



Weekly Worship

24th Sunday after Pentecost

Sunday November 7, 2021

Gathering & Lighting the Candle

Today we hear about signs of hope, signs that point to God's presence even though, often, we can only recognise them in hindsight. What signs of hope have you noticed over the past few days?

Let those signs of hope light your way.
Light the candle, Christ is with us.

Call to worship

Psalm 127:1 Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labour in vain.

You call us into your house, God of hope
and build us together as one body.

Be present with us, wisdom of Christ
stay beside us, watch and pray.

Breathe us into action, Spirit of Life,
and let your peace prevail.

Acknowledging

As we gather, we acknowledge the (name of First Peoples where you are) the traditional custodians of this land and these waters. We pay respect to elders past, present and emerging. As First and Second Peoples walking together, we commit ourselves to be people of the covenant, listening, truth telling and seeking justice for all.



Uniting Aboriginal and Islander
Christian Congress

Singing: Love divine, TIS 217

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.

Come, Almighty, to deliver,
let us all thy life receive;
suddenly return, and never,
nevermore they 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.

Finish, then, thy new creation,
true 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.

¹Charles Wesley, Rowland Hew Prichard

Listening

Read: Mark 12:38-44

For these words of faith and for Jesus the Word:

Thanks be to God.



Weekly Worship. Season of Pentecost 2021. Presbytery of Gippsland, Fig Tree Worship Resource



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA



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Prayer

We can imagine you in the temple,
Jesus who watches and waits;
imagine you noting the comings and goings,
hearing familiar sounds,
seeing the people for who they are.

We give thanks for the stories
of your life and ministry
that lean into our stories
and lend direction to our way.

We give thanks for the blessing of people
who give all that they can of themselves,
pouring hope and love into the lives of others
without counting the cost.

*(bring these people into your prayer
silently, or with words or candles)*

We give thanks for the capacity to do the same,
for opportunities great and small
that often come our way.

But here we confess:
that we don't always pay attention
when we see the suffering of others

that we sometimes participate
deliberately or unknowingly
in systems and economies that deprive people
of life and livelihood

that we don't always respond
with hopeful hearts and open tables
when you send the hungry to meet us

Forgive us, Jesus who watches and waits,
forgive us for our pride and greed,
our apathy and arrogance.

Teach us how to bring all we have, to life,
as you do,

(time of quiet)

Sisters and brothers, we are loved,
forgiven, healed, blessed and made new.

Thank you, Spirit of life, Amen.

Listening

Read: Ruth 3:1-5, 4:13-17
(read the whole book of Ruth at home, it's not long!)

May these words of faith live in us:
and bear much fruit to God's glory.

Reflecting

Rev. Sandra Houghton

When Naomi, in the book of Ruth, returns to Bethlehem after the deaths of her husband and two sons; she returns as the walking dead. All she can do is lament her tragic losses.

It seems that her life is over, with no hope and no future. She even changes her name to reflect the bitter turn downward her life has taken. "Don't call me Naomi, call me Marah, because the Almighty God has made my life bitter."

She cannot see the possibility that God is remembering her or caring for her. Yet, standing in the shadows beside her is Ruth, her Moabite daughter-in-law. Ruth stands there, unnoticed by Naomi and unwelcome in the city. She is the sign of unrecognised hope and forgotten friendship.

There is another sign of hope, as Naomi and Ruth have arrived at the time of the barley harvest. It is Ruth who decides that she must act, despite her vulnerability to abuse as a foreigner and as a lone woman without a male protector, and seek food to sustain them by gleaning grain in the wake of the harvesters.

In the barley field where Ruth gleans, the next sign of hope appears. The field is owned by Boaz, a relative of Naomi. He ensures that Ruth is not molested and that she has plenty of grain to gather. He recognises in her a sacrificial loyalty and love for Naomi that should be rewarded.

Reflecting continues





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Reflecting continues

The next sign of hope comes from Naomi, who has started to come alive again. She remembers her own Jewish traditions and teachings, and decides that she will try to use them to secure a future for Ruth and herself. It is a risky plan, one that will put Ruth in a vulnerable position.

Naomi remembered that there was an obligation for the nearest male relative to marry a widow, in order to secure her future and the future of any children. If he married her, he would also inherit any property or possessions. However, many men were reluctant to marry widows as it involved taking on a great deal of responsibility and obligations, and any children would be considered to be the children of the dead husband.

Naomi decides that they should use seduction to persuade Boaz to marry Ruth, hence the scene at the threshing floor. Boaz is clearly flattered by Ruth's approach, but he is not the nearest relative. However, he is an honourable man and he does not take advantage of her vulnerability, but rather he willingly accepts that he has a responsibility to her and then seeks to find an honourable way to marry her.

To do this, Boaz seeks out Naomi's nearest male relative, who declines to marry Ruth. Boaz then marries Ruth, and shows her the same kind of love, generosity, goodness and kindness that Ruth had lavished on Naomi. And so, by the end of the story we have a joyful Naomi nursing her grandson as the townswomen remind her that she has been blessed by the love of Ruth "who has done more for you than seven sons." Her life has been turned around and her future is full of hope.

At the beginning of the story, those signs of hope which have come to fruition were all there. However, they were unrecognised by Naomi as her focus was on her grief and loss.

She believed that she was in a hopeless situation, but it was only as Ruth acted and moved towards the future that the signs of hope were gradually revealed. If they had remained focused on the past, lamenting

their losses, they would have remained stuck in hopelessness.

Moving forward was risky, and it took courage, for there were times when they could have been revictimized, but God, the unseen actor in this whole story, was there protecting and guiding them.

When we, as individuals, as families, as a church, get to those points when hope seems absent and the future uncertain, how do we react? Do we lament and cry out to God? Or blame God or each other? Or keep trying to do the same things we've always done?

Or do we have the same kind of faith and courage, exemplified by Ruth, that enables us to strike out on a new path, seeking a new future? For that is what God calls us to do. God calls us to trust that there is a new future, and to act as though there is one. For just as in the story of Ruth the future is often only revealed as we move forward.

Who would have guessed at the beginning of the book of Ruth that it would end in joy with the birth of the child Obed, ancestor of both David and Jesus? Ruth's faithfulness and courage were to bear extraordinary fruit. Let us also step out in faith and courage, and see where God will lead us. Amen.



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Responding:

(this poem was published in Anneke Oppewal's book titled *Ruth, her story, our story...* Challenge Books, Australia, 2012)

at gathering time

fields fat with hope
glow golden
in the frail first light of day
and we are here at gathering time

ripe, ripe with blessing
workers toil
to reap the grace full bent their way
and we are here at gathering time

here, faith will find
a resting place of promise
and life will burst
from earth all but forgotten
and we will dance
the sway of grain
and grace
and life
and hope
and home

for we are here
at gathering time.

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Prayers for the World and Community

We pray today for the women of the world:
whose bodies bear the cost of feeding the family,
whose lives are deemed worthless to others
whose families have been torn apart.

**Through our actions, in your love,
bring hope and healing, God of peace.**

We pray today for the women of the world:
for young ones excluded from education
for mothers watching starving babies die
for grandparents carrying grief and pain

**Through our actions, in your love,
bring hope and healing, God of peace.**

We pray today for the women of the world:
the ones exploited in slavery,
the ones trapped as victims of war,
the ones whose pain is known only to you,

**Through our actions, in your love,
bring hope and healing, God of peace.**

Help us to see people as Jesus did,
and where there is injustice
and where there is bigotry
and where there is screaming silence
there let our voices join with yours,
and through our actions, in your love,
bring hope and healing, God of peace.

The Lord's Prayer

**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 for ever. Amen.**





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Passing the peace

May the Peace of God dwell with you:
and also with you.

Offering

God who sees us, bless these gifts, given from those who have much and those who have little. Bless the hope that we bring and multiply it. Bless our faith and courage that it might be strong and humble. Use all that we have to bring healing, joy and justice, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Notices

Gippsland's Presbytery in Council is meeting this coming Saturday Nov 13th online. We pray that the Spirit of God is amongst us, awakening, inspiring and leading us to be fruitful. If you would like to join as a friend and welcome visitor, please email gippspreszoom@gmail.com

Singing: God gives us a future TiS 687

God gives us a future, daring us to go
into dreams and dangers on a path unknown.
We will face tomorrow with the Spirit's power,
we will let God change us for new life starts now.

We must leave behind us sins of yesterday,
for God's new beginning is a better way.
Fear and doubt and habit must not hold us back:
God gives hope and insight
and the strength we lack.

Holy Spirit, teach us how to read the signs,
How to meet the challenge of our troubled times.
Love us into action, stir us into prayer,
till we choose God's life,
and find our future there.

²Elizabeth J Smith, John Michael Brierley

Blessing

Go knowing that you are loved
and live as if you believe it.
Make your life a gift of gratitude
and don't hold back.

Look for the lost
and find the forgotten.
Live lives of humble faith
and outrageous courage,

and may the blessing of God,
One in three, Three in One,
be amongst you, within you and around you,
today and always,

Amen.

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²W: Elizabeth J Smith 1956- M: John Michael Brierley 1932. Used with permission CCLI 206 729.

