



KNOX CHURCH, ŌTEPOTI

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost The last will be first

10am – Sunday 20 September 2020

As we continue to gather with Level 2 restrictions, please be mindful of observing best hygiene practices and physical distancing. Please feel free to wear facial masks and, when singing, try not to sing with your usual gusto (as hard as that can be!)

Music to prepare us for worship “*The Puls of Life*”, Mons Leidvin Takle (b. 1942);

“*Air form Holberg Suite*” Edvard Grieg (1843-1907); “*Ardacdia*” Oliver Davis (b. 1972)

Carolyn Schmid/organ

Music of approach “*May the road rise to meet you*”, music David Hamilton (b. 1955, NZ composer)

Karanga ki te atua *We are called to worship*

Kia noho a Ihowa ki a koutou. May the Lord be with you.

Ma Ihowa koe e manaaki. May the Lord bless you.

E Ihowa Atua, o nga iwi mataura

Lord God of all people

Ata whakarongona me aroha noa

Listen to us and love us eternally

Ki a hua ko te pai

May God flourish

Ki a tau to atawhai

May your blessings flow

Manaakitia mai Aotearoa

Please give your protection to Aotearoa

Himene

*From the ends of the earth we will
sing*

God is here, the Kingdom is near

From the land of the long white cloud

Christ to dwell, Emmanuel

‘Beneath the Southern Cross’ - Catherine Burton and Malcolm Gordon

1 From north and south, from east
and west

Beneath the Southern Cross we rest

Found by one who came for all

In this tale of spacious love we’re
born

2 This whenua on which we stand
This holy ground made by God's hand
Marred and scarred yet marked by
grace
Held and healed in Christ we find our
place

From the ends of the earth...

3 God of nations at thy feet
In the bonds of love we meet
Strangers once now called as one
Aotearoa wake to greet this love
From the ends of the earth...

Te Inoi Whaki Hara *We approach God in prayer*

Response:

E te atua (God)

Aroha mai (love us)

Te rangimarie o te Karaiti *We share the peace of Christ (intangibly!)*

Te rangimarie o te Karaiti ki a koutou. May the peace of Christ be with you all.
And also with you.

If you like, you can pass the peace with your neighbour in te reo Māori:

Te rangimarie o te Karaiti ki a koe (the peace of Christ be with you)

Kei a koe ano hoki (and also with you)

Musical reflection *"The Call of Wisdom", Will Todd (b. 1970)*

Sara Brown/piano, Carolyn Schmid/organ. Knox Junior Choir with Knox Choir

Tamariki

Waiata

(AA 31) - Traditional Maori

E te atua, aroha mai x3 (God, love us)

Ake ake tonu e x2

E te atua, awhina mai... (God, help us)

E te atua, manaaki mai... (God, bless us)

First reading: Jonah 3:10-4:11

We are likely all familiar with the story of Jonah being swallowed by the fish. The reading today takes place after Jonah has been saved from the belly of the fish and has journeyed to Nineveh to do God's bidding. Jonah prophesies that Nineveh will be overthrown in forty days. The Ninevites respond. We hear today about Jonah's rather surprising reaction.

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it. But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. He prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. And now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." And the LORD said, "Is it right for you to be angry? Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city. The LORD God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, "It is better for me to die than to live." But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?" And he said, "Yes, angry enough to die." Then the LORD said, "You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?"

*Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church **Thanks be to God***

Gospel reading: Matthew 20:1-16

This parable takes place just before Jesus' entry into Jerusalem: a journey which ends with his death on a cross. The book of Jonah is a kind of a parable. It is interesting to hear Jonah alongside some of Jesus' parables. What do you notice when you hear our two readings alongside one another?

"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?' They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.' When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.' When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

*This is the Gospel of Jesus Christ **Praise to Christ the Word***

Sermon "The last will be first and the first will be last"

I. Why is it that, when we're in a brightly lit room at nighttime, we can't see anything outside? It's because your eyes adjust to the amount of light in the room. If you turn out the lights, your eyes adjust to the darkness and suddenly you can see outside far better. I read a delightful book a few years ago called, "Mr. God, this is Anna", by Fynn. It tells the story of an unlikely friendship between a man called Fynn and a

young girl called Anna. In her childlike mind, Anna sees the world in a whole different way and so helps Fynn to also see things differently. There's one scene where Anna says to Fynn:

"The sun is nice but it lights things up so much that you can't see very far... The night time is better. It stretches your soul to the stars."

There's an irony here. Too much light can actually limit and shorten your vision. It can blind us to the whole reality. In the daylight you can see everything within a few kilometres. But when it's dark on a cloudless night, your vision can stretch millions of light years to distant stars.

I want us to keep that image in mind as I reflect this morning on *privilege*. What is privilege? It's one of those words we hear a lot about at the moment, often to talk about the favourable conditions that certain groups in society enjoy. Because it's talking about whole groups, it inevitably generalises. But the generalisations point to an increased awareness in our society that our systems and structures are skewed to favour certain people over others.

One of the difficulties about addressing some of the systemic privileges in our society is that, for those who enjoy privilege, it's often very difficult to recognise that privilege in the first place because it's just normal life. It's like being in a brightly lit room. We can see everything clearly. Everything is within reach. But within the confines of the room. Outside, all we see is a black abyss. Not even that... when it's dark outside and you look out a window you see your own reflection staring back at you.

II. It seems to me that both our Bible readings today are speaking to people with privilege, encouraging them to step out from their brightly lit room, step out from under the ceiling, so that their vision can expand and stretch to the stars.

In fact, I would argue that's a common thread that runs through the whole Bible. The story of the people of Israel in the Old Testament is one of constantly expanding horizons of what to expect from God. The other day I was driving back from Christchurch. You know those long stretches of road between Ashburton and Timaru? You keep driving and the horizon keeps on expanding before you. By the time you get to the "old" horizon, there is a new one lying before you. It's like that with Israel. God leads Israel on a journey. They are a people shaped by the promises of God. And while those promises are fulfilled, they're never exhausted. It's as if God is constantly saying, "yes *and...*" Their expectation of who God is constantly breaking its banks.

One of the fascinating developments in Israel's history, is that they begin to see God as the God of all nations and peoples, and the God of all creation. In parts of Isaiah and Jeremiah, for instance, we hear about God's plan to save all nations. This shift in Israel's thinking was remarkable. In the ancient middle-east, Israel was only a small nation state among many others constantly warring with one another. It doesn't make sense in a dog-eat-dog where Israel is constantly fighting for its survival to include its enemies and oppressors in its understanding of salvation. There is a challenge for Israel to see their special relationship with God not as a mark of privilege but as a mark of service and witness of God's love to all people and to all creatures.

III. The reason I give that rather long introduction is because that's the background for the book of Jonah. The book of Jonah is a short story in the same literary tradition as the parables of Jesus. It's a story directed at the people of Israel who were struggling to understand the expansiveness of God's love to include all people. Jonah represents the people of Israel. When the people of Nineveh, these non-Israelites, repent, Jonah is angry. Angry enough to die! And we can perhaps understand why when we look at the history of the people of Israel. They had been taken over by empire after empire. The Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks. These people destroyed our nation, killed our people, robbed us of our identity... and now God wants to save them, to include them in this redemption which is supposed to be ours? We can see that the horizon of what the people of Israel expect from God is expanding in an uncomfortable way. Come out from the house, God is saying. Look up to the stars and see how numerous are the descendants of Abraham!

Jesus is the fulfilment of this promise, the end of this trajectory in the Old Testament. In him, God's salvation spills over to include all people and creatures. In him, we see a glimpse, the promise, of the new heaven and earth to come, the fulfilment of all we can hope for from God, the renewal of all things.

IV. But here's the catch. In order for us to see the stars, in order for us to dream and participate in that new heaven and earth, we first need to turn out the lights. As Anna said, at night time your soul can stretch to the stars. But as long as we leave the lights on, our souls will only stretch as far as the four walls we inhabit! Our humanity is at stake here. How large do we want our souls to be?

I was thinking about that image and I realised the starlight is already there. It's always there, day and night. Just as the promise of God's coming future has already been given in Jesus Christ. God's coming salvation is the horizon to which all things are directed. That doesn't change. The stars continue to shine. But we can live blinded to that reality. We can live with the lights on.

Perhaps that's why Jesus concludes his parable with the well-known line, "the last will be first and the first will be last." It's the switching off of the lights. The great reversal of the way things are so that we begin to see beyond the confines of our own privilege and power. It's not enough that the last get included at the very end. It's not enough even that the last get paid the same amount as the first. No, the last must get paid first so that the wrongs are set right; so that those who have enjoyed privilege awaken to the fact that their privilege counts for nothing before God; so that justice can be done. The lights must be switched off, so that those who have enjoyed privilege can learn to look to the stars.

I want to suggest that this process of "switching off the lights" will not be an easy process. In fact, for those who have enjoyed privilege, it will be a remarkably painful process. I want to name two brief examples, by way of conclusion: First, our global response to climate change. The West have enjoyed the fruits of industrialisation. And now various countries in the South and East are wanting the same privileges to lift their people out of poverty. Problem is that largely because of Western growth and expansion, the world is on the brink of ecological collapse. We have enjoyed working all day and reaping the benefits and now we're scandalised that others should demand the same benefits. What does it mean to hear once more the words of Jesus that the last shall be first and the first shall be last?

Second, the relationship between Pākehā and Māori. This week is *te wiki o te reo Māori* (Māori language week). It's a small gesture in the ongoing commitment to recognise Māori language and culture and to continue on the path of reconciliation as treaty partners. I say it's a small gesture because one week dedicated to *te reo Māori* points to the fact that there are 51 other weeks in which we prioritise English by default. The issue of privilege with regard to treaty issues and Māori-Pākehā relations is immensely complex. But I want to suggest, given how hard it is to see privilege if you're enjoying it, that Pākehā like myself would do well to listen for a bit and to move forward in humility as we hear again the words of Jesus that the last shall be first and the first shall be last.

So may we be in the business of switching off lights, not so that we're all in the dark, but so that our souls can stretch together to the stars. Amen.

Ngā Inoi *The prayers for others will conclude with the Lord's Prayer* *Anglican prayer book*

Dear God, You have called us to open our hearts, to weep with those who weep, to rejoice with the whole of creation.

Dear God, we live in a suffering world. The hurt of the world invades our living-rooms, our minds, our hearts. We see before us now those who have lost everything in the maelstrom of fire, and flood, in the wake of war, and famine, and cruelty, and, loving God, we feel overwhelmed. So many, near and dear to us, under the pump. We have no words for this. All that is left to us is a primal cry. To you, O Lord.

Dear God, we live in a world of unbelievable beauty, we breathe in glory with every breath, with every little child we see. We rejoice in this marvelous land we are lucky enough to live in, in *te reo*, in all the wealth of cultures that are ours. We have no words for all this. Just the primal cry of joy. To you, O Lord.

The Iona Prayer

Lord Jesus, Master Carpenter of Nazareth, who at the last through wood and nails wrought our whole salvation, wield well your tools in this you, workshop, that we who come to you roughhewn, may be fashioned to a true beauty in your eyes.

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.

E tō mātou Matua i te rangi
Kia tapu tōu Ingoa.
Kia tae mai tōu rangatiratanga.
Kia meatia tāu e pai ai
ki runga ki te whenua,
kia rite anō ki tō te rangi.
Hōmai ki a mātou āiane
he taro mā mātou mō tēnei rā.
Murua ō mātou hara,
Me mātou hoki e muru nei
i ō te hunga e hara ana ki a mātou.
Āua hoki mātou e kawea kia
whakawaia;
Engari whakaorangia mātou i te kino:
Nōu hoki te rangatiratanga, te kaha,
me te korōria, Āke āke āke. Āmine.

Dedicate offering – *Please place your offerings in the offering bags held out for you at the door as you leave. Please do this as soon as you are able.*

Himene

(tune Hyfrydol) CH4 519 - Charles Wesley

1 Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven, to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation,
enter every trembling heart.

3 Finish then thy new creation;
pure and spotless let us be;
let us see thy great salvation
perfectly restored in thee,
changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise.

2 Come, almighty to deliver,
let us all thy life receive;
suddenly return, and never,
never more thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.

Te manaakitanga *We are sent in God's blessing*

"The Lord bless you and keep you", John Rutter (b. 1945)

Music for our leaving ““Prelude in G minor”, J S Bach (1685-1750)

Serving today

Associate Minister - Jordan Redding

Organist and Choir Director – Karen Knudson

Reader – Vanessa Sinclair

Ngā Inoi / Prayer for others – Peter Matheson

Welcoming team – Patsy Mason’s team

Counting team – Philippa Crack’s team

In relation to your monetary offering, you may:

- *Make regular automatic payments (which are tax deductible) - contact Helen Thew at plannedgiving@knoxchurch.net*
- *Give online to the Church’s bank account at 03 0903 0016425 00 - our charity number for tax rebate purposes is #CC52318.*