the escalating war between Israel and Palestine, the Ukraine war and wars in other parts of the world – Lord we collectively pray for peace in these areas. May You bring sanity and love amidst horrors and may aid reach those in crisis mode.
- For the devastation of bushfires in NSW and Queensland over the recent days – we pray for rain and dying down of fires. For those whose homes are now smoke and rubble we ask that as they go through shock and grief, You give them strength. We ask for resources of food/clothing/shelter and finances become available through community support.
- For the many experiencing financial stress here – may You bring about a turn in our economy for the better.
- For teachers/ doctors and medical personnel/ for healthcare workers/ social support networks/ for those that relay Your Word – we give thanks and ask for Your help in sustaining them.

Fijian

- We pray for those who are going through transitions from school to beyond.
- We pray for the Synod Pulse Team and Ofa's role as a newly commissioned Pastor in the Team, resourcing youth ministry across NSW/ACT.
- We pray for the guests at the Bula Feeding Ministry and Meals Plus and our wonderful volunteers. We pray for those who are unable to meet because of rain or storms and for those who have been sleeping rough.

Korean Faith Community

- We pray for the Korean community in Western Sydney and for the revival of the church.
- We pray especially for Nak Su Baik, Kyeong Ok Hyeon (Those who are not in good health).

Prayer Points

Leigh Memorial

- We pray for members who are unwell, and those experiencing anxiety and grief.
- We prayerfully support those in our local communities who need additional care and support at this time, including people experiencing hunger, homelessness, addiction, family crisis and loneliness, in addition to those who assist them – such as devoted care-givers, nurses, doctors, community support teams and emergency workers;
- We pray for wisdom and inspiration to infuse all current and forthcoming decision-making processes and actions by our dedicated ministry team, leaders, managers and staff – and specifically pray for Paul and the team at Meals Plus, Cameron and the team at Westmead and for the life, witness and outreach work being conducted by our fellow Parramatta Mission & Parramatta City Uniting Church communities;
- We pray for greater mutual respect, compassion and peace throughout the world, and for the realisation of an international spirit of inclusion, acceptance and love for all people.

Wider Work

For our Parramatta City Uniting Church and Parramatta Mission teams

- May God guide all our staff, leaders, members and volunteers to live out our conjoined values of grace, inclusion, dignity, faith and hope.
- We pray for the work, witness and service of Rev Geoff Smith, Rev Vladimir Korotkov, Rev John Barr, Pastor Fil Kamotu, and Rev Hyun Goo.

Service & Zoom Information

Leigh Memorial

Time: Sunday 9.30am on site & Zoom

<https://uca-nswact.zoom.us/j/5199089657>

Meeting ID: 519 908 9657

PCUC online service

<https://northmead.uca.org.au/>

Westmead

Time: Sunday 9.30am on site

Leigh Fijian

Time: Sundays 11.15am on site

Pastoral Contacts

Prayer Points may be sent to
wecare@parramattamission.org.au

For a conversation or to contact a Minister, please call
Parramatta Mission Reception (9am-3pm)
119 Macquarie Street Parramatta NSW 2150
9891 2277

Leigh Memorial Church
119 Macquarie Street Parramatta NSW 2150
9891 2277

Westmead Church
175 Hawkesbury Road Westmead NSW 2145
9891 2277

IN TIME OF PASTORAL NEED

Please contact our ministry team with any pastoral needs

◇ Rev Geoff Smith (Lead Minister)	0407 416 377
◇ Rev Vladimir Korotkov (Supply Minister)	0431 759 573
◇ Rev John Barr (Supply Minister)	0400 694 540
◇ Pastor Fil Kamotu	0404 552 915

YOU CAN ALSO CONTACT THESE PEOPLE FOR PASTORAL ISSUES

◇ Rev Hyun Goo Jun (Korean Faith Community)	0433 320 588
◇ Anare Vocea (Fijian Vakatawa)	0432 772 852