

ST ANDREWS GLENBROOK UNINTG CHURCH - 27 JUNE 2020



THE 4TH SUNDAY IN THE SEASON OF PENTECOST

CALL TO WORSHIP

Some of us are hurting,
some of us are laughing
All are welcome

Some of us are very young,
some of us are getting old.
All are welcome

Some of us have hearts of gladness,
some of us are filled with grief.
All are welcome

The strong and the weak,
the faithful and doubter,
the saint and sinner,
the regular and visitor.
All are welcome.

So come into the presence of God
and the fellowship of the Spirit,
come, just as you are.

SONG: COME AS YOU ARE - TiS 693 by Deirdre Browne

Come as you are, that's how I want you.
Come as you are, feel quite at home.
Close to my heart, loved and forgiven;
come as you are, why stand alone?

No need to fear, love sets no limits.
No need to fear, love never ends.
Don't run away shamed and
disheartened.
Rest in my love, trust me again.

I came to call sinners, not just the
virtuous.

I came to bring peace, not to condemn.
Each time you fail to live by my promise,
why do you think I'd love you the less?

Come as you are, that's how I love you.
Come as you are, trust me again.
Nothing can change the love that I bear
you.

All will be well, just come as you are.

CHILDREN'S PRAYER

Jesus says:

"Welcome, all are welcome."

That includes me

and you

and everyone.

Really God?

Me?

And everyone?

Even them?

Thank you, God, that you welcome us all.

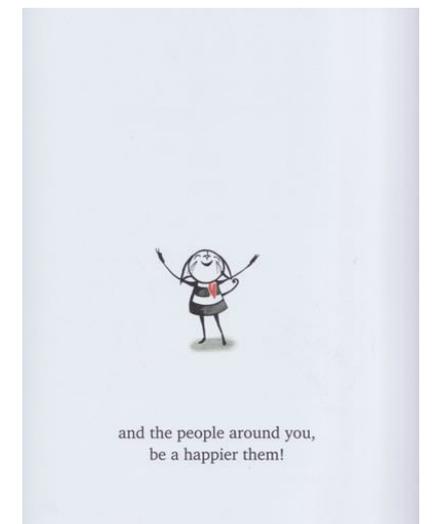
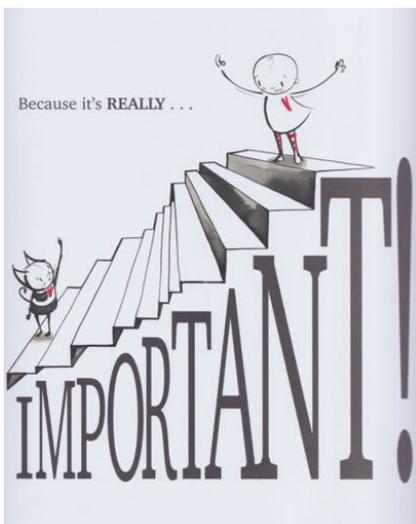
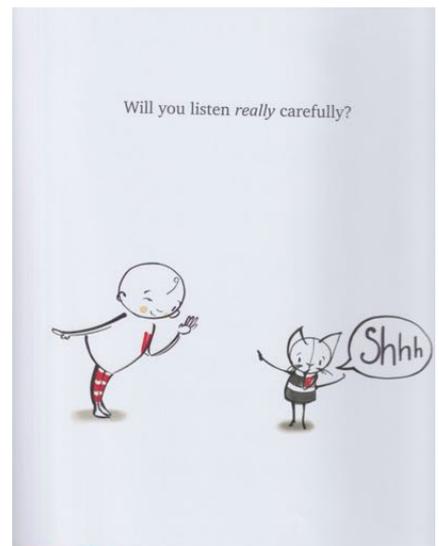
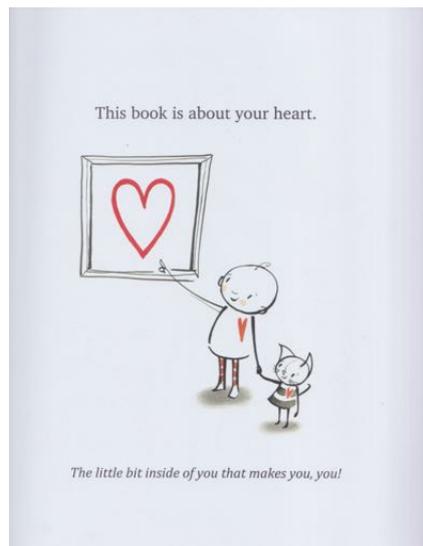
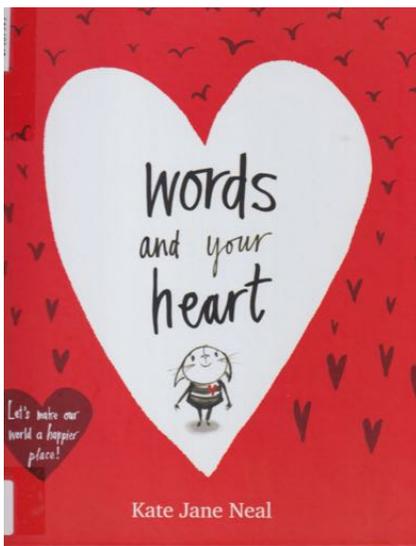
Thank you that you love each of us, every one of us.

You are truly awesome.

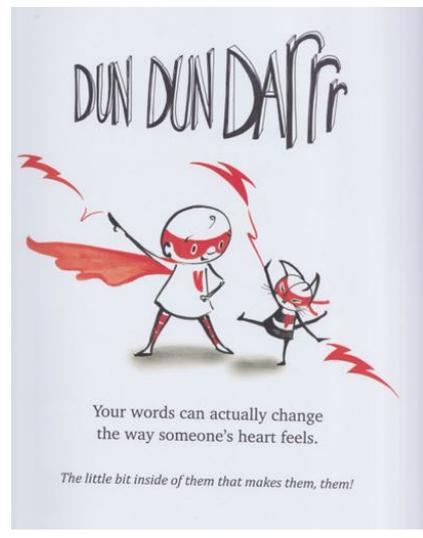
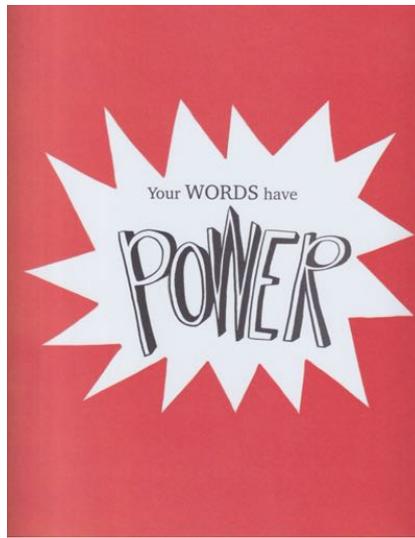
Your love is awesome, making me awesome.

Thank you, God.

Amen.



And some words can really hurt.



Your words can actually change the way someone's heart feels.

The little bit inside of them that makes them, them!

If someone feels sad . . .



. . . your words can cheer them up!



If someone feels weak, your words can help them feel stronger.



If someone wants to give up . . .



. . . your words can help keep them going.



Make them giggle,

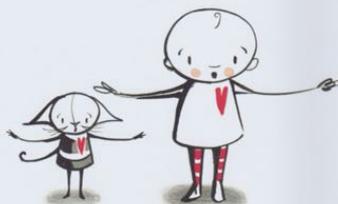


make them grin,



make them laugh out loud and roll around!

Do you see what we mean?



Your words are



How about we all use our words to look after each other's hearts?



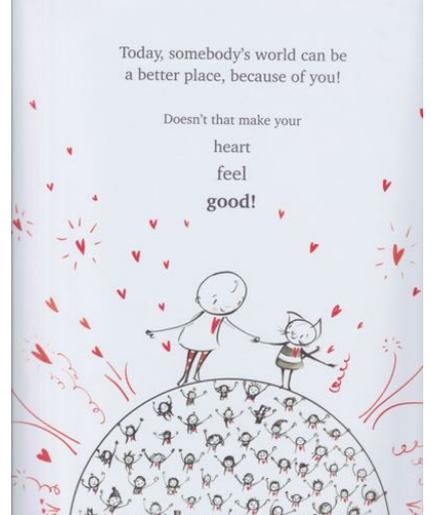
The little bit inside of us that makes us, US!



Let's try together and see the difference it makes.

Today, somebody's world can be a better place, because of you!

Doesn't that make your heart feel good!



GROWING FAITH TOGETHER: 'Words and Your Heart' a story by Kate Jane Neal
PRAYER OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION

Welcoming God,
we come to you
with all our words and our hearts,
knowing that you are waiting with open arms,
ready to welcome us,
your family,
into your loving presence.

Welcoming Jesus,
as we listen to the gospel and the way you enjoy
the hospitality of others,
we recognise that you were willing to sit with anyone,
saint and sinner alike.
And so we come to you
trusting that you will always make room for us.

Welcoming Spirit,
so often hidden from sight
and yet so large a part
of any gathering of God's people.
Even across the vast expanse of the internet,
we come together
knowing that the whispers of welcome are all around us.

We are welcomed
and yet there are moments when we don't feel deserving of that welcome,
your wide arms of grace, O God,
are sometimes too much to take in.

When we come with our heads dipped in shame
you gently lift our chins,
gaze into our eyes,
and say: welcome child,
so good to see you.

Lord, may we never take this for granted,
may we live into your gracious welcome,
accept your love and, in turn,
offer that same love and welcome
to all whom we meet.

Lord, gracious Lord, hear our prayers.
Amen.

Matthew 10:34-42 NRSV

³⁴ “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

³⁵ For I have come to set a man against his father,
and a daughter against her mother,
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;

³⁶ and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household.

³⁷ Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; ³⁸ and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

⁴⁰ “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹ Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; ⁴² and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”

INTRODUCTION

Today we have preaching for us, the wonderful Bec Reidy, Centre Coordinator for Bidwill Uniting. Bidwill Uniting is a small team of staff, volunteers and Bidwill/Mt Druitt residents who work together (and collaboratively with other agencies) to support the community by building on their strengths and passions. Bidwill Uniting helps to develop projects and programs that will benefit and build the capacity of residents to get where they want to be in life- both personally and as a community. Bidwell Uniting develops local leadership so that local people are driving the change in their own communities. Bec says “This is long term work, but amazing to be a part of the journey of so many people who are committed to moving their lives forward”
Bec, we welcome and thank you and we also welcome any “Bidwillians or Mt Druitt folk join us in worship today. May our ears and hearts be open to God’s word for us today.

Bec’s Message:

Hi, my name’s Bec Reidy and I’m delighted to be with you today. The first thing I’d like to do is acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet. I know that Ellie did this earlier but I feel like it’s important for me to do it too. I’m recording on Darug and Gundungurra land in the Blue Mountains where I live, and probably where most of you are. I work on the lands of the Darug and Wianamattigal people in Mt Druitt. I pay my respects to Indigenous elders past, present and emerging. I think the acknowledgment of country takes on a critical significance at the moment as we reflect on the Black Lives Matter movement and consider how we can all support the seeking of justice for our own Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander brothers and sisters here in

Australia, working alongside them, standing in solidarity with them, amplifying their voices and acknowledging their prior claim to this land and the atrocities that continue to be committed against them.

Many of you at Glenbrook Uniting Church know me, but for those who don't, I used to be part of the Emu Plains congregation before it closed. We had a great relationship with you guys and many of your wonderful members used to regularly come and preach and play the organ and visit our elderly residents of Edinglassie. I also work for Bidwill Uniting in Mt Druitt where we get behind the community and help them to create the change that they want to see. We focus on building up the local community and helping them find their own solutions to generational poverty. Again, many of your wonderful members have been involved over the years in various ways- through our Kids Hope Aus program and most recently involvement in the choir that we are trying to get up and running. Anyone who wants to know more about our work can contact me at any time- I'm always happy to hear from you. My contact details are at the top of this document.

The Gospel reading for today is very challenging- very confronting. I was given Matthew 10: 37-42, but I've chosen to include the couple of verses preceding it, so from verse 34 because I think it helps to put it into context a little more. It's a very difficult passage isn't it? It speaks of violence within families, not the peace that Jesus talks about earlier in the Sermon on the Mount. One of the things I love most about the example of Jesus is the way that he resists violence even til the very end, even to the point of shedding his own blood. Me- I want to smash things up when I see injustice in the world. Jesus did do this once and it brings me great comfort! (John 2:14-16) But mostly Jesus was non-violent- he taught non-violence. The other thing that I love in Jesus' example to us is that he was always taking a metaphorical sledge-hammer to the systems of oppression that he saw around him- both the Roman system and the Jewish authorities. Jesus *wanted* peace, but not at the expense of justice. For he understood what many oppressed groups around the world understand- that there is no peace without justice. Jesus understood that the message he was bringing was challenging- it was going to be difficult for people to follow it. It went against the grain of all the culture of that time. And unfortunately today, I would say that things have not changed.

This passage comes in the context of Jesus warning his followers about coming persecution which was very real, and did come. He was not saying that he wanted families to tear themselves apart, but that people should not expect a cushy ride. If people chose to follow him, they would cause trouble just by choosing his path.

So what does Jesus mean when he says, if you love your mother or father more than me you are not worthy of me? Are we meant to limit the amount of love we have for our family members? Or develop some kind of hierarchy of the order in which we love people the most? That doesn't make a lot of sense to me. Most of us love our parents right? Most of us love our brothers and sisters, children and cousins right? Surely God

wants us to love our family? Indeed, there's no evidence that Jesus wants to throw out centuries of values and tradition around looking after our families.

HOWEVER, Jesus is also very clearly trying to expand our ideas of what family is or should be, and of what it means to be a neighbour. Later on in Acts, Paul learns an important lesson about God's Spirit not being limited to Jewish people- it is meant for everyone, including the Gentiles (Acts 10). Matthew's Gospel is the only one that uses the word *ekklesia*- the word we translate as church. In using a third word, he avoids the Jewish/Gentile division. He opens up a third space to emphasise our oneness. A lot of the work of the New Testament is about helping the followers of Jesus to become one- neither Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, but one in Christ (Galatians 3:28).

The absolute core of the message of the Christ is love. That is the one commandment that we have- to love God and love one another- everything else hinges of this (Matthew 22:36-40). Love is about inclusion, not division. Love is about trying to understand "the other"- the one who is different- it is about showing compassion, empathy and understanding. The question I want to ask you is: what happens when you don't find that love in your own family?

Often what binds us together as families is not necessarily love, but a sense of duty, obligation, sometimes guilt. A sense of shared history and certain values and practices. Sometimes it can be a sense of not having anyone else to turn to, nowhere else to go. I'm sure we can all share experiences of times where we go to family gatherings not because we want to, but out of a sense of the expectation upon us- to keep a particular person happy- to maintain the peace. But I ask again, what if there is no love to be found in this? What if being bound by these family ties, these blood ties is not healthy? What if it harms people? What happens when the principles of your own family conflict with the principles of Jesus, of love?

Do we give up on our families? No!

But I think Jesus is saying that we need to prioritise love and the way of the Christ, the way of God, over and above our family obligations. Our blood ties, our nuclear, our extended families and even our culture, our national pride, are to be subordinated to the values of God, the values of love and inclusion.

The Gospel of Matthew argues that as followers of the Christ, we form our own family. The church is meant to be where we all find our belonging, where we find love and healthy connection, and most importantly, the base from where we reach out to include all in that love and belonging.

Jesus calls us to a lot more than inward looking, "we just want the best for our children" kind of lives. He calls us to widen our circles. To include more. To seek to understand more. To look further afield, to challenge ourselves. Jesus calls us to not let it slide when family and friends make racist or sexist remarks and jokes. Speaking up at these times

(though it is really hard) is to subordinate our love for our family to higher values of love for all, the values of Christ.

In families, partners often get together because they are from similar backgrounds and they raise their children within that background- they tend to be similar. There's nothing wrong with this. But what happens to families when someone within that unit has different thoughts or wants to explore something new? What if families are not supportive?

Some families are great! And I hope yours is. This isn't about saying that families are terrible- just that families are not everything. And we can't see them as everything because if we exalt our blood and family obligations to the highest place- that's how we end up in situations where the church tells women who are being abused that they just need to submit more to their husbands. That children being abused need to keep their mouths shut, to keep the peace, rather than disrupt family relationships and ruin reputations. It means that people have to hide being gay if their family is anti-gay. But if we as the church are fulfilling our role, all these people can find belonging, acceptance and love in us. We can be their family.

I can speak from some experience on this topic- there are many reasons why, but my family is not one that I can rely on. I haven't spoken a word to my parents in nearly 4 years and I am mostly cut off from my extended family on both sides. All I have left of my family is my precious sister, who I hold onto very tightly. So for me, my blood family cannot be all that there is in life. I have to find new ways of having family- a lot of which I find in the broader Uniting Church and at Bidwill Uniting. For me, following the call of God, being embedded in community, hospitality and working in solidarity with the poor is more important than blindly adhering to family obligations alone. For many of the people we work with in Bidwill, they have experienced family breakdown, hardship and abuse at the hands of family members. And not just Bidwill families- these issues cut across religion, class, ethnicity- all kinds of families have these issues. But for the people I work with in Bidwill, like me, they choose their own families- some of them choose that in us, and I in them. And I hope and pray that they find what they are looking for.

May everyone that we have contact with in our lives experience acceptance, love and belonging in our contact with them. May everyone who reaches out to our churches find what we are all looking for- the love of God. Thank you for having me.

Extra Bits:

Why Themes of Justice Are Important To Me:

I would like to mention that I have been accused in the past about banging on about the same issues over and over again. To this I say, guilty as charged. The reason for this is that when I read the bible, particularly the New Testament, I cannot help but see the same themes about love, justice and solidarity with the poor borne out over and over again. I see it as the central theme of the Gospel or Good News and I'll keep banging on

about it because when I look at the world around me at the corruption, the greed, the lack of regard for "the other", I feel tortured day and night. We, the church need to step up more and more and more and be the people that Christ calls us to be. As far as churches go, Glenbrook Uniting Church does a great job of this, but there's always more work to be done- always room for reflection, challenge and change, especially in these crazy times.

Christmas Example of Decisions Around Family and Inclusion:

Christmas is a good example of what it means to be church, what it means to be family and what it means to be inclusive. It's a time of year often fraught with conflict and stress about presents and food, and who's invited and who's not, and who gets along with who, about how many different gatherings we need to get to in one day. However, we all know that that's not what it should be about. We often had problems in our family when some of us tried to be more inclusive at Christmas- some wanted our gathering to be strictly just 'our family'. But to me, that's not what family or Christmas is meant to be about. And what that meant for me is that I had to start making my own decisions about how I would deal with that and what I might do differently at Christmas time. It's not an easy thing to do, and yet Jesus calls us to make those hard decisions.

SONG: COMMUNITY OF CHRIST - TiS 473 - by Shirley Erene Murray

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 children are of every race

 and every song.

 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 neighbor's feet.

 Community of Christ,

 through whom the word 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.

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 our law,
our food and faith be shared as one
forevermore.

PRAYERS FOR OURSELVES AND OTHERS

God of welcome,
we thank you that you are always ready, waiting to welcome us,
always waiting to spend time with us
and hear what we want to bring to you in prayer.
This prayer could be an endless list
and there will be situations missed
and people escaping our attention,
but we know that you are able to see beyond our limited memories
and hold all that pains creation with us and for us.
We are so consumed by the effects of a virus that many situations have gone unnoticed.
We pray now for those in our world who feel forgotten:
for refugees in camps
not only worried about when their lives might take a better turn
but now also fearful of this invisible danger;
for men, women and children
behind closed doors
living with danger and torment
at the hands of people who profess to love them;
for people living with serious ongoing health conditions,
amidst a health system that is stretched;
for those in the background within care-giving services,
the cleaners and maintenance staff, the administrators and managers,
doing what is needed to ensure hospitals and nursing homes
run smoothly and safely;
for places of conflict where,
with attention elsewhere,
dangers are increased and tensions raised,
and where deaths continue
unheeded.
So many places,
so many concerns, Lord;
thank you that we can bring them to you. Amen.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

Lord,

we bring to you our offerings:

our money, our time and ourselves, not as payment for something given but out of adoration and thanksgiving for all we have received.

Take what we offer and who we are, bless them to the work of this church and your kingdom.

Amen.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Hopefully you have all received a pastoral letter from our church council chair Mark with the Community Listening survey. This is a really important time for us, and family and friends to reflect and share our experience of worship over these past few months, so that together we can discern a way forward in these extraordinary times.

Please be honest, but also remember that words have power - so let them be shared with love for one another.

If you are experiencing any difficulties or concerns, please let me encourage you to reach out to our pastoral carers or to me. I know that many of you are reaching out with care and hospitality to one another and I thank you for this, however if you are feeling alone or disconnected, just give me a call or send me an email and we can make a time to meet.

BENEDICTION

God of welcome and grace,

lead us to follow you more closely.

Empower us to be the disciples you call us to be.

Send us out to bring comfort and aid to those who are alone.

Guide us to the "little ones" who need your love. Amen.