



KNOX CHURCH, DUNEDIN

10am – Sunday 6 June 2021

Pentecost 2

Music to prepare us for worship *Lobe den Herren, den machtigen Konig der Ehren (Praise to the Lord, the Almighty)* - Johann Gottfried Walther (1684-1748), *Vater unser im Himmelreich (Our Father in Heaven)* - Friedrich Wilhelm Zachau (1663-1712), *Vater unser im Himmelreich BuxWV 219* - Dietrich Buxtehude (1637-1707)

Everyone is welcomed to worship. Please place your offering in the offering boxes at the back of the church, if possible before worship commences.

Introit “*O for a closer walk with God*”

text William Cowper (1731-1800) music *Scottish Psalter*, 1635
arr. C V Stanford (1852-1924)

Greeting

Ia faatasi le Alii ma outou. The Lord be with you.

Ia faamanuia le Alii ia te oe. The Lord bless you.

Though we walk in the midst of trouble,
God preserves us and shields us from harm.

Lord, Holy Spirit, comfort us.

With outstretched hand, God reaches into our lives,
and liberates us from all that binds.

Lord, Holy Spirit, liberate us.

God’s good purposes for you and for me will be fulfilled,
for in Christ, God’s love is undying and endures forever.

Lord, Holy Spirit, complete us.

Hymn

(tune: Lobe den Herren) CH4 124: Joachim Neander, translator: Catherine Winkworth

1 Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the
King of creation;
praise God, my soul, for in him are your
health and salvation;
come all who hear,
into his presence draw near,
joining in glad adoration.

2 Praise to the Lord, who in all things is
wondrously reigning,
shields you from harm and is gently yet
firmly sustaining.
Have you not seen
how your heart's wishes have been
granted by God's wise ordaining?

3 Praise to the Lord, who with blessing
and power will defend you;
surely his goodness and mercy shall daily
attend you;
ponder anew
what the Almighty can do:
God will for ever befriend you.

4 Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me
adore him!
All that has life and breath, come now
with praises before him!
Let the Amen
sound from God's people again:
gladly for ever adore him.

Prayer of Approach *The prayer will conclude with the following sung refrain.*

O Lord, have mercy, have mercy on us
O Christ, have mercy, have mercy on us
O Lord, have mercy, have mercy on us
Have mercy on us.

...

E te whanau a te Karaiti, family of Christ, we are forgiven.

Thanks be to God.

Anthem *"Earth Song"*

words and music Frank Tichelli

Passing of the peace

Knox Church has a tradition of "sharing Christ's peace" with one another, which involves making a greeting of peace and saying, "the peace of Christ be with you." The response is "and also with you." At Covid Level One, we encourage people to be thoughtful of social distancing and practise non-tactile forms of greeting (i.e. a hand-wave).

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.

Binding up the bully

After the brief reflection children and youth are invited, if they would like, to go out to their programmes.

Hymn

lyrics and music Dan Shutte

*Biding in your holy presence,
Waiting here in humble silence,
Needing no more words to help us pray:
We rest within the myst'ry of God.*

1 Who are we, O Lord, that you should care for us?

We are like a small grain of sand,
yet you give our hands dominion over all.
Wondrous are your ways, O God.

Biding in your holy presence...

2 Ravish us, O God, with love beyond our dreams;

let us know the sound of your voice.

Hold us in your care, betroth us in your heart.

Wondrous are your ways, O God.

Biding in your holy presence...

3 Never let us doubt the passion of your love,

even when this world breaks our heart,
night is never long for those who love the Lord.

Wondrous are your ways, O God.

Biding in your holy presence...

First bible reading: 1 Samuel 8:4-22b

This Old Testament reading partly records the beginnings of Israel's monarchy. Prior to the establishment of the monarchy, Israel was governed by "judges". Unlike kings, judges were not hereditary but instead rose up in the midst of Israel's unfaithfulness to God. The judge was a kind of "saviour", rescuing the people from their enemies and orienting them back to God. Samuel was a judge of Israel and a prophet. Now in his old age, the "judicial" system is not working smoothly, and the elders of Israel come to him with a request.

Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, 'You are old and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations.' But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, 'Give us a king to govern us.' Samuel prayed to the Lord, and the Lord said to Samuel, 'Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. Just as they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so also they are doing to you. Now then, listen to their voice; only—you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them.' So Samuel reported all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king. He said, 'These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plough his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you in that day.' But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; they said, 'No! but we are determined to have a king over us, so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles.' When Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the ears of the Lord. The Lord said to Samuel, 'Listen to their voice and set a king over them.' Samuel then said to the people of Israel, 'Each of you return home.'

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

Gospel reading: Mark 3:19b-30

Just like the Old Testament reading, the question of power, control, kingship and dominion is explicit in this passage from Mark's gospel. It takes place towards the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. The scribes of Jerusalem claim that Jesus' power is demonic, and he responds to them. As you listen you might like to compare this passage in light of the picture of human power and dominion painted in the 1 Samuel passage.

Then he went home; and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, 'He has gone out of his mind.' And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.' And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, 'How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered. 'Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin' — for they had said, 'He has an unclean spirit.'

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

Sermon 'Give us a king to govern us!'

I.

Well, on Queen's birthday weekend, it seems appropriate to have a reading in which God is described as king, monarch, sovereign. It's a common image used to describe God in scripture. God is King, we're told in our reading today from Samuel. And Israel's request for a human king is therefore a rejection of God's kingship. In the New Testament, Christ is called King and who heralds the kingdom of God. Christ fulfills both the hopes and expectations of the Davidic monarchy as well as God's cosmic sovereignty over sin, evil, death and thus as eternal king over the new heaven and earth.

What does it mean to say God is sovereign? That image may sit uneasily in our current climate when, for most, the significance of Queen's birthday is simply a chance to catch a breather as the days darken and the temperature drops. For others the monarchy continues to hold positive connotations; a reminder of one's British heritage and the shared history we have with other commonwealth nations, particularly through the two great wars. For still others, the monarchy is a relic of the past, an enduring symbol of imperialist colonialism. Just this week, an exclusive news report shone a spotlight on the British monarchy's exemption from various anti-discrimination legislation -- a report which, for many, simply entrenches the belief that the monarchy is an elitist institution operating with different rules to everyone else. For still others the monarchy is a messy mix of nostalgia and suspicion.

I don't presume to offer my judgement one way or the other. I simply say this to highlight that talking about God as monarch, or even more specifically as *king*, may well be a fraught task. And that is before we even acknowledge that *king* is a gendered term and a symbol for many of male patriarchy. At our small group on Thursday night, we talked about a feminist alternative that talks about the coming *kindom of God*, which emphasises that in Jesus we are *kin*, whanau, siblings. There is much to be said in favour of this term.

However, today, I want to suggest that gathering to praise the Lord Jesus Christ, the almighty, the King of creation (as our opening hymn begins) is still an important, even a central, expression of the church's praise.

II.

I have been sitting with Jesus' parable which we heard from Mark's gospel. Jesus somewhat cryptically says (as we reflected on in the all-age talk) to his critics, *no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man. Then indeed the house can be plundered.* If we imagine the house as the place where we all live, our world, then Jesus' implication is that our world is not a neutral place. It is controlled, ordered, owned by "the strong man", the bullies of our world, those with power, wealth, influence. The implication is that, in order for God's liberating work to be done on earth as in heaven, the setting free needs to be coupled with a binding up of satanic forces in our world that oppress and that entrench inequality and injustice. Furthermore the maleness of the "strong man" image perhaps has heightened significance today as we recognise that systemic and structural violence has typically been patriarchal in form.

Jesus' words remind us that our world is not a neutral place. There are always power dynamics at work, whether spoken or unspoken. In our postmodern society, we are perhaps more aware of this than ever. If the mantra of modernism is *scientia potentia est*, "knowledge is power", then the catchphrase of postmodernism is the opposite: *power is knowledge*. Michel Foucault, the French philosopher, was a forerunner of the postmodern worldview. He argued that knowledge is never purely objective, but in fact is used as a form of social control. Whoever has the power, in other words, can decide what truth is. In our post-truth era, when social media is used to propagate untruths and conspiracy theories, we see with startling clarity just how prescient his insights were.

For that reason, to say with Paul that Jesus is Lord or to say with John that Jesus is the lamb who reigns as King on the eternal throne is to make a powerful political claim as to where our allegiance lies and, even more fundamentally, where our base criterion for what is true and real comes from. To say Jesus is Lord is to emphatically say that all our knowledge is subjected to, judged by, the claim that Jesus is risen from the dead and reigns victorious over heaven and earth.

Karl Barth understood this with utter clarity. Barth was a Swiss theologian based in Germany in the 1930s. At the time, the German church had been fundamentally compromised by a dangerous mix of liberal theology with German nationalism. It gave theological justification for the Church's support of Hitler and national socialism. In response, Barth along with others in the Confessing Church, *die bekennende Kirche*, drafted the Barmen declaration at the centre of which was the theological *confession* that Jesus is Lord. And because Jesus is Lord, Hitler is not. The Church owes its allegiance to Christ and no other.

III.

We would do well to hear Barth's warning again today. Partly because we see the potential in the rise of populist politics for the mistakes of the 1930s to be repeated again. We should be deeply suspicious of any leader who claims to speak exclusively "for the people". But at a more general level, I think our reading from Samuel today is a reminder that all human leadership is deeply flawed. In our culture we have somewhat of an obsession with forming leaders. We have offices for "student success" and "leadership development". We have scholarships for the "leaders of tomorrow" and we celebrate those who demonstrate brilliance and innovation. On one level, it is a very good thing to form people that can guide us through the sizeable challenges facing humanity today and in the future.

But on a deeper level, there is something insidious and problematic about our infatuation with leaders. Our Samuel reading articulates it well when God says to Samuel: "the people have not rejected you, Samuel. They have rejected *me* from being king over them. Just as they have done to me, forsaking me and serving other gods, so also they are doing to you." In requesting a king to lead and guide them, the people were not simply electing a human leader with all his flaws. They were erecting an idol, an ideal, of all their hopes and expectations of what their nation could be, a divine embodiment of Israel's might and greatness.

I have been making my way through this book of essays by Madison Hamill, called *Specimen*. She is a young New Zealand author and this book recently won an Ockham award for non-fiction. I highly recommend it. Her first essay is a reflection on her experience at primary school and the ideological obsession at her school with forming young "leaders". The problem, as she articulates well, was that she did not fit the ideal of a leader. She was quiet, timid, introverted, and socially anxious. And yet, there was pressure to be someone she was not. She writes these words: "I wanted to be a leader so badly I prayed to God to make me a better person ... I gave money secretly to charity, tidied the classroom, opened doors for teachers, did my ... duties to the best of my abilities, and tried hard in class. But the people who got the badges were not just loyal, respectful, and initiative-taking, but also talkative and good at sports ... I was not." The result was that she felt that something was wrong with her. That her quietness was somehow a character flaw. Her teacher would venerate the great leaders of history: Nelson Mandela, Gandhi, Harriet Tubman, Kate Sheppard, Ed Hillary. But in her words, he would venerate them in "ghost form", shells, containers with which to fill with the ideal values of our society. Successful, capable, perfected shells of human beings filled with values.

But whose values? The problem is that when we place anyone on a pedestal, we are not only celebrating them but the collective ideals they represent. And ideals change. And furthermore no human being ever lives up to those ideals anyway. Consider the debate in recent years over public statues of historical figures

that no longer represent the values of our society. Figures who achieved significant things but whose achievements have been tarred with the brush of colonialism, or racism, or sexism... whatever it may be. I read an article this week that said one solution is simply to tear *all* statues of historical figures down. Because history is not set in stone. Because values shift. Because all human beings are deeply flawed. Because we are bound to be disappointed when we look too closely and discover the heroes and heroines we've been venerating for generations are in fact just human like the rest of us.

The church is not immune from our cultural obsession with leaders. There is an emphasis in our church at the moment, in the midst of uncertain times, to train and equip *leaders* who can *lead* us into the future. An admirable goal. But then again, I'm sure the people of Israel also had an admirable goal when they called for a king, someone to lead them.

It seems to me, from our reading from Samuel, that the Church's primary business is in forming *followers* rather than *leaders*. Followers of the God who led the people out of slavery. *Followers* of God, who orders the collective life of the people according to God's way of life. *Followers* of God revealed in Jesus, who leads his people on the path of humility and suffering, who led the way from death to life, who is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, leading us into the presence of God, ordering our life according to the coming kingdom or *kindom*. *Followers* of God who is with us by the Spirit, leading us into communion with God and with one another, restoring and healing us, resurrecting and completing us as the new humanity in the midst of a new creation.

One final comment: that almost the final image in the Bible, at the end of the book of Revelation, is an image of the new Jerusalem. And at the centre of the city there is no palace. And there is no temple. No symbols of institutional power. The vision of where we're going is a vision of life where we live with God and God lives with us in perfect communion. No need for God to be mediated through king or priest. The house has been plundered, the symbols of power razed to the ground. And it is a glorious day. Amen.

Sung response

(tune: He is Lord) CH4 443

1 He is Lord, he is Lord;
he is risen from the dead, and he is Lord;
every knee shall bow, every tongue
confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord.

2 He is love, he is love;
he has shown us by his life that he is love;
all his people sing with one voice of joy
that Jesus Christ is love.

3 He is life, he is life;
he has died to set us free and he is life;
and he calls us all to live evermore
for Jesus Christ is life.

4 He is King, he is King;
he will draw all nations to him, he is King:
and the time shall be when the world shall
sing
that Jesus Christ is King.

Prayer for others followed by the Lord's Prayer

Anglican prayer book, AA117

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.

Lo matou Tama e, oi le lagi,
ia pa'ia lou Suafa

Dedication of offering

Hymn

1 Son of God, eternal Saviour,
source of life and truth and grace,
Son of Man, whose birth incarnate
hallows all our human race;
great High Priest who, throned in glory,
for your own will ever plead,
fill us with your love and pity,
heal our wrongs, and help our need.

2 Lord, as you have lived for others,
so may we for others live;
freely have your gifts been granted,
freely may your servants give.
Yours the gold and yours the silver,
yours the wealth of sea and land,
we but stewards of your bounty
held in trust at your command.

Blessing

Music for our leaving *"Come Holy Ghost, Creator Blest"*

Flor Peeters (1903-86)

Serving today

Officiating Minister - Jordan Redding

ia o'o mai lou malo
ia faia lou finagalo
i le lalolagi e pei ona faia i le lagi.
Ia e foai mai ia te i matou i le
aso nei a matou mea'ai
e tatau ma le aso.
Ia e faamagalo mai ia tei matou
ia matou agasala
e pei oi matou fo'i ona matou faamagaloina
atu i e ua
agaleaga mai ia te'i matou;
aua fo'i e te ta'ita'iina i matou
i le tofotofoga
a ia e laveai ia tei matou ai le leaga.
aua e ou le malo ma le mana
Atoa ma le viiga e faavavau lava.
Amene.

(tune: Blaenwern) CH4 468 - Somerset Corry Lowry

3 Come, Lord Jesus, reign among us,
King of Love, and Prince of Peace;
hush the storm of strife and passion,
bid its cruel discords cease.
Yours the prayer, and yours the purpose,
that your people should be one;
grant from heaven, our hope's fruition:
here on earth your will be done.

Organist and Choir Director - Karen Knudson
Reader - Judy Breward

Prayers for Others - Keren Skegg

- *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*
- *Give before the service, into the offering boxes at the back of the church*

In relation to your monetary offering, you may:

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