

Bendigo South Uniting Church Cluster
Sunday 3rd January 2021

Acknowledgement of Country:

Welcome:

Call to Worship:

HYMN: TIS 111/AHB 28

**Praise to the Lord,
the Almighty, the King of creation;
O my soul, praise him, for he is your health and salvation.
Come all who hear,
brothers and sisters draw near,
praise him in glad adoration.**

**Praise to the Lord
who in all things is wondrously reigning
and, as on wings of an eagle, uplifting, sustaining:
have you not seen
all that is needed has been
sent by his gracious ordaining?**

**Praise to the Lord,
who will prosper our work and defend us;
surely his goodness and mercy shall daily attend us:
ponder anew
what the Almighty can do
as with his love he befriends us.**

**Praise to the Lord,
who when darkness of sin is abounding,
who, when the godless do triumph, our best hopes confounding,
sheds forth his light,
scatters the horrors of night,
saints with his mercy surrounding.**

**Praise to the Lord!
O let all that is in me adore him!
All that has life and breath, come now with praises before him.
Let the Amen
sound from his people again:
gladly for ever adore him.**

*Joachim Neander 1650-80
tr. Catherine Winkworth 1827-78 and others*

Early Word: 'New Year'

Prayer of Confession:

Gracious God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word and action. You have given us love, but we have returned apathy; you have provided us with neighbours, yet we have become self-centred; you have given us a world to enjoy, but we have spoiled our home

Forgive us for the wrong things we have done, and for the good things we have failed to do. Give us time to change, and the desire and will to do so. Amen

Assurance

Those who are in Christ are a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled himself to us through Christ. Hear then God's word of grace to us: "Your sins are forgiven."

Thanks be to God.

HYMN: TIS 431

**Thanks to God whose Word was spoken
in the deed that made the earth.
His the voice that called a nation,
his the fires that tried its worth.**

Refrain –

***God has spoken, God has spoken:
praise him for his open Word.***

**Thanks to God whose Word incarnate
human flesh has glorified,
who by life and death and rising
grace abundant has supplied.**

Refrain –

**Thanks to God whose Word was written
in the Bible's sacred page,
record of the revelation
showing God to every age.**

Refrain –

**Thanks to God whose Word is published
in the tongues of every race.
See its glory undiminished
by the change of time and place**

Refrain –

**Thanks to God whose Word is answered
by the Spirit's voice within.
Here we drink of Joy unmeasured,
life redeemed from death and sin**
Refrain –

*Henry Thomas Smart 1813-79
Words R.T. Brooks copyright 1954,
renewal 1982 by Hope Publishing Co. Used by permission*

BIBLE READINGS:

Jeremiah 31:7-14

⁷ For thus says the LORD:

Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob,
and raise shouts for the chief of the nations;
proclaim, give praise, and say,
“Save, O LORD, your people,
the remnant of Israel.”

⁸ See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north,
and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth,
among them the blind and the lame,
those with child and those in labour, together;
a great company, they shall return here.

⁹ With weeping they shall come,
and with consolations I will lead them back,
I will let them walk by brooks of water,
in a straight path in which they shall not stumble;
for I have become a father to Israel,
and Ephraim is my firstborn.

¹⁰ Hear the word of the LORD, O nations,
and declare it in the coastlands far away;
say, “He who scattered Israel will gather him,
and will keep him as a shepherd a flock.”

¹¹ For the LORD has ransomed Jacob,
and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him.

¹² They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion,
and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD,
over the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and over the young of the flock and the herd;
their life shall become like a watered garden,
and they shall never languish again.

¹³ Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance,
and the young men and the old shall be merry.

I will turn their mourning into joy,
I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.

¹⁴ I will give the priests their fill of fatness,
and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty, says the LORD.

John 1:10-18

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.

¹¹ He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.

¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

¹⁵ (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'")

¹⁶ From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

¹⁷ The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

¹⁸ No one has ever seen God
It is God the only Son who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

MESSAGE: Jeremiah 3:7-14

"Are we there yet?" How many times have you been on a journey and heard that from the back seat, probably several times over. In a sense, on our journey through the years, we are there, and we are certainly not there yet. The world has journeyed through the most difficult year in the lifetimes of most of us, and we have arrived. We have completed the year of 2020. And yet, we are also just beginning our journey through this new year of 2021.

I am continually impressed by the relevance of God's Word to us today, no matter how long ago it was written. God speaks to us in our world, through God's word written to a very different world in time and place. In our reading from Jeremiah God is promising to take the Israelites on a journey back to their home. Some of them have been in exile in Babylon, and some have been scattered to various parts of the known world, while some have been privileged to remain in their homeland. We can see the link between this situation and our own in Australia, although the situation of the Israelites had lasted for many, many years, not just one year.

I can only speak for Australia, but I'm sure that there are comparisons to be made with the situations in many other countries. I'm thinking particularly of those Australians who found themselves overseas and unable to get home, for a variety of reasons. We have heard or read of the anxiety, fear, and distress suffered by thousands of them as they faced what must have felt like exile in foreign countries. For some, that still continues, but the situation for them is changing, as they begin to arrive home in regular flights. Imagine their relief and rejoicing.

Maybe the Israelites were anxious as they contemplated the journey back to their home, as they remembered the difficulty of their people in the exodus from Egypt. But this passage from Jeremiah is part of the Book of Consolation, or of Comfort (Jeremiah 30 and 31). The poetry of the oracle signifies that the message is coming directly from God. God promises that they will travel all the way by brooks of water, and that the path will be smooth and straight, that they will not stumble. It is beautiful and poetic writing, reminding me in some ways of the book of Isaiah. The important thing is that the relative comfort of the journey, compared with the Exodus, allows all to be included.

God speaks of the blind and the lame specifically, pregnant women and those about to give birth. The blind and the lame represent anyone who may have a disability, and the pregnant women are inclusive of all women and children. God does not promise to change the situations of the blind and the lame, or to enable the pregnant women to deliver their babies before or after the journey. All are to come as they are. The journey is to be adapted so that all can manage.

We begin our journey through the new year, with all its hopes and plans to see the end of this virus which has brought the world largely to a standstill. We need to be aware that we must take it at a pace that all can manage, encouraging our Government to make sure that those in many countries which cannot afford to buy the new vaccines still have equal access to them. The brooks of water and the straight path of Jeremiah represent the easing of the way, and the comfort which must be available to all.

As we begin our journey into 2021, in Australia, there is sorrow mixed with joy. We weep for those in many countries still suffering enormous loss of lives and continued large numbers of infections. We sorrow for the losses of the past year, when so many of us were unable to see our loved ones; when important celebrations had to be held online; when weddings were unable to be celebrated by numbers of guests; when many died without the presence of loved ones beside them and even funerals could not be held as fully as in the past.

God promised the Israelites that although there would be weeping, there would be consolation. Comfort would be there for them. God says "I will turn their mourning into joy. I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow."

The gospel reading from John this week reiterates the promises of God, again in John's poetic style – he writes in a very different style to the writers of the other Gospels. Jesus has come to earth, and we can celebrate the joy of his birth as we enter our journey into 2021. John tells us again that Jesus is the Son of God, and that it's only through Jesus that we can see God. "Through his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace" (v16). God promised the Israelites celebration, dancing and merriment. We can celebrate the coming of Jesus into the world with rejoicing.

In spite of the continuing presence of the corona virus in the world we can rely on the promise of God to be with us. Jesus was promised by God, and Jesus came to be in the world. We can rely on God's promise to be our shepherd as we undertake the journey into the new year. We can rely on God's promise to make our lives like a watered garden, beautiful and inviting. Let us begin that journey with hope and confidence.

Pastor Miriam Darlow

HYMN: TIS 145

**The King of love my Shepherd is,
Whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am his
And he is mine for ever.**

**Where streams of living water flow
My ransomed soul he leadeth,
And where the verdant pastures grow
With food celestial feedeth.**

**Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,
But yet in love he sought me,
And on his shoulder gently laid,
And home, rejoicing, brought me.**

**In death's dark vale I fear no ill
With thee, dear Lord, beside me;
Thy rod and staff my comfort still,
Thy cross before to guide me.**

**Thou spread'st a table in my sight;
Thy unction, grace bestoweth:
And O what transport of delight
From thy pure chalice floweth!**

**And so through all the length of days
Thy goodness faileth never;
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
Within thy house for ever.**

Based om Psalm 23: John Bacchus Dykes 1823-76

Henry Williams Baker 1821-77.

OFFERING:

NOTICES:

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE:

God of the field and river, of the desert and oasis,
of the plains and mountains, of the towns and cities,
Lord of all

We ask your blessing

For people who are waiting for food,
for people who are waiting for water,
for people who are waiting for shelter,
for people working to relieve want and need,
wherever they are, whoever they work with,
Lord of all

We ask your blessing

For children and young people,
for their families and friends,
for the old and infirm,
for the childless and the bereaved,
for those working to bring communities together,
God of all

We ask your blessing

For each Christian community meeting today,
for our leaders and all committed to their care,
for our missionaries, teachers and administrators,
our worship leaders and worshippers,
for all those working to forward your kingdom,
God of all

We ask your blessing

Grant us courage and determination,
and grace and openness
to acknowledge all unique journeys
alongside our own.

We ask your blessing on this world. Amen

HYMN: TIS 675 "Shine, Jesus, Shine"

**Lord, the light of your love is shining,
in the midst of the darkness, shining;
Jesus, Light of the world, shine upon us,
set us free by the truth you now bring us –
shine on me, shine on me.**

***Shine, Jesus, shine, fill this land with the Father's glory;
blaze, Spirit, blaze, set our hearts on fire.
Flow, river, flow, flood the nations with grace and mercy;
Send forth your word, Lord, and let there be light.***

Lord, I come to your awesome presence
From the shadows into your radiance
By your blood I may enter your brightness
Search me, try me, consume all my darkness –
Shine on me, shine on me

Shine, Jesus, shine

As we gaze on your kingly brightness
So our faces display your likeness
Ever changing from glory to glory
Mirrored here, may our lives tell your story –
Shine on me, shine on me

Shine, Jesus, shine

Graham Kendrick 1950

Words and Music copyright Thank you Music administered by Scripture in Song

Sending Out:

HYMN: TIS 778 “Shalom”

**Shalom to you now,
shalom, my friends.
May God's full mercies
bless you, my friends.
In all your living
and through your loving,
Christ be your Shalom,
Christ be your shalom.**

Elise Shoemaker Eslinger 1942-