

## A TEAM SERVICE 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2022

### CALL TO WORSHIP:

The Spirit of grace is actively stirring in the world, creeping into places where a word of compassion is needed, riding waves of joy as wrongs are put right and justice is done, always hopeful and always anticipating the best, the Spirit is with us here,  
**may we catch her delight and desire for what is good.**

### PRAYER OF INVOCATION:

Come Spirit, captivate us in your desire for goodness enthrall us with the way in which your kindness transforms the world and inspire us to do the same. **AMEN**

### HYMN: WOV: PRAISE MY SOUL THE KING OF HEAVEN

1. Praise, my soul, the king of heaven;  
to his feet thy tribute bring;  
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,  
who like me his praise should sing?  
Praise him, praise him, hallelujah,  
praise the everlasting king!

2. Praise him for his grace and favour  
to our fathers in distress;  
praise him still the same for ever  
slow to chide and swift to bless:  
praise him, praise him, hallelujah,  
glorious in his faithfulness!

3. Father like he tends and spares us;  
well our feeble frame he knows;  
in his hands he gently bears us,

Rescues us from all our foes:  
praise him, praise him, hallelujah,  
widely as his mercy flows.

4. Frail as summer's flower we flourish,  
blows the wind and it is gone;  
but while mortals rise and perish,  
God endures unchanging on.  
praise him, praise him, hallelujah,  
praise the high eternal one.

5. Angels help us to adore him,  
ye behold him face to face;  
sun and moon bow down before him,  
dwellers all in time and space:  
praise him, praise him, hallelujah,  
praise with us the God of grace.

### PRAYER OF CONFESSION:

We are people who desire goodness and justice but sometimes our enthusiasm for justice becomes depleted.

Some people and situations are hard work, our compassion is tested, and we become selective with those who we include in our goodwill.

The distressing stories we hear and all the injustices we see zap our motivation and our energy to continue to be attuned to our world that gets worn down and we feel unable to keep on hoping and striving for good.

There are too many people in need, too many causes to contribute to, too much abuse of power, too many systems that are too difficult to change, and the temptation is to let go, to let injustice have its way.

But that's not your way God, you ask us to look to you and seek strength and hope from you dear God. **AMEN**

### WORDS OF ASSURANCE

The nourishment we need to continue to be God's people of justice and hope is given to us by the Spirit, who dwells and abides in us. When we open our hearts with prayer to kindness and gratitude, we then find strength and compassion and we need to carry on. God is with us.

### BIBLE READINGS: Psalm 63: 1 – 8

Isaiah 55: 1 – 9

Luke 13: 1 – 9

## REFLECTION: Final Reflection for service 20<sup>th</sup> March 2022

Today the readings begin with the Psalm Chapter 63 and verses one to eight. It is a section of the Psalm that has David glorifying the Lord. Being dedicated to live his life to the best it can be. Those last few words remind me of when I was taking part in a training day for early childhood teachers. I am sure the lecturers of the workshop did not realise that the Words they used had come from the bible. Today's reading where David is extolling how God is always there with encouragement and this is; "To be the best you can be."

David is so poetical and I love the verses 7 and 8 "I sing happy songs in the shadow of your wings. I stay close to you and your powerful arm supports me." This is a metaphor for Gods all encompassing love.

We as humans have to have something tangible that is significant to us, when we try to explain to others. how important our faith in God is.

Isaiah in Chapter 55 is full of such examples of using basic everyday experiences and longings to explain the wonders of God. Yes; God is inviting us to drink and eat without having to pay for anything. It is free.

If anybody these days offers something for free we are sceptical and wonder if there is some catch. The invitation from God is not for just a few, it is there for everyone. It isn't there just for the privileged in our Society but it includes all. How fantastic is that.

When we search for meaning in our lives, and not just in things such as a new car, a new boat, a new BBQ, a new ebike, a new job. **But would we be satisfied?**

"Why waste your money on what isn't really food?" Says Isaiah. So what is the alternative? Call out to God. Not only when you are having difficulty. Call to God as a true friend, someone who doesn't judge you. Someone who builds you up and does not use the word "**BUT**"! "**She is my dear friend, but.....!**

**Isaiah says.** "Let them return to the **LORD**, and He will have mercy on them;

**And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.**

**"Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD.**

**"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, Nor are your thoughts higher than my thoughts.**

**Isaiah** is a prophet and is recognised as such. He had been marked out by God as a bringer of the good news that everyone was able to be forgiven. Isaiah said to them you are invited to the feast with water, wine and milk. The difference between God & humans is that **growth** is just as much a **gift of grace** as our **salvation**.

The three reassurances God makes with us humans are to:-

- 1) Listen carefully,
- 2) Eat what is good
3. **I will make an everlasting covenant with you.**

Reconciliation with God is for anyone and it has no cost.

Let us examine the reading from Jesus disciple Luke. Luke is not known to us for stirring up the waters

*Rian Adams mentions in his contribution on the internet that church goers and non church goers struggle with; "Am I good enough for God? And he goes on to say "I can't speak for you but at certain times in my life I've felt like my decisions, and my life choices drove God away. We carry the fear that God's going to "teach us a lesson".*

The Lesson today comes from Luke and he uses a number of well worn paths of teaching others the power of **THE SPIRIT**.

It is a bit of a **puzzle** for us, because we are left to decide what this parable will teach us. It is a bit like the Rubik's cube. You have to get all the pieces correctly to come up with the completed puzzle. As I have grown (older) I am very interested in what this lesson can tell us as a Christian follower of Christ.

As a child I believed everything the Sunday School teachers taught us without question. I diligently recited and memorised texts and performed in our Church presentations and listened with anxiety at what most of our Ministers were saying over the Pulpit about **HELL & Fire**.

When I became a member of our Bible Class things began to change in my thought processes of church, and I wanted to know what went on in other churches! We were lucky that some of our bible class teachers could organise trips to other churches in our district. After that I bravely stepped through the door of the Catholic Church. It was a revelation to me that although the practises were different the belief in Christ was the same.

I have looked at this parable often and have interpreted it probably to suit myself but recently have discovered a new concept to me and it is that of:-

### **Who is the Landowner?**

Of course I am thinking it is God but another suggestion is The Humans are the Landowners! That makes sense as my knowledge of Māori Tikanga indicates that the whenua is the Earth Mother, Papatuanuku and we as people of this land are in charge of looking after the whenua.

Rian Adams says- "I think this passage can teach us some unique lessons if we put ourselves at the centre of the story. When we're at the centre, we can analyze the fig tree and the gardener.

His reflection goes on to have the vineyard owner planting a fig tree in his vineyard.

With so many vineyards in Central Otago it is interesting when vineyards were popping up close to Alexandra I began to notice that at the end of each row of grape vines the owners planted a rose bush.

When I looked this up on Google I found an explanation; and that is the story behind the tradition and it is a practical one.

"The roses played an important role, helping alert winemakers to possible trouble on the vines.

"The roses were always a good indicator of disease and people would often wander to the end of the row and have a look at the rose. If the rose plant was diseased it would ring alarm bells. It would always hit the roses, before it hit the vines." (Guy McMaster tells Magic Talk announcer of Newshub.co.nz)

**Back to the Parable.** The vineyard owner is planting a single fig tree. And he planted it because it would provide him with those delicious figs, as a personal luxury, twice a year. St Luke says the landowner waited for three years but no fruit was forthcoming so he decided to cut it down. Now this sounds more like us than God.

And I have been guilty of that too. I was watching a little stick develop in my garden a few years ago and after some months it looked like a bush and my new neighbour asked what it was and I replied that I didn't plant it and that I would probably cut it down. I didn't look after it, at all.

Rian suggests that we might be the Fig Tree as well. Maybe we have been too judgmental of ourselves. Beating ourselves up that we didn't take advantage of an opportunity that would have helped us or our family. We need to be kinder to ourselves he says.

At this point the gardener comes on the scene and encourages the impatient Landowner from cutting the tree down. Rian suggests that the gardener may be the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, the encourager and the landowner is not the expert gardener but the gardener is the expert and authority of tree growth and production.

I love this analogy as it brings into focus how God has given us freewill to decide for ourselves and we do not always make the right decisions of course. I have written a poem to include in this reflection.

### **LANDOWNER, FIG TREE or GARDENER?**

I sit here and write to you dear God,  
it is a poem from the heart.  
My heart overflows with  
thankfulness.

Thankfulness turns to light and  
I cannot wait to share it with you.  
I am the landowner of my  
thoughts.

Sometimes I feel bursting  
with life and other  
times I am filled  
with nothing at all.

Come, lover of all  
come and give me  
your blessing  
and love.

Maybe I am the fig tree  
hoping that someday  
I will bear fruit  
for you.

Gaynor Gordon © 2022

There is nothing like experiencing Gods abundant pardon and forgiveness. He is the one who gives us a **second** chance, and a **third** chance and so on and so on.

“Turn and live,” Jesus always has an open invitation “Follow me, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Remember God’s love knows no bounds and his steadfast love abides forever and his mercies cannot be counted. **AMEN**

### **PRAYER OF ADORATION AND THANKSGIVING:**

We are so grateful that you are like a gardener that never gives up on what they’ve planted. That you are constantly looking out for our welfare, providing the nourishment we need, checking that we can adjust to the conditions in which we live, willing to muck in and get messy when we need support. We feel your delight when we thrive, and the joy you have when the fruit we produce is unspoiled and bountiful. We know the strength that comes from being grounded in your wisdom and the courage that comes from being nurtured in a community of faithful people. Thank you, that you are always optimistic about our potential and encouraging of us when we seek to live into it.

## CONTEMPLATIVE HYMN/SONG

### PRAYER OF INTERCESSION:

Jesus, brother, and friend, we look to you for the way in which we can lead impactful and compassionate lives.

May we take on your nature of grace, optimism and hopefulness, that what we believe to be good news will be received as such.

Make us wise in how we act in the world attentive to pathways that will lead to liberation and those that won't, help us make good choices as to which way to take.

Open our eyes to see those who are so often excluded and overlooked, and to understand the ways we can let them know we have seen them and ways in which we can best offer them support.

### **Prayer for Ukraine by: [Sam Hargreaves](#)**

The psalmist writes: "I call on the Lord in my distress, and he answers me."

We lift up the people of Ukraine before you.

We call to you for mercy and peace.

Bring comfort to the bereaved, bring an end to violence.

We pray for the church in Ukraine and Russia, give strength to use their hands for healing, and courage to speak truth, justice and love.

We pray for world leaders, guide their responses to this crisis, may hope and grace triumph over fear and hate.

In a moment of silence, we lift our fears, our sorrows and our hopes to you.

God of peace, God of love,

have mercy on our world,

have mercy on Ukraine.

Lord, we call to you in our distress.

Give us the courage to call out bad behaviour and words that diminish and harm, to stand up against lies and deceit when they worm their way into our society.

**Teach us to be a community of faith that nurtures one another, that cares for all those in need that happen our way, and finds the strength always believe that the just will overcome what's unjust. Amen.**

### **WOV 148 LOVE DIVINE**

**1. Love divine, all loves excelling,  
joy of heaven, to earth come down,  
fix in us thy humble dwelling,  
all thy faithful mercies crown:  
Jesu, thou art all compassion,  
pure unbounded love thou art;  
visit us with thy salvation,  
enter every trembling heart.**

**2. Come, almighty to deliver,  
let us all thy life receive;  
suddenly return, and never,  
never more thy 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.**

**3. Finish then thy new creation,  
pure 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.**

### **BENEDICTION:**

We have been nourished and nurtured in this community of faith, so now we go into our ordinary lives confident in the power of God's goodness to work its way in the world. Go in the love and with the encouragement of the Spirit. **AMEN**