



# KNOX CHURCH, DUNEDIN

## Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

10am – Sunday 18 October 2020

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Music to prepare us for worship "*Pavane*"

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

### Welcome

**Music of approach** "*Give almes of thy goods*"

Christopher Tye (c1505-73)

### Call to worship

Kia noho a lhowa ki a koutou. May God be with you.

**Ma lhowa koe a manaaki. May God bless you.**

We come to offer gratitude and to mediate upon the Creative God; the Most Holy One; the Ground of our Being; The Source of all Wisdom and Beauty...

**The Creator; The Majestic; The Protector; The Giver of Peace; the Author of Safety; The Merciful; The Expander; The Provider; The Bestower ...**

Many are your names and images:

**The Loving; The Generous; The Finder; The Awakener; The Preserver; The All-Forgiving; The Sublime; The Appreciative; The Noble; The Watchful; The Gatherer; The Equitable; The Compassionate; The Light.**

As we are meditate upon You, may we move more deeply into your Light and Love and connect more lovingly with all of your children here on earth.

### Hymn

(Gather us in) CH4 623 - Marty Haugen

1 Here in this place new light is streaming,  
now is the darkness vanished away,  
see in this space our fears and our  
dreamings,  
brought here to you in the light of this day.  
Gather us in – the lost and forsaken,  
gather us in – the blind and the lame:  
call to us now, and we shall awaken,  
we shall arise at the sound of our name.

2 We are the young – our lives are a  
mystery,  
we are the old who yearn for your face,  
we have been sung throughout all of  
history,  
called to be light to the whole human race.

Gather us in – the rich and the haughty,  
gather us in – the proud and the strong;  
give us a heart so meek and so lowly,  
give us the courage to enter the song.

3 Here we will take the wine and the  
water,  
here we will take the bread of new birth,  
here you shall call your sons and your  
daughters,  
call us anew to be salt for the earth.  
Give us to drink the wine of compassion,  
give us to eat the bread that is you;  
nourish us well, and teach us to fashion  
lives that are holy and hearts that are true.

4 Not in the dark of buildings confining,  
not in some heaven, light years away,  
but here in this place the new light is  
shining,  
now is the Kingdom, now is the day.

Gather us in and hold us for ever,  
gather us in and make us your own;  
gather us in – all peoples together,  
fire of love in our flesh and our bone.

## Prayer, assurance of forgiveness

E te whanau, in Christ we are forgiven. **Thanks be to God.**

Kia tau te rangimarie o te Karaiti ki runga i a koutou. May the peace of Christ be with you  
always. **And also with you.**

**Music** *“He watching over Israel, slumbers not nor sleeps”* from *Elijah*

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-47)

## Children

*‘They All Saw a Cat’* by Brenden Wenzel

## Song

He hōnore, he korōria  
Maungārongo ki te whenua  
Whakaaro pai e  
Ki ngā tangata katoa  
Ake ake, ake ake  
Āmine  
Te Atua, te piringa,  
Toku oranga.

## Prayer for Illumination

**Readings – Listen for God’s Word to us ...** *from various cultures and religions*

### Ancient Chinese writings:

There was something formless and perfect before the universe was born. It is serene. Empty. Solitary. Unchanging. Infinite. Eternally present. It is the mother of the universe. For lack of a better name, I call it the Tao.

It flows through all things, inside and outside, and returns to the origin of all things.

When you have names and forms, know that they are provisional. When you have institutions, know where their functions should end. Knowing when to stop, you can avoid any danger.

### Baghavad Gita

God has a million faces.

### Rg Veda

The one being the wise call by many names.

### Hindu tradition says:

There is only one Rama and he has a thousand names.

### Sufism (*mystical Islamic beliefs and practices*)

“Dear ones, beware of the tiny gods frightened humans create to bring an anesthetic relief to their sad days.” (*Hafiz, Sufi teacher*)

**(Book of Wisdom; Sirach)** *Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus, is found in the Catholic Bible and the Orthodox Bible. The Protestants excluded it because no Hebrew version was found and it was considered a product of Greek culture. It was included in the original King James Version. A Hebrew version was found in the Dead Sea Scrolls.*

Sophia (Wisdom) I loved; I sought her out in my youth, I fell in love with her beauty...once you have grasped her, never let her go. In the end she will transform herself into pure joy.

### **Christian, John's Gospel (1: 1-5 selections)**

In the beginning was the Word. This Word was with God in the beginning and through it all things came to be; not one thing had its being but through it. All that came to be had life in it.

## **Reflection - Can Religions Create Peace and Harmony?**

The children's story for today is very simple. The Cat walks through the world; all the creatures see and imagine/envision the Cat differently...depending on their own needs and context: their feelings, fears, hope. Yet it is the same Cat.

If you were hearing it as a metaphor it might seem very simplistic, but let's play around with it as applying to interfaith relationships. We all, as individuals or groups, see God through our own lens: culture, gender, history, our individual experiences and upbringing. Why might some of us see God as angry and terrifying; some as distant and negligible; some as sweetly personal? God is still God...regardless of the names or the images we create. We humans develop particular structures, worship, rituals, even ethics and morals based on our particular vision of God.

And the more significant question: why is it seemingly so threatening to know that others have different contexts and different perceptions of God, which then lead to different faith traditions, different moral constructs, rituals, forms of community, even different core values?

That question came into sharp focus in the questioning period after Helen Clark's roundtable discussion about World Peace on September 30. A questioner asked, "Wouldn't the world be better off without any religions?" Obviously in this questioner's mind, religions only seemed to create war, hostility and destruction. And that is partially true, there is no way around it.

We can also look at the way religions have been, and can be, a force for peace and harmony. So the brief readings I chose today come from that perspective; admittedly again, simplistic because we cannot contain the whole of any religious or philosophical system within a few verses. I deliberately chose readings that represented a commonality, rather than polarized views; with a more hopeful focus.

The commitment I carried away from the forum with Helen Clark (and Jordan and others in the chaplaincy program at the University) was again to find interfaith connections that could create spaces for people to know and respect each other. I don't presume to speak about interfaith relationships in NZ...but I thought I might share a bit of my experiences in the United States...and some of them may resonate with you...or not. Perhaps they will be a cautionary tale for what NZ does NOT want to become.

There are many facets to Interfaith relationships and understanding: I would like to use the Four Types of Inter-religious Dialogue mentioned by Kris Chan.... and share a bit about my experiences with all of those:

There is, of course, the dimension perhaps most of us think of:

--- **The Dialogue of Theological Exchange**, which is perhaps the most cognitive. This usually involves listening to “experts” explain theological beliefs, the history of the religion; rituals & worship. This involves lectures, books and scholarly articles. In the campus ministry situation and congregations I served, we tried to offer as many as possible of these opportunities. I invited speakers from Jewish, Bahai, and Muslim faiths for Sunday worship time and for adult education. I have always appreciated these and yet been personally more drawn to dimensions which speak to my heart and feelings more directly. I invited the president of the Bilal Mosque, Shahriar, to preach at Southminster once. He was shocked to be asked to preach in a Christian church and said he couldn’t possibly “preach”, but he would speak. It was one of the most powerful sermons I have ever hear about the need to be open, truthful, committed to justice and to speak truth to power. It was much more compelling than any lecture about the history or theology of Islam.

**Another dimension of Interfaith Dialogue is the Dimension of Action: working or peace and justice together.**

-----So, for example when Shahriar was “invited” to have a conversation with an FBI agent, which you might imagine to be a bit intimidating, a Rabbi and I accompanied him to offer support.

-----Another example: in Washington County, near Portland, I was a member of an Interfaith Action Network for a number of years: This was a very diverse group including Protestants (of various denominations), Catholics, Jews, Bahais, Muslims, Church of the Latter Day Saints, New Thought religions and Scientology. At monthly meetings we had a brief presentation and prayer time from different members, but our main focus was action: cleaning up the environment; an interfaith Thanksgiving Service and combined food drive; anti-racism work. In working together, we developed respect and friendships that would not have happened just by listening to lectures. I have to admit there were some private discussion with Mormans and Scientologists which were very challenging for me; and perhaps for them.

----At Southminster Presbyterian Church, the last congregation I served before retiring, we often organized interfaith events as a way of remembering those who died on 9/11 and the first responders, and committing ourselves to peace. We would have a brief interfaith prayer service in our sanctuary, or outside around the Peace Pole, then spend time working to clean up and repair the grounds around the elementary school nearby; and perhaps share a pizza lunch.

There are so many possible actions to take as faith groups which can focus on positive values shared by all, that don’t demand we fuss about theological differences.

----- **Another Dimension of Interfaith Dialogue is the Dialogue of Religious Experience:** This is the dimension which speaks most to my heart and soul. Usually it involves groups in which people share their spiritual practices and how that affects their daily life. One such experience for me was after the shooting at the Mosque in Christchurch. I happened to be in NZ when that happened. When I returned home, the mosque near my house was sponsoring a discussion about healing after violence (which of course there are so many more examples in The US), and asked me to say a few words about my observations here. It was for me a profound experience to see how New Zealand embraced and supported the Muslim community, allowing for some healing to happen. After that discussion, Faiza, a Muslim women, a social worker and founding member of the mosque and I decided to form a small interfaith group. The idea was to have a group which would meet for six weeks in the summer, the focus of which would be building relationships. We invited some folks we knew at first, men and women of various faith

traditions...then opened up to whoever wanted to come. The group focused on questions such as: what do you most appreciate about your faith tradition and what is difficult; what are your spiritual practices and how do they impact your daily life? What is difficult or good about practicing your faith in the United State? One wonderful surprise was that five teenage Muslim girls wanted to participate; it was a great opportunity to hear how they experienced public school and the teen culture in the US. Of course, after the six weeks, people wanted to continue. We had developed friendships and learned so much from each other. This group had forced us in a very non-threatening way to confront our stereotypes. It also pushed us to learn more about our own faith traditions. When asked a question about what we believed or what the Bible said, or why we did certain things, we sometimes had to go home and do some real thinking about ourselves and our beliefs.

---**The fourth type of Dialogue is that of Everyday Life**...one that should be very easy: it just involves simple courtesy and openness to neighbors of different faiths.

Those are some of the wonderful experiences I have had with interfaith relationships. Unfortunately all is not rosy, as you might imagine in a country so polarized as the US. Sometimes interfaith encounters can be very rough and tumble.

Earlier in my ministry I served as a campus minister at a very large secular university in Minnesota. There were representatives of almost every possible religion, and there was an interfaith ministers group, which I found exciting. I also found it disturbing that often the most **intolerant** members were Christians. I remember going to a meeting with the Director of Hillel, the Jewish campus ministry, and two men from an evangelical Christian ministry. Amy, the Hillel Director asked me to go with her because she felt a need to try to respond to their request for an interfaith conversation but was also very nervous about meeting with them. As well she might be: They told her they thought she was a “nice lady” but she would go to hell if she didn’t convert to Christianity. Their pretense at conversation was only a disguise to intimidate and harass her. They couldn’t allow her to have her faith and they have theirs...even though she never tried in any way to “convert” anyone to Judaism.

The university was also the venue, every spring and summer, of the itinerant “Christian” preachers who would stand outside the student union and hold forth: all Jews, Muslims, all gays and lesbians were going to hell and were the cause of every evil in the nation. Sometimes another campus minister or a university staff person would ask me to go out and counter their incendiary speech. Mostly students simply heckled them and thought of it as street theater...but some more mentally fragile students were truly damaged by these so-called preachers.

In another interfaith group of about forty people, I was one of only two women present when a Presbyterian minister called by views “disgusting” because I said I believed in universal salvation. “Disgusting” is a pretty strong word and not one he used when disagreeing with male ministers. When I called him on the way he spoke to me, the only person who spoke in support of me was the male rabbi. Sometimes it is harder to find respect among members of one’s own faith tradition than with people of a different faith.

When I moved to Portland, I heard similar stories ---mostly aimed at Muslims. A Muslim woman medical technician told of an incident at the hospital where she worked. She was to draw blood from patients for tests ordered by their doctors. One day a woman came in and seeing her in the hijab, refused to allow any “terrorist” to touch her or draw her blood. The Muslim woman was devastated but tried to find another technician to handle this woman’s case. Another young woman who rode public transportation every day to her university

classes told me she finally gave up and drove because it was so upsetting to experience almost daily harassment: someone pulling on her scarf, or telling her to go home (which was nonsense since this woman was an American citizen).

Some of these incidents may seem to be small and inconsequential...but when seen in the national context of Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and racist government policies, become very terrifying. One of my Muslim friends told me that every time there was a mass shooting in the US, he prayed first that the shooter wasn't Muslim...then prayed for the victims. He feared the backlash on the whole Muslim community if the shooter was Muslim.

Why would "Christians" live in such fear of others or preach such intolerance? Can our God be so small that there is no place in the universe for an alternative view? Is it simply arrogance and pride to think we have the only valid beliefs? These feelings of threat, fear, and arrogance make it so difficult for religious traditions to build bridges of peace and harmony in the world. It is that sense of distrust and intolerance, that makes it possible for unscrupulous leaders to manipulate nations to go to war (usually for egotistical and economic gain.) (This is a tangent, but if any of you are also intrigued by why we can feel so threatened by differences, you might be interested in a book called, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion* by Jonathan Haidt.)

If we are confident in our faith why would we be intolerant of others who envision God differently or use different names for the Sacred; especially since Jesus, the one we profess to follow, seemed to be so expansive and inclusive in his love and caring. There are so many stories of Jesus breaking boundaries...building bridges between groups in his culture: tax collectors, Samaritans, the Canaanites.

Certainly from my observations, New Zealand does not have the same polarization and hostility that the US does. And yet I know that we all have stereotypes, often unconscious, that drive our fears and can pollute our relationships. I know I have certainly had to confront many of my own unconscious biases in relating to people of other faiths and cultures.

So here is a little exercise for you to do silently in your mind. Think of the first responses that come to mind when I say these words:

Roman Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Bahai, Christian Science, Church of the Latter Day Saints, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhs, Wiccans, Unification Church, Sai Babba, Indigenous spiritual traditions?

Do any of them call up feelings of concern, alienation or fear? Can you dig a bit into your consciousness: what about that group or tradition is disturbing? How did you learn about them? Do you know many people of that group? Do you know if your disagreements or fears are based on their religious beliefs or on cultural and geopolitical realities? Can we respect others and still disagree about certain beliefs or practices? How do we do that?

It seems to me that it is only by learning about those we perceive as "different", through some form of interfaith encounter, that we as Christians, can make sure that religions **can** be a force for understanding. Then we can offer a resounding "YES" to the question posed today: can religions help create peace and harmony.

I will close with this thought from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Though he was speaking to conflicts between Jews and Gentiles, perhaps it can also speak to broader interfaith reality:

"Christ is peace... Christ has broken down hostility and dividing walls between us...Christ has proclaimed peace to you who were far and peace to those who are near...So then you are no

longer strangers and aliens, but citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God.”

Let us pray that we may all live as members of the household of God. Amen.

## Hymn

(Channel of Peace) CH4 528 - Sebastian Temple

1 Make me a channel of your peace.  
Where there is hatred let me bring your  
love;  
where there is injury, your pardon, Lord;  
and where there's doubt, true faith in you.

*O Master, grant that I may never seek  
so much to be consoled as to console,  
to be understood as to understand,  
to be loved, as to love with all my soul.*

2 Make me a channel of your peace.  
Where there's despair in life let me bring  
hope;  
where there is darkness, only light;  
and where there's sadness, ever joy.  
[Refrain]

3 Make me a channel of your peace.  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
in giving of ourselves that we receive;  
and in dying that we're born to eternal life.

## Prayer for others and the Lord's Prayer

(The New Zealand Book of Prayer He Karakia  
Mihinare o Aotearoa)

**Eternal Spirit, Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,  
Source of all that is and that shall be,  
Father and Mother of us all,  
Loving God, in whom is heaven:  
The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!  
The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world!  
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!  
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain our hope and come on earth.  
With the bread we need for today, feed us.  
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.  
In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.  
From trials too great to endure, spare us.  
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.  
For you reign in the glory of the power that is love, now and forever. Amen.**

## Hymn

(tune Finlandia) lyrics - Lloyd Stone

1 This is my song, O God of all the nations,  
a song of peace for lands afar and mine.  
This is my home, the country where my  
heart is;  
here are my hopes, my dreams, my holy  
shrine;  
but other hearts in other lands are beating  
with hopes and dreams as true and high as  
mine.

2 My country's skies are bluer than the  
ocean,  
and sunlight beams on clover-leaf and pine.  
But other lands have sunlight too and  
clover,  
and skies are everywhere as blue as mine.  
Oh, hear my song, O God of all the nations,  
a song of peace for their land and for mine.

**Dedication of 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.*

## **Blessing**

Sung blessing *“I’m gonna sing when the spirit says sing”*

Spiritual  
Knox Choir with Knox Junior Choir

Music for our leaving *Fantasia and 5 part Fugue*

J S Bach (1685-1750)

## **Serving**

Associate Minister - Jordan Redding

Rev Peg Pfab

Organist and Choir Director – Karen Knudson

Prayer for others – Keren Skegg

Welcoming team – Leigh Haslam’s team

Counting team – Tony Haslam’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](mailto: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*
- *Give at the conclusion of the service.*