

## WORSHIP Pentecost 18A - Living in God (October 4 2020)

(Rev Gordon Wild/Loddon Mallee Presbytery & Libby Gregory/Swan Hill UC with the LM Worship Collective)

### Words of Gathering

All around our region, and as a sign of solidarity and friendship with people of God all around the world, we take time to participate in the mystery and love that is God with us.

### Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we live.  
We pay our respects to their Elders past and present, and those to come.

**Call to Worship** *(derived from Psalm 19 - could be followed as a responsive reading)*

The whole universe sings and reveals the glory that is God;

*and the wisdom of the day  
and the reconciling pause of night,  
are sought throughout the world.*

The ways of God are clear and true;  
*and the wisdom of God's law  
and the reconciling spirit in its fulfilment,  
are celebrated within community.*

Let us join the exaltation of the universe,  
*and worship the God of splendour and mystery;  
the God of the guiding voice of truth  
throughout history, and in our every day.*



### SONG - TIS 72 From All Who Dwell Below the Skies

<sup>1</sup> From all who dwell below the skies  
let the Creator's praise arise;  
*Hallelujah! Hallelujah!*

Let the Redeemer's name be sung  
through every land, by every tongue,  
*Hallelujah! (x5)*

<sup>2</sup> Eternal are your mercies, Lord,  
eternal truth attends your word:  
*Hallelujah! Hallelujah!*

Your praise shall sound from shore to shore  
till suns shall rise and set no more.  
*Hallelujah! (x5)*

Isaac Watts (1674-1748) © CCLI Licence #5010074

## Prayer of Thanks - (TIS 168 For The Fruits Of All Creation)

### (to read as responsive prayer)

<sup>1</sup> For the fruits of all creation;  
**thanks be to God;**  
for God's gifts to every nation,  
**thanks be to God;**  
for the ploughing, sowing reaping,  
silent growth while we are sleeping,  
future needs in earth's safekeeping,  
**thanks be to God.**

<sup>2</sup> In the just reward of labour,  
**God's will is done;**  
in the help we give our neighbour  
**God's will is done;**  
in our worldwide task of caring  
for the hungry and despairing,  
in the harvests we are sharing,  
**God's will is done.**

<sup>3</sup> For the harvests of the Spirit,  
**thanks be to God;**  
for the good we all inherit,  
**thanks be to God;**  
for all the wonders that astound us,  
for the truths that still confound us,  
most of all, that love has found us,  
**Thanks be to God.**

*Frederick Pratt Green 1903-2000 © CCLI Licence #5010074*

## Prayer of Regret (in response to the song/Prayer of Thanks)

We regret that in the midst of plenty for all,  
we might hold on to more than we need.

We regret that in protecting our own wellbeing,  
we might overlook those denied security and meaningful work.

We regret that in doggedly repeating familiar patterns,  
we might miss out on surprises and renewal that are happening around us.

## Words of Assurance

The good news and reassurance are,  
that we will be astounded and confounded  
by the wonders and truth, that are God  
revealed in the life and teaching of Jesus,  
and made known in the expressions of the Spirit  
in the people around us.

*Alleluia! Amen!*

## SONG - TIS 121 God Himself is Present

<sup>1</sup> God himself is present,  
let us now adore him  
as with awe we come before him.  
God is in our midst, now  
in our hearts keep silence,  
worshipping in deepest reverence.  
Him we know, him we name,  
come and let us make him  
our renewed surrender.

<sup>4</sup> Lord, make me your dwelling,  
let my heart and spirit  
be for you an earthly temple:  
come, Immediate Being,  
my whole life illumine,  
so I'll always praise and love you,  
so where'er I may be  
there I may perceive you,  
ever bow before you.

*Gerhard Tersteegen 1697-1769 Translator - Honor Mary Thwaites 1914-93 © CCLI Licence #501007*

## GOSPEL READING

### Matthew 21:33-46 The Parable of the Wicked Tenants

<sup>33</sup> ‘Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watch-tower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. <sup>34</sup>When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. <sup>35</sup>But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another.

<sup>36</sup>Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. <sup>37</sup>Finally he sent his son to them, saying, “They will respect my son.” <sup>38</sup>But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, “This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.” <sup>39</sup>So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

<sup>40</sup>Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?’ <sup>41</sup>They said to him, ‘He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.’

<sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, ‘Have you never read in the scriptures: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is amazing in our eyes”? <sup>43</sup>Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. <sup>44</sup>The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.’

<sup>45</sup> When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. <sup>46</sup>They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

## REFLECTION

**“A people that produces the fruits of the kingdom.” Matthew 21:43.**

Dad swerved quickly and sent me sliding across the back seat of the Toyota Crown. He’d seen a sign. He had to act.

This was 1976, and I am with my parents returning from holidays. We were nearing Yackandandah in north east Victoria; but the sign stopped everything. Yack isn’t known for that many gifts to Australian culture- but this one shone above all others. Yackandandah Strawberry Wine. Grown in ground that deeply nourished the fruit: sweet strawberries which were distilled and refined again.

This was the fruit of fruitfulness, and my Dad loved it. We followed The Sign straight to the cellar door. We left several bottles and a few tasters heavier.

THIS was the kind of fruitfulness my dad most cherished.

Fruitfulness. It’s a rich image in scripture as God keeps describing the people as a vineyard. Isaiah 5 shows God’s generosity and grief over the vineyard, his hopes and heartache over the people. God’s longing is for their fruitfulness: lives alive to God and to one another. It is good for them. It is good for others. I see this longing for fruitfulness in each of this week’s passages:

- Exodus 20 - the Ten Commandments with the call to honour God and honour people
- Psalm 19 - the daily call to encounter God in the daily rhythms of nature
- Philippians 3 - Paul speaking of giving his whole self so God’s life may grow in his life.

It is also here in Matthew 22. Jesus is confronting the leaders of his day and this day: our calling is not to ownership of the vineyard of life; we are not called to control. We are called to fruitfulness, “a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom.” Matthew 21:43.

This fruitfulness is possible because of two key truths I see in these passages:

**We are grounded in God.** Fruitfulness is even possible because our life is planted in God’s life. “I am the LORD your God” says Exodus 20:2. That’s already the reality we live in every day. God’s life embraces us as the daily rhythms of day and night in Psalm 19:2; “Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge”. Paul knew this calling in his very bones, as in Philippians 3:12; “I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.” In Matthew 22 Jesus reminds the people they rest on this ‘cornerstone’, Christ.

**We are invited to fruitfulness.** The life of God in us seeks to enrich others’ lives, and our own too. Exodus 20 finishes with commandments that are all about the quality of relationship with others. Psalm 19 ends with a longing for right relationship. Paul is acutely aware of the riches of life in Christ that transforms all other values.

We are also invited to enjoy this nourishing fruitfulness in our own lives too - to care for our own selves as well as others.

### **So what?**

These feel like hard days to be ‘fruitful’ - either personally or as a church. It seems like the wrong time, wrong season. Personally, many of us have felt hardships squeeze the life out of us. Just holding on can seem enough. As people of God, maybe we wonder if the church will ever be fruitful again?

Yet look at us, even today! We ARE finding new ways to be grounded in God. We are discovering a fruitfulness in gifts and abilities among one another we never knew we had. We are even more keenly aware of each other’s needs and we turn afresh to support one another.

We realise afresh that we do not and cannot own the vineyard [or the church]. Trying to own or control other people or groups never brings life. We can see the work ahead in ‘this vineyard’. We are entrusted and called to labour in the strange new landscape that is the vineyard of these days. We are learning new ways of being church. Finding our way through grief and loss and separation. Encouraging each other simply by turning up whenever we can.

Life is coming as we are discovering the God who gives us this life. Life comes in loving the people God has given us to.

There will be a time - a time when we taste again the fruitfulness of these days - and we will taste communion with God and communion with one another.

And it will be even sweeter than strawberry wine.

## SONG - TIS 473 Community of Christ

<sup>1</sup> Community of Christ,  
who make the Cross your own,  
live out your creed and risk your life  
for God alone:  
the God who wears your face,  
to whom all worlds belong,  
whose people are of every race  
and every song.

<sup>2</sup> Community of Christ  
look past the Church's door  
and see the refugee, the hungry,  
and the poor.  
Take hands with the oppressed,  
the jobless in your street,  
take towel and water, that you wash  
your neighbour's feet.

<sup>3</sup> Community of Christ,  
through whom the world must sound -  
cry out for justice and for peace  
the whole world round:  
disarm the powers that war  
and all that can destroy,  
turn bombs to bread, and tears of  
anguish  
into joy.

<sup>4</sup> When menace melts away,  
so shall God's will be done,  
the climate of the world be peace  
and Christ its Sun;  
our currency be love  
and kindness be law,  
our food and faith be shared as one  
for evermore.

*Shirley Erena Murray 1931-2020 © CCLI Licence #5010074*

## Offering and Blessing

*In response to the words of faithful reflection and song, we offer ourselves and our money to God.*

May our giving and living reflect the grace and generosity that is God;  
and be signs of nourishment and hope for everyone.  
Amen

## Prayers of the People

We pray to the God we see in the glory of the heavens and our planet, in the calming rhythm of day and night, and in the rest and regeneration of the seasons -

Where so many people are worn out and confused by the constant social changes demanded of us -

we pray for patience and calm, where God is revealed in friendships and insight.

Where politicians and people in decision making positions have a myriad of sources of information and questions to sort out -

we pray for fair and sustaining outcomes, where God is revealed in their integrity and wisdom.

Where people are afraid and overwhelmed because of job losses and financial insecurity -

we pray for stability and renewed flourishing, where God is revealed in robust support systems and compassionate advisers.

Where people are exhausted from striving to hold other people up, providing services and care in dramatic situations -

we pray for a chance for rest and renewal, where God is revealed through the support of colleagues and friends, and their work in bring about healing.

May we have the courage to express God's kingdom values of love, peace and justice for all, through our actions, our words, and our understanding. Amen

Now, with people all around the world, and with faithful people since the time of Jesus, we pray **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.

### **Sending Out & Blessing**

Let's go into the week ahead,  
immersed in God and expressing the ways of the Spirit.  
May we be alert to the wonder of our friendships  
and the kindness of our companions.  
And let's surprise one another with our care.

### **SONG - Go Gently Go Lightly** (*Hope Is Our Song 35*)

<sup>1</sup> Go gently, go lightly,  
go safe in the Spirit,  
live simply, don't carry  
much more than you need:  
go trusting God's goodness,  
go spreading God's kindness,  
stay centered on Jesus  
and where he will lead.

<sup>2</sup> Go singing, go bringing  
the gifts of the Spirit,  
go hopefully searching  
for things that are true:  
in living, in loving,  
whatever befalls you,  
God keep you, God bless you  
in all that you do.

*Shirley Erena Murray 1931 - 2020 © CCLI Licence  
5010074*