

### Welcome

As we write this, a few weeks before what might be the day of the end of Stage 3 & 4 lockdowns in Victoria, we welcome you to worship. If there's now a lessening of restrictions and a lifting of the State of Emergency then we celebrate that we've been able to keep the virus numbers low and to care for each other through this challenging time. We know that the battle is not over and we will endeavour to continue to provide this resource while people are still unable to gather together for worship. **Welcome!**

### Light Your Candle



Know that the light of Christ  
is shining in your life,  
shining from the beginning,  
shining in the dark,  
shining for you  
and for those around you.

### Call to Worship

Put it down, put it all down, everything that you don't need to carry into this time of worship. Imagine there's a box under your chair. Slip it out and put it all in there - concerns about what's for lunch, or when to put away your winter coat, or what to do about that barking dog... Put it all in the imaginary box and push it back under the chair. You can get it later (if you want to).



**Come Holy Spirit,  
enter this space and rest on us**

**with your calm presence  
and your wild inspiration.**

**Breathe us into life as we worship God:  
Source, Son and Spirit. Amen.**

### Acknowledgement of Country

The earth beneath us is holy ground, so is the land around us and the seas and rivers that ebb and flow. We acknowledge the traditional custodians of this place, and pay respect to elders past, present and emerging. We commit ourselves to truth telling and to walking together in justice, hope and peace.



*Uniting Aboriginal and Islander  
Christian Congress*

### Hymn TiS 231 At the name of Jesus

At the name of Jesus  
every knee shall bow  
every tongue confess him  
King of Glory now:  
this the Father's pleasure  
that we call him Lord  
who from the beginning  
was the mighty Word.

Humbled for a season  
to receive a name  
from the lips of sinners  
unto whom he came  
faithfully he bore it  
spotless to the last  
brought it back victorious  
when from death he passed.

In your hearts enthrone him  
there let him make new  
all that is not holy  
all that is not true.  
He is God the Saviour  
he is Christ the Lord  
ever to be worshipped  
trusted and adored.

When this same Lord Jesus

shall appear again  
in his Father's glory  
there with him to reign  
then may we adore him  
all before him bow  
as our hearts confess him  
King of Glory now.

*Used with Permission Caroline Maria Noel 1817-77  
alt. CCLI 241 739*

### Opening Prayer

God whose power and ways  
are beyond our understanding,  
we bring before you our thankfulness.

### Thank you

for this time of worship and reflection,  
and for the stories of your presence  
alongside people long ago,  
and here with us now.

### Thank you

for coming to live beside us in Jesus,  
offering us a way to see your love at work  
and to know for ourselves  
the healing power of forgiveness,  
the freedom of living in your grace,  
and the delight of life in your light.

### Thank you

for the ongoing gift of the Spirit,  
companion with us on the way  
urging us to offer our best  
and to see each other as you see us.

### Prayer of confession

And yet, we confess that  
we struggle to see ourselves  
and each other  
as clearly as you see us  
with open eyes of mercy, love and grace.

We confess that we find it easier  
to wear cloudy lenses of judgement  
feeding our need to feel superior  
by putting others down,

We confess that the mirror is often misty  
when we look at ourselves,  
holding onto shame and blame  
for our past mistakes  
and making ourselves feel worthless  
and not deserving of your love.

Free us, God of deliverance,  
from being enslaved to these ways,  
lead us through the river of change  
and land us safe on the other side;  
eyes wide open  
to see your goodness and glory  
reflected like candles in our eyes  
and in the eyes of each other.  
May it be so, Amen.

### The Readings

- Exodus 14: 19-31
- Romans 14: 1-12
- Matthew 18: 21-35

For these words of faith and Jesus the  
Word: **Thanks be to God.**

### Reflection: Rev Deacon Wendy Elson

Do you remember the Picture Bible that  
was around a few years ago? Alright, I  
mean about 50 years ago. It was very  
helpful in making the Bible alive to  
children. I do, however, think that it gave  
me some false images as well, which have  
needed to be examined later in life.

The Exodus reading is a bit unexpected to  
me. The image it creates is not like my child  
picture Bible. Yes, it does say that God  
caused the wheels of the Egyptian chariots  
to be sluggish. My pictures did show them  
stuck on the rocky bottom of the sea. But  
no, they didn't just plough on into the sea  
in their chase of the Israelites. Actually,  
they all camped the night at the seaside  
first and the Israelites were protected by  
something amazing. The angel and the  
cloud which guided them through the day

by taking the lead, went around to flank them during the night and to keep them safe. It even gave them light. What assurance and what protection was lovingly offered to the people in such a fearful and risky time!

Then in the Gospel we see the importance and nature of forgiveness.

Of sharing grace time upon time, no matter what the offence. Just as we have been given grace, so also

we give grace to others. It cannot be hoarded.



I will try not to get caught up in the debate in the Romans reading regarding vegetarianism and weakness. How ironic that this reflection falls to me as the team vegetarian. So, I am not going to go there as judgements are out of place in the debate!

We are told here in Romans that judging is not ours to do. 'Who are you to judge?' Judgement is an arrogance and it is a hindrance to those we judge, and to us when we act as judge. I think that there is a fair bit of pressure on us these days to make judgements, to make assessments. Pressure even to make snap judgements which we then need to hold and reinforce. Perhaps, it's all those uncomfortable judging shows around cooking efforts, talents in dancing and singing etc. Like in this Romans passage, what we eat, even which day of the week people consider best, we judge it all. We think we have to have an opinion on all things. It is such a human thing to make a judgement and if

we can possibly find the "other" to be inferior, then we can feel superior. It is so tempting and at a shallow level it can build our self esteem (although deep underneath we know, don't we?). And then comes the pressure inside us, to hold on to these views and judgements. Letting go of these preconceived ideas is then really tough. But how many times have YOU been forgiven? Hard to justify then, not doing the same for others. Just let go.

So, without that forgiveness the Matthew passage underlines, we are pretty out of step. We ignore the grace we have been given and hold it to ourselves. We can find so much to judge about and it can be the strongest, the dominant part, of our nature. Instead let the dominant part of our nature become compassion and grace. And perhaps gratitude has a part to play here.

We are all less than whole, we are all human, make mistakes, act like duds, whatever! But we are all forgiven and loved and cherished and celebrated. God is with us and forgives us. Jesus already showed deep love by being prepared to keep making the points of love, even when that threatened his life. And, well, you know the rest of that story. God has already forgiven us and shown us absolute love.



Throughout the tough restrictions there have been reminders to be thankful and to make gratitude a practice. I recently found myself holding a point of view I have held for years that I had to change. I needed to see things in a different light, to write myself a new narrative. I had told myself

that there was no joy in a certain part of my life. So, I decided to reframe it and see it through a different lens. To do this I needed to change my self-talk that kept insisting that there was no joy. This part of me kept looking for the reasons to see it that way. And of course, that is what it found (since it was all it COULD see). It caused me to look at a couple of other things that I had flippantly described a certain way and which had then acted as reinforcement. Restrictions have been good for reflection!

So maybe these eyes of grace and compassion could even act on my own self-perception, allowing me to see myself as God does. OK, so this is a work in progress

but if God has and does forgive me, why do I hold on to those things I see as regrettable. Why do I feel a little bit ill when I think about certain words and actions? The eyes of grace through which I see, need to be more like contact lenses than spectacles I take on and off.

As I said at the start, things are not always as we remember them to be, as we thought that they were. We are then invited to change our understandings and perceptions and take courage in the fact that we are surrounded by the Light and Grace of a very present God. For sure, God's grace is not to be sniffed at. The whole Egyptian army was chasing the fleeing people who must have wondered if they had lost their marbles by following Moses out into the desert. They must have really been at their wit's end with the



suffering of being an oppressed and discounted people. They left everything behind and trusted God and Moses, and God gave them reassurance, courage and deep care through the protection and presence of the Light and the Cloud. God's nature, God's glory and grace, was right there. And is right here!

The Psalm tells us that we are to tremble at the presence of the Lord, present to us in and through the remembering of God's care and provision for us. We are to be transformed by this knowledge and experience. So judging is out, and gratitude and mercy and grace are in. Let God take care of the rest. Treat others with tenderness. Be tender with yourself, for then you can tend others. Live gratitude and awe, for then you will recognise grace.



#### Prayers of the people

Loving and forgiving God

We pray this day for the leaders of the World, every Nation, every Island:

For those who lead communities devastated by virus;

For those who lead countries at war, or who provoke war, or those who seek to destabilise peace:

- We ask for wisdom to bring peace to every place
- Fortitude to seek justice for the oppressed and vulnerable

- And courage to stand with them for new life to emerge.

Loving and forgiving God

We pray for our leaders in this country  
Our Prime minister and the Leader of the Opposition

That they may work together in these days of threat of infection,

- And seek solutions to keep all in our community safe and well.

We hold our premier in prayer today:

- For wisdom and stamina to lead our state to health.

Loving and forgiving God

We pray for our Church:

- That our past stewardship may create a pathway,
- For new ministries in these new days and beyond our lifetimes.

We pray for our Ministers of the Word, our Ministers of the Diaconate, and our pastors and all who work in our Church:

To bring the schools, hospitals, and Social Services and congregations

To their full potential,

So your Good News may be made real in Human life and in the Creation.

Loving and forgiving God,

Bring healing to those who are sick;

Bring deliverance to those who are dying;

- Bring hope to those who care for them, in these days.

May those who grieve

Know your comfort and care.

In this moment, we bring those prayers

For which only we can know.

< a space for stillness prayer >

We bring all our prayer together in

### 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.

### Passing the peace

Is there someone who you need to reach out to with a hand of peace? Maybe as a healing gesture between you, or as an offering of peace in their struggle. Make sure you do that today, maybe even after you read the blessing. You could read it for them also.

### Offering

We make our offering of money, time, prayer and service to the church, not because we need to repay God for God's goodness, or purchase a favour or feel

better than others. We offer what we have because we want to uphold God's work in the world, bringing life and hope to all.



Our offering is received and blessed.

### Notices

If you'd like to join worship "On-Line" you can access a version of the Shearwater service from St John's Uniting Cowes here: <http://cowes.unitingchurch.org.au/index.php>

The Gippsland Presbytery have other worship resources here:

<https://gippsland.unitingchurch.org.au>

**Hymn: If I have been the source of pain***tune: SINE NOMINE (For all the saints)*

If I have been the source of pain, O God,  
 if to the weak I have refused my strength,  
 if in rebellion I have strayed away,  
 forgive me God, forgive me God.

If I have spoken words of cruelty,  
 if I have left some suffering unrelieved,  
 condemn not my insensitivity;  
 forgive me God, forgive me God.

If I've insisted on a peaceful life,  
 far from the struggles  
 that the gospel brings,  
 when you prefer to guide me to the strife,  
 forgive me God, forgive me God.

Receive, O God,  
 this ardent word of prayer,  
 and free me from  
 temptation's subtle snare;  
 with tender patience,  
 lead me to your care.

Amen, amen.

*Words: C. Maude Battersby  
 & (transl) Janet W. May*

**Blessing**

May the love of Christ enfold you,  
 wherever he may lead you.  
 May he guide you through the wilderness,  
 protect you in the storm.  
 May he bring you home rejoicing  
 at the wonders he has shown you.  
 May he bring you home rejoicing,  
 with a welcome at the door.

Go in peace, to love and serve God.

**In the name of Christ, Amen.**



You can pick up the imaginary box from  
 under your seat and  
 reclaim the contents  
 if you choose. Or you  
 can simply discard it  
 to the great recycling  
 of worries and struggles; and may they  
 return as blessings!

