

## **Prayer**

Sabbath God,  
Silence amid noise,  
Rest amid work  
Ease amid effort,  
Spacious, Quiet,  
In this world of activity, we praise you.  
Sabbath Christ,  
Hidden in creation,  
Wordless in the face of anger  
Powerless in the face of violence  
Crucified by an emperor,  
In this world of fullness, we praise you.  
Sabbath Spirit,  
Rhythm of life,  
Drummer of peace,  
Beating for those who listen,  
Karanga for those who hear  
In this world of relentless demand, we praise you.  
Forgive our shouting and insisting and expecting and demanding and controlling and  
manipulating and criticising.  
Forgive our noise, of spirit, of heart, of mind, of ourselves.  
Make space we pray, this Labour weekend, to rest with you,  
Great God of all time, in Jesus, through whom we pray.

## **“God’s things” a sermon based on Matthew 22:15-22 preached by Kerry Enright at Knox Presbyterian Church, Dunedin New Zealand on 22 October 2017.**

The daily rhythm of life can often carry on almost as if it is predetermined. It’s just what happens. There are times of disruption or tragedy or change, when we review life. But for much of the time, we can live as if choices are basically made for us.

We may largely accept the lifestyle and opinions and values of those around us. So we look normal and acceptable.

We might sail along, until we become part of the church, for then major dimensions of life are subject to scrutiny and reconsideration. Our attitudes and lifestyle and values and behaviour are looked at in the light of Jesus.

We might sail along, until we come to worship, and before the service we pray, invite God to encounter us, to influence and guide us.

We might sail along, until we come to the prayer of confession and before a loving forgiving God, we hold out all our humanity, including what is not of God.

We might sail along, until we invite God to speak with us in the conversations with young people, in the readings and in the proclamation. We are open to the Word of God.

We might sail along, until we stand for the offering and we offer up our whole selves for the leading of Jesus and who he wants us to stand with.

We might sail along, until we are sent out, to live as disciples, Jesus Christ shaping our living.

There is a drum with a different rhythm.

So every aspect of our life involves a choice. The kind of house we rent or own; the public transport we use or car we drive; the kind of food we eat; the people we befriend; the person we love; how we spend our time, the study we undertake, the work we perform.

The more we seek to follow Jesus, the more we realise how many choices we make, even if we did not realise it at the time we made those choices. The more the light of Christ shines into our lives, the more we offer for fresh assessment what we previously accepted and believed. The more we are drawn into the world-wide generations-long church, the more options we learn.

When I was a student, there was an influential book by Francis Schaeffer, *How should we then live?* The book I do not commend, but the question I do.

There are times fresh scrutiny changes people's whole lifestyle.

In our small town when I was young I was shown the farm of a family who had come to faith. They had rented out their farm so they could serve the church overseas. I remember my parents pointing to the farm as we drove past it. That is how notable it was.

My minister spoke of the 1930s Oxford Group's commitment to daily guidance, which, he said, was generally positive – he had been part of it and it helped shape the approach of Alcoholics Anonymous. At its worst though, he said, it descended into praying about what kind of toothpaste one should buy.

We have learned that sometimes those little things matter.

Once we have been with cocoa farmers, the choice of chocolate. Once we have been with children forced to work in cotton plantations, and women forced to work in appalling conditions, the choice of the clothes we buy.

In subjecting our whole life to scrutiny, we counter a view that religion is for religious people, that it is a discrete activity or interest for people so inclined. That is not the gospel for today.

Jesus asks for a coin to be shown. "Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." There are not two realms, the empire of Rome and the empire of God. The empire of God, the realm of God, the commonwealth of God, is all encompassing. All life is for God to guide.

But it is not easy sometimes to know whether how we live is part of the commonwealth of God. It is not easy sometimes to know what does or does not participate in the commonwealth of God among us.

The coin is thin, and so is the difference at times. Which way we are facing is not easy to discern.

Yet, that is where we are called to live our faith, on the thin edge. It is where our faith makes a difference. Do we take this approach or that approach? Do we face this way or that way?

And we cannot avoid that thin edge. We cannot keep our heads down, mix with the crowd, imagine we ourselves do not have to decide. There comes a time where choices must be made.

And on thin edges, choices are often controversial, often confronting, often criticised, often attracting attention. On thin edges, we may not make the right choice. That is the risk.

This is where Jesus puts us, on the thin edge, to discern what is the commonwealth of God among us.

If we want to not be noticed, if we want to avoid opposition, if we want to avoid making difficult choices, don't let Jesus take hold of our lives, don't let Jesus call us, don't let Jesus make us part of the church.

Two weeks ago I received a phone call from the General Secretary of the South Island branch of a trade union telling me about the decision needing to be made by the City Council regarding Easter Sunday trading. I had not heard of this before. The submissions closed in 30 minutes. I didn't have time to consult anyone. I decided to make a submission, in my name, and eventually I did.

Not for the first time. Years before, in Whanganui, the proposal had been for Sunday trading. The Council of Churches, the President of the Retailers Association and the Secretary of the major local Trade Union all opposed it. There was a photo of three of us in the Wanganui Chronicle, with the headline, *Unholy trinity opposes Sunday trading*.

It is not that we claim some kind of privilege because we are church, but we can explain why Easter is important to Christians and why they would want the freedom to worship that day. If we don't say that who will?

It is not that we want to stop new jobs, but is that what will happen, and is the Christian concept of Sabbath a basic principle, that people are not defined by their place in the economy, are not defined as economic units, and there do need to be agreed days off.

Do I sometimes shop on Sunday? Yes. Do I work on Easter Sunday? Yes. Do I know clearly what is the right thing to do? No

But again and again, we are called to make a quick decision. What is crucial is to be theologically informed, biblically grounded, open to God's Spirit, even when it gets us into trouble.

Render to God's what is God's.

Or as Paul put it to the Church in Rome (Romans 12:1-2):

"Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.

In the JB Phillips version ...

Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within ...

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## **KNOX CHURCH, DUNEDIN**

***growing in courage to live the Jesus way***



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