



KNOX CHURCH, DUNEDIN

10am – Sunday 25 July 2021

Pentecost 9

Music to prepare us for worship “Aria” Noel Rawsthorne (1928-2018), “Ich Ruf zu dir- I call to you, Lord Jesus Christ”
J S Bach (1685-1750), “A moment of reflection” Mons Leidvin Takle (b. 1942)

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

Greeting and call to worship

...

Lift up your eyes to the heavens
and look at the earth beneath;
for the heavens will vanish like smoke,
the earth will wear out like a garment,
and those who live on it will also pass away,
but God’s salvation will be forever.

Hymn

(tune: Be Still (CH4 189)) - Jordan Redding

1 Be still for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One is here.
Come bow with knee to earth,
with reverence draw near.
On earth God’s life abounds;
we stand on holy ground.
Be still for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One is here.

2 Be still for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around.
Sustained with celestial fire,
with splendour Earth is crowned.

How awesome is the sight:
This world God’s making right.
Be still for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around.

3 Be still for the power of the Lord
is moving through this place.
God comes to cleanse and heal,
to minister with grace.
Making the whole world new,
God’s life with me and you.
Be still for the power of the Lord
is moving through this place.

Prayer

Comfort us, O God,
You, who stretched out the heavens.
You, who laid the foundations of the earth.
You, in whom all things live and move and have their being.
You, who chose us: chose us to be bearers of your word,
witnesses to your grace, stewards of your creation.
Comfort us, remind us whose we are.

For we so easily forget:
giving into fear at all that overwhelms and oppresses.
The darkness in us, between us, around us,
can seem so all-encompassing that it feels endless.
Forgive us our doubt.

By your Spirit, comfort us and reassure us,
lift the burden of our fear,
and remind us that, though all things pass away,
you are ever with us, ever faithful.

And by your Spirit, lead us.
Lead us through Christ who is ever for us: our exodus,
paving the way through troubled waters, from death to life.
In his name we pray. Amen.

Hear these words from the prophet Isaiah:
“The ransomed of the Lord shall return
And come to Zion with singing;
Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
They shall obtain joy and gladness,
And sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”

E te whanau a te Karaiti, in Christ God’s promises remain forever sure.
We are forgiven. We are set free.

Thanks be to God.

Sung refrain

AA 31

1 E te Atua aroha mai,
E te Atua aroha mai,
E te Atua aroha mai,
Ake, ake, tonu e,
ake, ake, tonu, e.

3 E te Atua awhina mai,
E te Atua awhina mai,
E te Atua awhina mai,
Ake, ake, tonu e,
ake, ake, tonu, e.

2 E te Atua manaaki mai,
E te Atua manaaki mai,
E te Atua manaaki mai,
Ake, ake, tonu e,
ake, ake, tonu, e.

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.

Apple puree and licorice tea

Musical reflection “Adagio” Frank Bridge (1879-1941)

played frequently by Prof George Petersen at Knox Church Dunedin

First bible reading: Isaiah 51:9-16

Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord! Awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago! Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon? Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep; who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to cross over? So the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. I, I am he who comforts you; why then are you afraid of a mere mortal who must die, a human being who fades like grass? You have forgotten the Lord, your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth. You fear continually all day long because of the fury of the oppressor, who is bent on destruction. But where is the fury of the oppressor? The oppressed shall speedily be released; they shall not die and go down to the Pit, nor shall they lack bread. For I am the Lord your God, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar— the Lord of hosts is his name. I have put my words in your mouth, and hidden you in the shadow of my hand, stretching out the heavens and laying the foundations of the earth, and saying to Zion, ‘You are my people.’

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

Gospel reading: John 6:14-21

When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, ‘This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.’ When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself. When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, got into a boat, and started across the lake to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The lake became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the lake and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But he said to them, ‘It is I; do not be afraid.’ Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land towards which they were going.

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

Sermon ‘I am the one who comforts you’

I was tidying up my chaplaincy study at the university the other day. And I came across some old business cards for the Student Christian Movement. I’ve recently joined its National Coordinating Group, so I was particularly interested to find these relics of its history.

The business cards struck me. They were clearly quite effective, because I’ve been thinking about them ever since. On them was printed: “Student Christian Movement: A Christianity you *can* believe in”. An evocative phrase.

The phrase, I’m guessing, was intended to disarm folk who bring a whole lot of negative stereotypes about Christianity and its beliefs. Beliefs that seem overly restrictive, moralistic, even judgmental. Beliefs characterised by a popular view of Christianity today, often reinforced by our media and popular culture. Convictions that lead people

to go, I can't believe in *that*. And so the Student Christian Movement has long advocated for a different expression of Christianity and, in my mind, has been quite effective at creating a place of belonging for disaffected Christians who might otherwise have left the Church.

It promotes an expression of Christianity which emphasises the social and political impacts of the Gospel. There is much about other Christian groups on campus that I value and appreciate as well. But I find SCM's emphasis on these broader social and political issues in pursuit of justice and peace refreshing. Hence why I've joined the National Coordinating Group.

However, there was something about the phrase, "a Christianity you *can* believe in", that also sat uneasily with me. I was trying to work out what it was. I think, for me, the phrase implies that we are justified in doing some editing or redacting work to make the claims of Christianity more palatable to our modern ears. And I think that's a dangerous game.

It seems to me that if we continually restrict the claims of Christianity to what we find palatable, to what we *can* believe in, then we quickly end up with a restrictive and narrow faith that simply mirrors our own image and value system. We subject scripture to some other truth criteria that have gone unchallenged.

I know that wasn't SCM's intention with the phrase. Quite the opposite: they've always advocated a very open and broad faith. So I'm not criticizing them, but simply using the phrase to enter into our passage today from John's Gospel.

Because here we encounter a Christ who refuses to be contained by the expectations of the crowd.

The crowd did exactly what we are often inclined to do. Having witnessed the miraculous sign -- in this case the feeding of the 5000 -- they sought to make sense of it all, to fill it with meaning from what they knew.

Jesus is a prophet, they said, the one we've been expecting!

Let's make Jesus our king, they said, one who can challenge the political powers of our day.

One who can advocate for our needs.

One on whom we can place all our hopes and dreams and expectations.

A Messiah we *can* believe in.

In a way, the crowd wasn't wrong. Jesus was the prophet, the new Moses, who was to come into the world. And he was the messianic King, long-hoped for. The problem was, their imaginations were too small. A Jesus who is the answer to our social and political imaginings, will also be limited by those expectations and hopes.

But Jesus does not play the game. The moment the crowd tries to make Jesus their own, he departs from them.

II.

One of the problems, it seems to me, of projecting a palatable Jesus, is that life itself is often not palatable. Reality rarely fits within our tidy view of things. Rarely fits our sensibilities and tastes. Some of the problems facing our world seem often too complex to solve. Human behaviour often seems so irrational. Far from being palatable, the stomach churns and is unsettled by much of what we read and hear.

The human condition is also often unpalatable. The tragedy of sickness. Of abandonment. Of loneliness. Of violence towards others. Towards oneself. Of grief. Of death.

Some of the evils in our world go beyond our ability to explain or make sense of. In the midst of tragedy, "palatable" explanations, things we *can* believe in, can seem woefully inadequate. We peer into the abyss. The chaos swirls around, and we are utterly terrified.

We get a sense of that in our reading from Isaiah today. The reading is part of a passage typically read during the passover meal. It speaks of a God, who has power over the chaotic forces of the world. Evil is represented as an inhuman dragon, beyond human power to control:

*Was it not you who pierced the dragon?
Was it not you who dried up the sea,
the waters of the great deep;
who made the depths of the sea a way
for the redeemed to cross over?*

The reference of the sea-crossing is, of course, talking about the Exodus, when God parted the waters of the Red Sea so that the people could escape the Egyptian army hunting them down.

Isaiah goes on, reminding the people that even the most terrifying, overwhelming powers of the world are indeed limited, and will indeed pass away. Everything is silenced before God, the Maker of Heaven and Earth:

*Why are you afraid of a mere mortal who must die,
a human being who fades like grass?
You have forgotten the LORD, your Maker,
who stretched out the heavens
and laid the foundations of the earth.
You fear continually all day long
because of the fury of the oppressor,
who is bent on destruction.
But where is the fury of the oppressor?*

Isaiah is concerned not about rational or palatable explanations of God, but about comforting the people in the midst of the chaos. In the midst of the storm. In the midst of the evil facing them, in the face of which every theological explanation seems somehow trite.

This is a God who meets us in the midst of the storm, when all rational thoughts seem utterly irrelevant. The God who holds us in loving, comforting embrace, before we ever hold God in our head.

III.

We're not told why the disciples, in our reading from John, wanted to row to Capernaum without Jesus. In some ways, it doesn't matter. And John is scant on the details. It seems more significant that they pushed out from the shore in the first place. Rather than joining with the cries of the crowd, trying to subject Jesus to their expectations, they set out into the unknown.

Darkness fell and the storm raged, we're told. Both deeply symbolic for John. The place of unbelief and of unknowing. There are no tame demons here. Just the wild abyss and your existence at the mercy of the waves.

It is here that Jesus came to meet them. At the moment when the disciples were beyond themselves in the middle of the lake, far from the shore. At the moment when the disciples were cast upon him as if their lives depended on it. Because in all likelihood they did.

John is making a claim. He is giving his emphatic answer to the claims of the crowd.

This Jesus is no mere human prophet or political leader. This Jesus is the very living God, who, as we hear in Isaiah, "stirs up the sea so that its waves roar", who "stretched out the heavens", and who "laid the foundation of the earth."

He is very God, who has power over the irrational forces of chaos in the world. The one on whom we can be cast in utter confidence.

"I am he. Do not be afraid," Jesus said to the disciples. The same words that God speaks in our Isaiah reading. *"I, I am the one who comforts you."* Whether or not John had this exact passage in mind is unclear but the claim he is making is nonetheless unambiguous. Jesus speaks and acts with the authority of the eternal and mysterious God.

Our faith is one of deep mystery. Not so much a Christianity we *can* believe in, but a faith that is always stretching our belief deeper, further, wider, as we are led by Christ into God's expansive future. Our faith constantly draws us beyond the shore, beyond belief, to unlearn, to challenge our rationale, criteria, ideologies, by which we make sense of the world.

By throwing ourselves into this mystery, there are no easy or tidy answers, no palatable belief system that can be distilled. But there is comfort, we're told, in the presence of the one who leads us through the chaos and the storm into everlasting joy. Amen.

Hymn

*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.

[Refrain]

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.

[Refrain]

Prayer for others (followed by the Lord's Prayer)

Anglican prayer book

**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.**

Notices and dedication of offering

Hymn

1 Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair,
Lord, in the suffering this is our prayer.
Bread for the children, justice, joy, peace,
sunrise to sunset your kingdom increase.

2 Shelter for fragile lives, cures for their ills,
work for the craftsmen, trade for their skills.
Land for the dispossessed, rights for the weak,
voices to plead the cause of those who can't speak.
*God of the poor, friend of the weak,
give us compassion, we pray,
melt our cold hearts, let tears fall like rain.
Come, change our love from a spark to a flame.*

3 Refuge from cruel wars, havens from fear,
cities for sanctuary, freedoms to share.
Peace to the killing fields, scorched earth to green,
Christ for the bitterness, the cross for the pain.

Benediction

Music for our leaving "*Toccata*" from *Organ Symphony no 5 in F*, Charles-Marie Widor (1844-1937)

Serving today

Associate Minister - Jordan Redding
Organist and Choir Director - Karen Knudson
Reader - Jill Rutherford
Prayers for Others - Mavis Duncanson

(tune: God of the poor) CH4 259 - Graham Kendrick

4 Rest for the ravaged earth, oceans and streams
plundered and poisoned, our future, our dreams.
Lord, end our madness, carelessness, greed;
make us content with the things that we need. [*Refrain*]

5 Lighten our darkness, breathe on this flame,
until your justice burns brightly again;
until the nations learn of your ways,
seek your salvation and bring you their praise. [*Refrain*]

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*