

WE SING 'For the fruits of all creation' (TIS 168)

1

For the fruits of all creation,
thanks be to God;
for his gifts to every nation,
thanks be to God;
for the ploughing, sowing, reaping,
silent growth while we are sleeping,
future needs in earth's safe keeping,
thanks be to God.

2

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.

3

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

CALL TO WORSHIP Psalm 84

How lovely is your dwelling place,
O Lord of hosts!
My soul longs, indeed it faints
for the courts of the Lord;

my heart and my flesh sing for joy
to the living God.

Even the sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O Lord of hosts,
my King and my God.

Happy are those who live in your house,
ever singing your praise.

Happy are those whose strength is in you,
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.
As they go through the valley of Baca
they make it a place of springs;
the early rain also covers it with pools.
They go from strength to strength;
the God of gods will be seen in Zion.

O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer;
give ear, O God of Jacob!
Behold our shield, O God;
look on the face of your anointed.

For a day in your courts is better
than a thousand elsewhere.

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than live in the tents of wickedness.

For the Lord God is a sun and shield;
he bestows favour and honour.

No good thing does the Lord withhold
from those who walk uprightly.

O Lord of hosts,
happy is everyone who trusts in you.

OPENING PRAYER

WE LISTEN TO GOD'S WORD:

SHARING THE EARLY WORD

The circle of days by Reeve Lindbergh

WE SING 'All things bright and beautiful' (TIS 135)

*All things bright and beautiful,
all creatures great and small,
all things wise and wonderful
the Lord God made them all.*

1

The wildflowers in their beauty,
the mountain ranges tall,
the billabongs and rivers,
and friendly birds that call,

2

The cold wind in the winter,
the bright, life-giving sun,
the ripe fruits in the garden --
he made them every one.

5

He gave us eyes to see them,
and lips that we might tell
how great is God Almighty
who has made all things well.

NEW TESTAMENT James 2: 1-10, 14-17 *Faith without Works Is Dead*

My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favouritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, 'Have a seat here, please', while to the one who is poor you say, 'Stand there', or, 'Sit at my feet', have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen

the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonoured the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?

You do well if you really fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill', and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

THE GOSPEL Mark 7: 24-37 *The Syrophenician Woman's Faith*

From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, 'Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.' But she answered him, 'Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.' Then he said to her, 'For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.' So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

... for the word of the Lord, **THANKS BE TO GOD.**

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AND CONFESSION

WORDS OF AFFIRMATION

REFLECTION ON THE SCRIPTURES

Finding immeasurable grace

‘Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God... He will come and save you.’

These words from Isaiah 35 are a neat summary of ministry I’ve been privileged to share with you here at St. Margaret’s these past 8 years. The prophet reminds people as needed of the big story of God.

I have sought to do the same with you each time I’ve been blessed to stand in this space. But I’m aware too that we will soon diverge into the next phase of God’s story with us. Our times remaining are few and precious, but as we reflect together once more, my hope and prayer is that prophetic words and troublesome gospel encounters alike will enable us to be strong and without fear. I pray that together we will discover our saving God and what that means for the weeks, months and years ahead.

But the story of Jesus this week is among the most troubling of any we have about him. We find him tired and exhausted and in need of some solitude. The last thing he wants is to meet more human need when that is exactly what happens.

He is bothered – not just by a woman, but one of Syrophenician descent. She is desperate for her daughter, but Jesus has had enough. We are confronted with a Jesus we don’t know or don’t want to know. He is dismissive towards her and effectively calls her a *little bitch* (which is the best translation of the Greek into colloquial English).

It doesn’t look or feel all that good. I can imagine the 10 second grab on our nightly TV news. We don’t expect this from our leader. But there is something about the words from the prophet that speak of something deeper than Jesus image or behaviour. It is the story of God that the prophet proclaims. ‘Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God... He will come and save you.’

The woman seems to know that the story is bigger than Jesus. It is bigger than this teacher who is tired, cranky and prejudiced. In her persistence, and perhaps her knowing, she demands a telling of the

bigger story of God. Despite all you say Jesus, 'even the dogs under the table eat'.

And Jesus has to admit this is so. He must admit his narrow focus, his prejudice, his being weary and worn out. And most importantly he must admit that the story of God has broken through for the sake of the woman and her daughter.

I am grateful this is so. Ministry has a way of humbling those who are full time workers in the church. Many times, I've been weary and worn out, or too narrowly focussed, or subject to my own prejudices that do not reflect the justice of God. Many times, I've worked valiantly for good purpose only to discover that the Spirit moves where she will, and God enables what I often cannot enable. While I don't expect these things of Jesus, and at times forget his humanity, I am well aware of my own.

And praise be that God yet comes to save us, as the prophet proclaims. And this is what Isaiah says about our saving God:

*Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.
For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;
the burning sand shall become a pool,
and the thirsty ground springs of water;
the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp,
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.*

And with this vision I am left humbled and struck by awe. If we limit the justice of God or salvation story as being simply about the care of a foreign woman's daughter, then we will be do-gooders. This falls short of living out the salvation of God revealed through Jesus Christ. I'm not saying that caring for those who are struggling is not the right thing to do, but that is only the half of what faithful living looks like. If we look at what Isaiah says, then the vision of God's story is for the whole of creation to be restored and to flourish. It is not simply that the blind will

see and the deaf will hear – important though those things are. Waters will be abundant in the wilderness, the grasses will flourish. Life in all its fulness will be apparent where the story of God meets our human story and the story of the whole creation.

To dig a little deeper, we turn to the book of James. We find there a warning not to favour those with obvious wealth and privilege over those who are poor. It is a temptation that lies at the heart of our culture. It exposes the world of success where we climb not by what we know, but by who we know. We've seen it in our news recently about Peter Dutton making visa exceptions (it would seem) for his influential friends.

A friend of mine who was once a shire building inspector. He told stories of people he went to school with who were builders. They would invoke the *good old mates* line to try and get away with dodgy building habits. I'm glad to say my friend was not impressed by this – but neither were they. But what is James trying to warn us about?

I think it is the kind of attitude that would push away the Syrophenician woman and her sick daughter because they were not core business. It can be tempting to run a church like a members only fee paying club. That way we could keep riff raff out, like the woman pressing in on Jesus. That way we could vet potential new members based on merit: wealth, connection, influence, success ...

Of course, this doesn't belong in the church. James sees this as half-hearted discipleship because it submits to an authority other than Jesus. That authority is desire. The desire to be comfortable. The desire to be upwardly mobile. The desire to only feel good. The desire to keep failure at bay.

And while in the church we will never always get it right, just like Jesus, the church that James is imagining is one of whole-hearted faithfulness to God. It is the kind of church that will recognise when we have strayed from the big story of God, and like Jesus own up and make right our failings.

And from a success point of view, perhaps the church is called to be a failure by normal measures. That is, we are called to look out for those devoid of wealth or connection, or influence or success. Rather we are called to direct our view towards orphans and widows, to the naked, hungry, to any left broken by a success driven world.

But just as the prophet reminds us the story of God is for the whole of creation to be redeemed, it seems that James is calling for and Jesus is reminded to be moved deeply by encounters with those left wounded on the roadside of life.

Father Joseph Wresinski grew up in France in extreme poverty. As a result he founded the “Fourth World Movement”, seeking to eradicate poverty. His method is do this by connecting people together. Fr. Wresinski wants people from all walks of life have radical ‘gospel encounters’. What we have heard about Jesus and the Syrophenician woman are not just text or story, not just advocacy or social action, but an encounter that offers hope and changes lives, and therefore changes the world.

Or to reflect on James’ community in light of this, we need those who are wealthy, well connected and successful to be brought alongside those who are profoundly needy and struggling. Fr. Wresinski says that we only get access to an “immeasurable grace” through the poor. In other words we cannot be wholly faithful, unless we journey deeply with all people, especially those left broken by a success driven world. (Fr. Wresinski has written a book titled ‘Blessed are You the Poor’).

The Syrophenician woman demanded an encounter with Jesus. It seems that through it they both experienced immeasurable grace. I wonder how bold and grace-filled encounters will keep shaping St. Margaret’s in the journey ahead?

Perhaps I can offer some reflections based on what I see. For one, I think that St. Margaret’s has a poor business model, but I mean that in the best possible way. Time and time again I see you and your leaders act in ways that undermine the financial success of this congregation. You do not seek wealthy benefactors. You do not seek the influence of

those well connected. You are not driven by success yourselves despite the temptations and pressures that come from all of that. I see you spend your time and care with those who cannot underwrite future success of this place. You encourage the sick, widows, orphans, the naked, those in prison.

And I have seen grace shared deeply in first hand encounters with those who are struggling. More than \$50,000 has been given away to Karyrie to support rural ministry in the depths of drought. When your country friends had no money to sustain ministry, and when the pressures on farmers were immense, you found a way to enable hope and grace to be present in those places. And more than twenty years of engagement with RYDA has also seen blessings deeper than any could have imagined. In recent years I've seen the impact of the Kids Hope mentoring program in Kilsyth Primary School. Although the program is small, the very real human encounters bring immeasurable blessing again, as the story of God's saving grace is invoked through these relationships.

My friends, I see opportunities to live into the story of God more fully if we believe that grace comes through first hand encounters with human need. There are perhaps many steps that might be taken, but I wonder what lies ahead for St. Margaret's and the Nourish Network; and for your relationship with the Peoples Pantry; and for your relationship with the Chin Evangelical Church who worship here?

In the name of Christ, may we encounter God with us, even through it may not be in the form of our desiring. May we learn from Jesus to own up to our failings, and invite grace and healing in his name.

WE RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD:

WE SING 'Kneels at the feet of his friends' (TIS 640)

1

Kneels at the feet of his friends,
silently washes their feet:
master who acts as a slave to them.

*Yesu, Yesu,
fill us with your love,
show us how to serve
the neighbours we have from you.*

2

Neighbours are wealthy and poor,
varied in colour and race,
neighbours are near us and far away.

3

These are the ones we should serve,
these are the ones we should love;
all these are neighbours to us and you.

4

Loving puts us on our knees,
silently washing their feet,
this is the way we should live with you.

OFFERING

PRAYER

Loving God – the One who is with us in times of uncertainty as well as in times of security and optimism – we dedicate this offering to you today in the Name of Jesus. May it help to bring your love to those who are suffering terrible uncertainty and daily pain, and give hope to those despairing because of what life has brought them. Inspire us all to actively work for creative changes, that reflect your compassion, love and care. Amen.

CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

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.**

SHARING FROM THE CHILDREN

SENDING FORTH OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD:

WE SING 'God of freedom, God of justice' (TIS 657)

1

God of freedom, God of justice,
God whose love is strong as death,
God who saw the dark of prison,
God who knew the price of faith:
touch our world of sad oppression
with your Spirit's healing breath.

2

Rid the earth of torture's terror,
God whose hands were nailed to wood;
hear the cries of pain and protest,
God who shed the tears and blood;
move in us the power of pity,
restless for the common good.

3

Make in us a captive conscience
quick to hear, to act, to plead;
make us truly sisters, brothers
of whatever race or creed:
teach us to be fully human,
open to each other's need.

SENDING OUT & BLESSING

SENDING OUT SONG 'Sent by the Lord am I' (ATOK 412)

Sent by the Lord am I;
my hands are ready now
to make the earth the place
in which the Kingdom comes.

Sent by the Lord am I;
my hands are ready now
to make the earth the place
in which the Kingdom comes.

The angels cannot change
a world of hurt and pain
into a world of love,
of justice and of peace.

The task is mine to do,
to set it really free.

O help me to obey,
help me to do your will.