



KNOX CHURCH, DUNEDIN

10am – Sunday 2 January 2022

Second Sunday after Christmas

Music to prepare us for worship *Wie schon leuchtet der Morgenstern (How Brightly Shines the Morning Star)*

Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767)

Call to worship

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

Ma Ihowa koe a manaaki. May God bless you.

Before the earth was; before the stars and moon and sun existed, there was Wisdom; there was the Light.

Before the seas and trees and animals and humans--- there was Wisdom; there was the Light.

Wisdom created; Light brought hope. All that existed was One; was holy; was beautiful.

The Oneness was fractured as choices were made; as anger and anxiety entered the world; as wisdom was discarded and replaced with fear and greed and competition.

As we worship today, help us Holy Spirit of Wisdom and Light to return to our oneness; to heal the fractured world; to live in harmony and peacefulness.

May we be authentic followers of Jesus, an incarnation of Wisdom and Light. May we live in the spirit of Jesus as healers and bearers of wisdom and light.

Hymn *(please stand and sing while masked)*

(tune: Blauenwern CH4 468) - Ruth Duck

1 Womb of life, and source of being,
home of ev'ry restless heart,
in your arms the worlds awakened;
you have loves us from the start.
We, your children, gather 'round you,
at the table you prepare.
Sharing stories tears and laughter,
we are nurtured by your care.

2 Word in flesh, our brother Jesus,
born to bring us second birth,
you have come to stand beside us,
knowing weakness, knowing earth.
Priest who shares our human struggles,
Life of Life, and Death of Death,
risen Christ, come stand among us,
send the Spirit by your breath.

3 Brooding Spirit, move among us;
be our partner, be our friend.
When our mem'ry fails, remind us whose we
are,
what we intend. Labour with us,
aid the birthing of the new world made new,
ever singing, ever praising, one with all,
and one with you.

4 Mother, Brother, holy Partner;
Father, Spirit, Only Son:
we would praise your name forever,
one-in-three, and three-in-one.
We would share your life, your passion,
share your word of world made new,
ever singing, ever praising,
one with all, and one with you.

Opening Prayer

Assurance of forgiveness and Acceptance

E te whānau, in Christ we are forgiven and made whole. **Thanks be to God.**

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

Please stand and make a gesture of peace towards people around you.

Hymn *(please stand and sing while masked)*

Colin Gibson

1 Where the road runs out and the
signposts end,
where we come to the edge of today,
be the God of Abraham for us;
send us out upon our way.

*Lord, you were our beginning,
the faith that gave us birth.
We look to you, our ending,
our hope for heaven and earth.*

2 When the coast is left and we journey on
to the rim of the sky and the sea,
be the sailor's friend, be the dolphin
Christ,
lead us on to eternity. [*Refrain*]

3 When the clouds are low and the wind is
strong,
when tomorrow's storm draws near,
be the spirit bird hov'ring overhead
who will take away our fear. [*Refrain*]

Time for children *(Wisdom from Winnie the Pooh and Jesus)*

Readings - Listen to God's Word for Us

Wisdom 10:15-21

(translation: the Common English Bible)¹

Wisdom rescued a holy people and a pure generation from the grip of people who were crushing them. She entered the soul of a man who served the Lord. She enabled him to oppose terrifying kings by means of signs and wonders. She rewarded the holy ones for their labours and led them along a wonderful route. She became a shelter for them by day and a flaming shower of stars by night. She carried them across the Red Sea and led them through deep waters. She drowned their enemies and caused the depths to boil up over them. The people who did what was right then stripped the ungodly of their weapons. All together they sang hymns to your holy name, Lord. They praised your hand, which had defended and fought for them. Wisdom opens the mouths of those who can't speak and puts clear words on the tongues of infants.

John 1: 1-14A

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us.

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

Reflections - When the Signposts End

So, here we are—the beginning of a new year. It is perhaps no accident that some of the lectionary readings today have to do with wisdom and light. Sometimes this past year it seemed the darkness was winning...the road had run out and the signposts ended. Here we are now on the cusp of a new year...without much to guide us as we try to navigate the future. Families, nations, the world are torn apart by response to COVID, to vaccines and mandates; torn apart by responses to climate change; poverty, homelessness; water rights. It often seems as if the whole world is divided into two---or more factions ...and all parties are digging in their heels; blaming and shaming those who disagree.

I am a great supporter of science, reason and logic but it seems when we try to think of how to unite disparate factions, reason is not enough. We run out of our usual signposts. Right now it seems the whole world is anxious, fearful and overwhelmed; the very worse situation in which to move into the future. No amount of research, reason or logic is going to bring together polarized groups in our world. What is left to us? We can take the road that continues into cynicism, despair and anger. Or perhaps we can take a road that leads to wisdom...to take the leap into a spiritual dimension that alone can heal these wounds of the world.

What I observe is that many people are searching for a spiritual dimension to life that offers hope and a way forward. People raised Christians now look to the wisdom of Buddhism, Sufism, nature religions; the spirituality of indigenous communities. All of these have much to enrich us all and in these days of fractured communities, can offer an experience of healing and connectedness.

At the same time I think it is sad that Christianity has often neglected its own rich tradition of wisdom and spirituality and has over emphasized cognitive knowledge at the expense of heart wisdom. But Christianity has a tradition of mystics, beginning with the teachings of Jesus. Sadly we have lost some of the understanding of Jesus as a wisdom teacher, a sage, as we focused on Jesus as Saviour from sin.
...

In an article adapted from the *Wisdom of Jesus: Transforming Heart and Mind*, Episcopal priest, Cynthia Bourgeault says:

His (Jesus) message was not only one of repentance (at least in the usual way we understand it) Rather, he stayed close to the ground of wisdom: the transformation of human consciousness. He asked those timeless and deeply personal questions: What does it mean to die before you die? How do you go about losing your little life to find the bigger one? Is it possible to live on this planet with a generosity, abundance, fearlessness, and beauty that mirror Divine Being itself?

Are not these not compelling questions? When we are in conflict-- be it personal with families and friends...or political with polarized groups...how **DO** we live on this planet with generosity, fearlessness and beauty? How do we “lose our little life” to find a bigger one? Is it possible to die to our own individual judgments and prejudices and grudges in order to open our hearts and understand someone who experiences life differently? Can we go beyond some of our rational arguments and find the spiritual dimension where we can connect with others and the wisdom and find a bigger life for all?

Whatever our views on vaccination, climate change, water rights...whenever we believe we have the **only** correct and righteous stance and it is simply a matter of convincing those other who are wrong...we will never be able to bring healing. Knowledge and intellect alone will not connect us. Don't we all...however conservative or progressive our views... need to think of how we live on this planet with a Light and Wisdom and generosity of soul that can mirror the Divine Being? How do we go about losing our little life; our personal ideologies to create a larger, more expansive life? Can we conceive of a spiritual dimension in which we are all connected...that can open us to finding shared understandings of life that might actually save us all? Can we actually be humble enough to admit that we can learn from those with whom we disagree?

Christian mystics have offered some glimpses of this way. Meister Eckhart, Julian of Norwich, Hildegard of Bingen are a few of the mystics whose writing, art and music we still have access to. And though they lived in very different times and situations, there are some bits of wisdom they share: the connectedness of all humankind with the Divine; humankind with the earth, and the deep experience of the Divine-- the Light with us always. I can't do justice to this rich tradition today, only offer a few of their words.

Juliana of Norwich might be especially relevant for us today: It is believed that she lost both her husband and her son to the Plague, she then entered and spent the rest of her life in a cloister, but she saw many people and offered them counsel through a window in her cell. At about age 30 she became very ill and almost died; but that was the beginning of her Revelations. In spite of all her challenges, she had an optimistic faith. She is best known for her saying 'All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well'.

Meister Eckhart, a German mystic who lived from 1260-1328 says: says, "Spirituality is not to be learned by flight from the world, or by running away from things, or by turning solitary and going apart from the world. Rather, we must learn an inner solitude wherever or with whomsoever we may be. We must learn to penetrate things and find God there."

How can we find that inner solitude which makes it possible to understand those with whom we disagree? How do we cultivate that generosity of heart to learn from those with whom we disagree? Rather than reacting with anger and judgment to people who don't agree on vaccination or climate change...can we look deeply enough to see what might be underneath this position?

Might we understand that often there is a long-term experience of people feeling their concerns are not being heard? Or that people are reacting out of a very deep-seated fear? I personally find this very challenging. It is a lot easier of me to label and dismiss those, for example in my home country of the US, who are of a different political or religious ideology. And yes there **are** some people I who are using this to hoard personal and economic power. But there are also a lot of folks who are simply afraid: afraid of this pandemic; terrorized by changes in the country; in the world. Offering logical or scientific reasons for them to not be afraid is useless when what is needed is compassion and deep listening and understanding of their fear.

When I get really frustrated, I think of my own fears: I am really afraid of water and hardly am able to swim after many lessons with great instructors. I am fine in a pool as long as my feet touch water...but otherwise I panic. No amount of reasoning or logic changes that. The only thing that helps is knowing people are there to hold me up if I begin to drown.

There is a great deal of fear and angst among many in our Western culture because they believe they will be left behind; hurt or abandoned. We need wisdom and spirituality to help us respond in ways that can heal the rifts.

The mystics also emphasized the connection of humanity with the earth and nature's cycles.

Hildegard of Bingen, a German mystic, found within her own experience of pain and illness a fertile ground for amazing creativity in art, music, healing. She was a composer; artist; scientist... compared the spiritual life with the nature's cycle of life: "The Word is living, being, spirit, all verdant greening, all creativity." And, "The earth which sustains humanity must not be injured. It must not be destroyed!"

Isn't this what Jesus tried to teach? How did Jesus, how did the mystics, actually find that inner solitude or that experience of living in the Light? We know that Jesus often went off alone in nature to find that inner space of connection with the Divine. The mystics and Jesus found that connection through prayer; meditation; a willingness to undergo a very challenging self –reflection and discipline ...a strong connection to the earth and creation and a sense of joy in life.

I have to confess that personally I have not been very good at a regimented schedule of prayer and meditation. I might say that is because I am too much of a free spirit...or just that I am stubborn...maybe both. I don't know how it is for you to develop a deeper spiritual life. But I DO believe that being in community helps us to develop our spiritual dimension.

That's one of the reason I am so passionate about pastoral care and building community and connections within church: small groups where we might not only read the mystics but also meditate together; where we connect and care for each other's pains and share each other's joys...where we share light and hope and wisdom.

I think it is pretty hard to find wisdom alone.

But we can help each other to find laughter and joy even in the midst of fear and uncertainty and pain; help each other to respond to others with compassion and understanding rather than shaming and blaming. We can support policies and laws that protect the whole community and the earth without demonizing all who disagree.

Isn't one of deepest fears the fear that we are alone in the face of pain and loss and uncertainty? What can give us inner wisdom and peace is falling into that deep solitude in which we are all connected to each other; to the earth; to the Divine Light. Therein is the road to Wisdom and Generosity and courage and hope, even within the pain. That is what Hildegard means when she says, "All will be well; all will be well. All manner of things will be well." Not that we will all get what we want...but that we can live in joy with what we have.

This is our challenge as we move into move into 2022, is it not? We can approach it with the same old arguments and conflicts...or take a leap into the spiritual dimension to live on this planet with a generosity, abundance, fearlessness, and beauty that mirror Divine Being itself.

When the road runs out and the signposts end we are not left with nothing. We are left upheld and enfolded by the Wisdom and Light of the Spirit's love. In closing I invite you to reflect on this quote from Meister Eckhart:

"And suddenly, you know: It's time to start something new and trust the magic of beginnings." May it be so.

Hymn *(please stand and sing while masked)*

(tune: Hyfrydol (CH4 39)) - Peter Mayer

1 Though below me, I feel no motion
Standing on these mountains and plains
Far away from the rolling ocean
Still my dry land heart can say
I've been sailing all my life now
Never harbour or port have I known
The wide universe is the ocean I travel
And the earth is my blue boat home

2 Sun, my sail and moon, my rudder
As I ply the starry sea
Leaning over the edge in wonder
Casting questions into the deep
Drifting here with my ship's companions

All we kindred pilgrim souls
Making our way by the lights of the
heavens
In our beautiful blue boat home.

3 I give thanks to the waves upholding me
Hail the great winds urging me on
Greet the infinite sea before me
Sing the sky my sailor's song
I was born upon the fathoms
Never harbour or port have I known
The wide universe is the ocean I travel
And the earth is my blue boat home.

Prayer of thanks and for others

The Lord's Prayer in English and Te Reo Maori

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.

Blessing and the Offering *(please stand)*

Closing hymn *(we will stand and sing while masked)*

Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And never brought to mind?
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And days o' lang syne!

Chorus:

*For auld lang syne, my dear
For auld lang syne,
We'll tak a cup o' kindness yet
For auld lang syne!*

We twa hae run about the braes,
And pu'd the gowans fine,
But we've wander'd mony a weary foot
Sin' auld lang syne. [*Chorus*]

We twa hae paidl't in the burn
Frae morning sun till dine,
But seas between us braid hae roar'd
Sin' auld lang syne. [*Chorus*]

*Should old acquaintances be forgotten,
And never brought to mind?
Should old acquaintances be forgotten,
And days of long ago!*

Chorus:

*For times gone by, my dear
For times gone by,
We will take a cup of kindness yet
For times gone by.*

*We two have run about the hillsides
And pulled the daisies fine,
But we have wandered many a weary foot
For times gone by. [*Chorus*]*

*We two have paddled (waded) in the stream
From noon until dinner time,
But seas between us broad have roared
Since times gone by. [*Chorus*]*

And there's a hand, my trusty fiere,
And gie's a hand o' thine,
And we'll tak a right guid willie-waught
For auld lang syne! [Chorus]

And surely ye'll be your pint' stoup,
And surely I'll be mine!
And we'll tak a cup o' kindness yet
For auld lang syne!

*And there is a hand, my trusty friend,
And give us a hand of yours,
And we will take a goodwill drink (of ale)
For times gone by! [Chorus]*

*And surely you will pay for your pint,
And surely I will pay for mine!
And we will take a cup of kindness yet
For times gone by! [Chorus]*

Blessing and sending forth

Music for our leaving *Wie schon leuchtet der Morgenstern* - Max Reger (1873-1916), *Praeambulum supra Jesu meine Freude (Prelude on Jesu My Joy)* KWV 502 - Johann Ludwig Krebs (1713-80)

Serving today

Leader - Peg Pfab
Organist and Choir Director - Karen Knudson
Playing today - Peter Stockwell
Reader - Janet Sim Elder
Prayers for Others - Russell Thew

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