

MOSMAN UNITING CHURCH

21st March 2021

Lent 5

Words in bold are spoken by the congregation.

GATHERING AS GOD'S PEOPLE

GREETING & WELCOME

The Lord be with you!

And also with you

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We honour the Elders past, present and emerging, of the Cammeraygal People, the traditional custodians of the land on which we stand.

WE LIGHT THE CHRIST CANDLE

Jesus Christ is a light to the World

Thanks be to God

HYMN (TiS) 596 'Fill my whole life, O Lord my God'

CALL TO WORSHIP from Psalm 51

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;

**according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.**

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgment.
Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived me.

You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

God of mercy,
you sent Jesus Christ to seek and save the lost.
We confess that we have strayed from you
and turned aside from your way.
We are misled by pride,
for we see ourselves pure when we are stained,
and great when we are small.
We have failed in love,
neglected justice,
and ignored your truth.
Have mercy, O God, and forgive our sin.

Return us to paths of righteousness
through Jesus Christ, our Saviour. Amen.

(source: <http://pilgrimwr.unitingchurch.org.au>)

ASSURANCE OF GRACE

But with unfailing love, God offers us forgiveness—
complete forgiveness that erases our sins completely,
and allows us to begin again.

So be at peace – your sins are forgiven!

Thanks be to God.

(source: Christine Longhurst on <https://re-worship.blogspot.com>)

THE PEACE

God reconciles and unites us.

The peace of God which is beyond our understanding will guard our
hearts and our thoughts in Jesus Christ.

In worship the greeting of peace is given with a sign.

As the words are spoken now, we may turn our hearts and thoughts to
neighbours near and far, hearing and repeating the words:

The peace of the Lord be always with you. **And also with you.**

HYMN 546 'Lord Jesus, think on me'

RECEIVING GOD'S WORD

BIBLE READINGS

Jer 31:31-34

Heb 5:5-10

Jn 12:20-33

This is the word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

REFLECTION *Written by Bruce Prewer*

The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

You can't find a smaller parable than this. One grain of wheat cast into the earth.

On the surface this speaks of what is obvious in agriculture. Grains or seeds are planted. They are buried. Yet in time those solitary seeds bring forth an abundant harvest. The one becomes many.

However, under the surface of this, Jesus is pointing us to a similar truth at the personal, spiritual level. Loss is gain. Death becomes life. It is a truth which is carrying him forward to his destiny.

It is also a truth about us, an immutable fact of human life.

Protect your life and it will shrink. Lose it and it will expand

We sometimes don't want to hear this message.

The ever-pressing world around us shouts: "Save your life, protect yourself, hoard it, and pamper it. Keep it safe from the inroads of other people. Spoil yourself with all your energy and all your cunning. Don't make yourself vulnerable. Be cautious. Look after your own interests at all times. Protect the wants of number one"

That is the gospel according to Women's Day, The Financial Times and Home Beautiful. It's the message of almost every clever advertisement that you see on TV. The secular world advises, "Spoil yourself. You are worth it! Take your solitary grain of wheat and indulge it with all the comforts and pleasures that money can buy. Save your life at all costs."

Yet the most alive person who ever walked on the earth, practised a harder and deeper truth; be willing to let your ego be buried, let your precious grain of wheat appear to die. The message is to share our lives and talents; to give ourselves entirely to God and be willing to sacrifice whenever is required. Then we will discover an abundant quality of life that out-grows and out-celebrates all the 'me-first' millions in the world.

We are not likely to have literally to give up our life in our early thirties, as Jesus did, but we are asked to die thousands of little deaths in the cause of God, and as a consequence find ourselves bearing fruits that we never thought possible.

Such is the way our Master went. But Jesus did not find it easy. He liked the "good life" as much as any of us, but for God's sake; he took the steep, narrow, rough road. Long before Good Friday, he did not find self-giving, and making himself vulnerable, the easiest of options. He found himself misunderstood and derided, homeless, hounded out of some towns, often weary and exhausted, and stalked by enemies.

It got worse near the end, or course. As Jesus drew nearer to that horrible destiny that awaited him in Jerusalem, he recoiled from it with his whole being.

The letter to the Hebrews paints the true picture:

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the God who was able to save him... Son though he was, he learned obedience in the school of suffering."

Along the same lines, our Gospel story for this 5th Sunday in Lent reveals the emotional trouble and struggle that Jesus experienced in those last days. We are told that some Greeks sent a message via Philip that they wished to meet with him. It must have seemed like an honourable way out. Why lose his one life in stubborn Jerusalem, while others were eager to hear his Gospel? Jesus was tempted. Sorely tested. He prayed.

Now is my soul in turmoil. What shall I pray: Father, save me from this fateful hour?

No. For this purpose I have arrived at this hour. Father, glorify your name through me."

Jesus did not readily surrender his solitary grain of wheat; to be lost, buried and forgotten. His self-giving was far from easy. It came at a large cost.

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the God who was able to save him... Son though he was, he learned obedience in the school of suffering."

Nor is it always easy for us. Not for Christian teenagers who make themselves vulnerable to peer ridicule. Not for those followers of Christ in the work force trying to maintain their Christian integrity. Not even for the retired people who try to balance service for Christ with diminishing energy and declining health.

We need to continue welcoming those thousands of minor deaths as we sow our seed in the furrows of life. All these little self-offerings are the valid sequence of giving our mind and heart to the Lord Jesus. In the continuous offering of our one, precious life, we soon discover that our experience deepens and widens and lengthens and heightens; in a way the lone grain could never predict if it closed its borders and lived in solitary self-containment.

It is not always easy, not always comfortable, but it is delightfully fruitful.

At this point I want to flash a cautionary yellow light. Losing one's life in the service of Christ, and for our fellow human beings, does not mean we must comply with every external demand made on us.

We are not asked by Christ to become the puppets of bossy or manipulating people. Christ does not reduce us to subservience. Those precious grains of wheat that belong to Christ must not hand themselves over to the selfish agenda of others. The agenda of Christ is the only one that matters.

The sacrifices of self should be discerning. They must be the ones to which Christ calls us, not the ones that others attempt to impose on us whenever they have the whim or fancy. Jesus never allowed others to boss him around. He kept charge of what was happening in the expenditure of his time and energy. He even kept charge in those last few fateful days in Jerusalem before betrayal, arrest, trial, suffering and death. As he stated: "No one takes my life from me. I give it of my own free will."

Jesus is our template; the pattern for that grain of life which discerns what is happening, makes choices, and then embraces a little death (or a large one) whenever and wherever God wants us to. When one grain willingly dies to self, the results can be extraordinary.

Most of our lives have been wonderfully enriched by ordinary people who have lovingly given of themselves rather than hoarding. Who have made themselves vulnerable. Who have not shied away from self-sacrifice.

Forget for now those famous names that may inspire us. Think rather about the value of ordinary saints: those people that have brought a harvest of blessings into our lives. It is the glory of God that matters most. For in God's glory is our deepest happiness and our perfect peace.

When Jesus reset his eyes on the cross and death, rather than go off with the Greeks, we are told that the Lord said: *For this purpose I have arrived at this hour, Father glorify your name. And a voice from heaven answered: I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.*"

In Christ's realm, where love is what matters most, losing life means gaining a more beautiful and fulfilling life. Creating a richer life for those around us and becoming a significant part of the glory of God.

Truly, truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

There, in this briefest of parables, like some well kept secret, resides all the glorious ways of God! The little seed sown lovingly reveals the ultimate kingdom, the power, and the unstoppable glory. For ever and ever. Amen!

(source: <http://www.bruceprewer.com/DocB/BLENT5.htm>, used with permission)

HYMN 331 'Sing, my tongue, the glorious battle'

WORK & WITNESS OF THE CHURCH

OFFERING

O God, may these, our offerings, expand your work in the world and add gifts to many people's lives.

Bless all that we have given today. Amen.

PRAYERS OF GOD'S PEOPLE

In this season of Lent, God calls us to pray.

As the hour of his suffering drew ever near, Jesus often raised his voice in prayers to you, O Lord.

Unworthy though we are, we implore your grace to help us to pray too.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

In today's worship we have been called by the voice of the psalmist who gives us the words to pray in repentance.

'Have mercy on me, O God, blot out my transgressions, according to your steadfast love'.

All prayer is a response to divine love.

God, as we incline our heads in prayer, reminds us of that love, especially the love shown by his Son.

The words of the psalm become our own words

Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer

Throughout this Lenten season we have heard of the need for repentance

The whole world, in the Lenten season of this year, 2021, seems to be suffering.

Too often, even we who call ourselves Christians have - consciously or unconsciously - laid blame for the cause of this trouble. Laid blame on others. We have doubted that God holds the world in his hands. Forgive us, Lord, for failing to continue to pray, even in puzzlement, as we seek the divine purpose in the history unfolding around us

Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer

As we survey the wondrous cross, remind us that, just as Jesus lived and died to save, not himself, but others, so our prayers and our lives should be given not for ourselves, but for others, on behalf of whom we offer our prayers, interceding for them

Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer

Love begins in community, and enables true community. In our daily lives and interactions, God is calling us to respond to Christ's love for others, and he rejoices with us in the good things, and supports us in the bad. Let us each now in some moments of silent reflection gather up in our thoughts those people and circumstances your love prompts us to bring to our minds and hearts.

We know that God knows the need, before and even beyond our discernment of it. Nevertheless we are called to pray, as we now do in silence

[silent prayer]

Look favourably on us, O God, for what we have taken to you in prayer.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Prayer was especially needful in the time we have been unable to gather as a congregation in one place. Let us celebrate joy at hearing each other pray, as we join, a church reunited in face-to-face fellowship, praying in the words Jesus taught us

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.**

BEING SENT ON GOD'S MISSION

HYMN 580 'Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us'

BLESSING AND THREEFOLD AMEN

May Christ dwell in our hearts through faith;
May we be rooted and grounded in love;
May we grasp the full breadth and length
and height and depth of the love of Christ;

May we know that love, which surpasses knowledge.
May we be filled with the fullness of God.

Now to Him who is able to do more than we can ask or imagine,
according to His power that is at work within us,
to Him be glory throughout all generations,
for ever and ever.

(Source: <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk>)

AMEN AMEN AMEN

ANNOUNCEMENTS

We warmly welcome Nicole Smeulders

Many thanks to David for leading our worship today.

Sermon written by Bruce Prewer. Prayers sourced with permission from UCA online worship resources, Pilgrim Uniting Church, Christine Longhurst/Re-worship and Church of Scotland weekly worship material.

Palm Sunday Rally for Refugees on the 28th March, 2 p.m. at Belmore Park. More details on insights.uca.org.au or the Australian Refugee Action Network website. Registration and masks required.

If you would like to talk to a minister of religion, we suggest you contact the Rev Michael Thomas, minister of Crows Nest Uniting Church. Look on our website for details.

Revised Common Lectionary. Our readings for next Sunday will be chosen from the following list. Isaiah 50: 4-9a; Philippians 2: 5-11; Mark 11: 1-11 or John 12: 12-16.

ICC Prayer: We pray for Rev Timothy St. Quinton and the people of St Peter's, Cremorne.

Service leader and prayers of the people: David **Reader:** Lucia