

## ST ANDREWS GLENBROOK UNITING CHURCH

11th Sunday in Pentecost - The Growing Time



### CENTERING WORDS

When all seems to be lost, God is most near to us.

### OPENING WORDS

"You do not have to be good. You do not have to walk on your knees for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting. You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves. Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine. Meanwhile the world goes on. Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain are moving across the landscapes, over the prairies and the deep trees, the mountains and the rivers. Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air, are heading home again. Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the world offers itself to your imagination, calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting - over and over announcing your place in the family of things." ( Mary Oliver)

### SONG: 'Come As You Are' 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.

## PRAYER OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION

Living God,  
 we come before you today as your people,  
 a community of faith,  
 a family of hope,  
 a people of love.

We give thanks for your beloved son,  
 our Saviour, our Guide, and our Protector,  
 the Good Shepherd to all people,  
 wherever we are, whomever we are, whatever we are,  
 we are yours and you are ours.

We give thanks that your constant and unending love knows no borders,  
 no ethnicity,  
 no gender or sexuality,  
 but is poured out freely upon each one of us, today and always.  
 In a time of uncertainty and fear,  
 we ask that this love continues to sustain us through whatever trials we face.

As we seek to follow you in this ever-changing world  
 we ask for the wisdom to see your light shining in every person we meet.  
 Let your example of care and compassion for all people be our guiding force.

In the many times that we fail to follow in your footsteps,  
 we ask, not only for forgiveness,  
 but for courage and confidence in our ability to carry on,  
 to return to your path.

No matter how many times we may falter  
 we pray that we will always know that you stand with us.

God of all,  
 merciful and loving,  
 we come before you,  
 in faith, hope, and love,  
 today and every day,  
 Amen.

## GROWING FAITH TOGETHER: 'FUSSY RYAN'

Once upon a time there was a boy called Ryan who was a very fussy eater. He wasn't allergic to anything and his Mum and Dad cooked delicious, healthy meals, but Ryan had very definite ideas about what he liked and what he did not like.

Here are the things Ryan would not eat: mushrooms, baked beans, marmalade, Vegemite, spicy sausages, spinach, jelly and trifle.

He had never tasted any of them, but he had decided he would not eat them!

One Saturday afternoon, his sister Katy and his Dad were in the garden together and Dad decided he was going to do baked potatoes for dinner that night.

"Can I help prepare the fillings, Dad?" asked Katy.

"That would be great " said Dad. "We'll be the cooking team for tonight!"

"I'll go and ask the others what they would like as their filling," said Katy.

"Good idea!" said Dad,

Katy went into the house and found her brothers with Mum, playing a board game on the kitchen table.

"Hello," smiled Katy, "sorry to interrupt your game. But Dad and I are going to be the cooking team for dinner and we're doing baked potatoes. I just wondered what fillings you would like best.

"Thanks Katy," said Mum. "I think I'd like baked beans and cheese!"

"Oh yes, me too, please," said her brother Chris, "I love baked beans! What is Dad having?"

"I don't know yet," said Katy, "but you know Dad, he's sure to want some mushrooms on the side. He eats mushrooms with just about anything!"

Everyone laughed.

"What about you, Ryan?" asked Katy. "We've got some tuna, plenty of cheese, and there's some coleslaw. Or I could make you some prawns with mayonnaise?"

"Tuna and coleslaw, thanks," said Ryan, "that would be yummy. What are you going to have?"

Now they all knew Katy adored baked beans and she quite liked mushrooms too! So what did she say?

"Oh, now you mention it, I'll have the same as you! Tuna and coleslaw. Right, enjoy the rest of your game. I'm going back to the garden for a bit!"

Chris and Ryan smiled at each other after Katy had gone. Chris spoke first. "What a lovely little sister we have. She says the nicest and kindest things—always."

"Yes, she's the best!" agreed Ryan.

Later, at dinner time, Dad served up the baked potatoes, and Katy put bowls of cheese, coleslaw and tuna on the table. Then she gave a final stir to the saucepan of baked beans while Dad finished frying the mushrooms.

"Now, who'd like some of these?" he asked.

"Can I try one?" It was Ryan. What a surprise!

"Of course you can," said Katy quickly, winking at Dad. So Ryan tasted his first mushroom and discovered it wasn't too bad at all. Then he said to his surprised family, "I was thinking about how Katy is always so kind and nice in everything she says. She always takes care not to be rude or horrible, even when she's feeling sad or angry." He looked at Katy and went on, "You say kind things because you're a kind sister. It made me realise that I'd rather be a fussy speaker than a fussy eater. From now on, I'm going to try and be a fussy speaker!"

"What a wonderful idea," said Mum, "let's all be fussy speakers, being careful to use kind and caring words as much as we can!"

Then Dad said, "And can I put one more question to all of you, and I hope it's kind?"

"What is it?" they replied.

"Would you like some baked beans?"

Everyone laughed and shouted, "YES!!"

## ALL AGE PRAYER

Whoever,  
 wherever,  
 whatever we are, Jesus is there.  
 He loves us being us.

He loves us when we are silly,  
 he loves us when we are sad,  
 he loves us when we are happy,  
 he loves us when we are alone,  
 he loves us when we are together,  
 he loves us when we are ourselves.

The world might want us to be something else  
 but whoever we are,  
 wherever we are,  
 whatever we are,  
 Jesus loves us! Amen.

## BIBLE READING: Matthew 15:1-9

Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands before they eat." He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die.' But you say that whoever tells father or mother, 'Whatever support you might have had from me is given to God,' then that person need not honor the father. So, for the sake of your tradition, you make void the word of God. You hypocrites! Isaiah prophesied rightly about you when he said: 'This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.'"

## REFLECTION by Andrew Goodwin

Hi. my name is Andrew, my young family and I have been coming to St Andrews as much as we can since we moved to Glenbrook in December last year. You're hearing from me because I heard from Ellie that she and the church council were trying to figure out what worship and our life as a congregation would look like as we move out of lockdown and into a post COVID19 future. I have worked for many years helping communities through times of change and wanted to share my skills.

And right now is a time of change like no other. COVID19 is a global pandemic tearing apart society as we know it. This is a once in a century occurrence and we are responding in ways that we couldn't even imagine just weeks ago. For months we've not

been able to gather at St Andrews for worship. For months we've been learning new ways to connect with each other and connect with God.

And now we're looking to the future. In hearing about the heart tank process Ellie and the church council have proposed I volunteered to share my skills to help facilitate a discussion about how we figure out what church looks like in this time of extreme uncertainty. Now it's important to remember that it is not a process of how we get back to how things used to be. One day we hope that our freedom to meet and worship like we used to won't be constrained by the real and serious risks to our lives and the extraordinary regulations that are in place to protect us. But we don't know how long away that could be, and if or when our freedoms return, we don't know how long they might last before things change again.

At the same time, there have been unexpected benefits to the changes we've made. Being pushed into new ways of worship and being church have given us opportunities to engage with our faith and with each other in ways we couldn't have imagined. Ways that have been lifegiving for many who were unable to participate in worship as we previously knew it.

So here we are. We're thrust into the unknown, have no idea when we'll be able to choose how we meet, or even know, as a community, how we would go back even if we could. So now what?

I think of the words of Psalm 121: *I lift my eyes to the hills. From where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.* I find deep assurance knowing that God is with us. We are indeed looking to God for help. The tradition of the Psalm speak to us of being held in the assurance of God with us, even when facing a storm, or an enemy, or separation from peace. Yet as we turn to the teaching of Jesus, and look at the words of Matthew, in Chapter 15, where Jesus talks of the traditions of his elders, we clearly see that Jesus has a way of confronting and transforming 'traditions', that had felt like safe harbour, comfort and assurance.

Now there is a lot happening in this passage. And I'm cautious about reading too much of our current experience into Jesus' words. Two things I do think are relevant to us, are reflecting on the devotion of the pharisees and the traditions they upheld, and Jesus' consistent call to live outside of the rules and regulations of the church and society of his time.

It is interesting to note that in this confrontation, both the pharisees and Jesus use specific yet different behaviours - that is washing hands for the pharisees or honouring our parents for Jesus - as representative of all their traditions. While washing hands has

particular importance to us today, whether or not Jesus and his disciples washed their hands did not impact on their alignment to the commandment of God in their context. However, some traditions, namely supporting their church with allowances that should be used to support one's parents, is a dangerous example of how support of the church can itself be against the will of God.

With this in mind I ask you, what are the traditions of *our* elders? How closely do they align with the commandment of God? Are they like the washing of hands - meaningful rituals but at base not necessary for holiness? Or do we elevate devotion to them above the teachings of Christ and the prophets? What about traditions like meeting in a church hall on Sunday mornings? Or greeting each other with handshake or a hug? What about Communion on the first Sunday of the month? I find thinking about the differences between my religious life and the values and teachings of Jesus quite unsettling.

Whatever our traditions may be, many of those long held are now lost to us. I don't know when we will be able to share morning tea in the hall, or sing together, without being fined or risking each others' lives. All that seems left at times is a deep uncertainty for the future.

But as followers of Jesus this deep uncertainty isn't new to us. Is it? Like Christians throughout the ages, we are called daily to pull away from the traditions of the world, even at times like in Matthew 15, to pull away from the traditions of our own elders. Jesus is consistently and repeatedly clear on this point. God's call on our lives is still the same. We are still like Jesus' disciples, sent out like sheep amongst wolves, to heal the sick and give sight to the blind, without so much as a few coins and spare shirt. This hasn't changed. The world around us has gone topsy turvy, but Jesus' teachings remain the same.

As we work out how we want to function as a community over the next few weeks it's important for us to reflect on our traditions. Those that we cannot practise for who knows how long. New traditions that are emerging in this time of change. And perhaps old traditions that have been lost but could be reinvigorated. It's important to also reflect on how God through the teachings of Jesus continues to call us into the wilderness, the same today as yesterday and tomorrow. And it's important to remember, like in Psalm 121, that we're not doing this alone. Yes, God is with us, and even though we as a congregation might not be able to meet as we used to, we are still on this journey together.

Working out how we worship and organise ourselves in these strange times is hard. But it is vitally important that we do it together. Many of you have already participated in

helping shape what our future might look like by responding to the survey sent out a few weeks ago. Going through the survey results what stood out to me is that we are a community committed to weathering this storm as faithful followers of Christ.

From the results, there were 79 people who responded to the survey, and 99% of respondents from St Andrews said they feel connected to St Andrews during the COVID19 crisis. Nearly 90% of respondents have been accessing the online worship, two in every five have been on Zoom and one in six have been using printed materials. Some shared their loss and desire for worship to return to the way it was and some said it has brought new life to their faith and improved their engagement with services.

There were about the same number of respondents aged under 70 as over 70 years old, which is on average older than the respondents to the National Christian Life Survey in our congregation in 2016. There were also nearly double the number of respondents to this survey than to the NCLS survey in 2016.

When looking to the future there is a great desire to meet face to face, but it is tempered by a recognition and enthusiasm to do the right thing – not only the right thing by COVID19 regulations, but the right thing by Ellie and her family. Many survey respondents recognised the incredible effort it takes to bring these new forms of worship together and want to make sure whatever we do decide is sustainable. Sustainable for Ellie, her family, and for all of us.

Thank you to everyone who responded to the survey. Alas though, there is more to planning for the future than answering a few questions. To continue, Ellie, the Church Council and I invite you to take part in our Heart Tank workshops. In contrast to a think tank that may provoke intellectual discussions, we are making a space in which we invite you to share from your heart and hear from others in the congregation as we map out our hopes and ideas for the future. We invite you to help shape the way that we as a community will continue to step out as followers of Jesus in this time of deep uncertainty. At the workshops we will go through the survey results, unpack what is and is not safe to do, and with this knowledge share ideas about how we can do things differently in the future.

We are also establishing a small taskforce to collate everyone's input to the workshops and the survey, and then provide recommendations for what this future might look like. These outcomes and recommendations will be shared with the congregation and put to the Church Council to decide what our next steps will be. As in the notices, the workshops will be online on 23 August, and in person on 30 August for those unable to participate online. If you have ideas or preferences for what our future worship will look like, then alongside the survey these workshops are your chance to have your say. If you

are unable to make it and have input outside of these sessions please contact Ellie, any of your church councillors or me and we can include your perspectives in the process.

As we reflect on our traditions and the constraints that we are under it is important to remember our goal isn't how to achieve what's most comfortable for us personally, or even as a community. Our goal is to see how we, as St Andrew's Glenbrook, can best respond faithfully and sustainably as Jesus, once again, calls us to follow him.

SONG: 'The Galilee Song' by *Frank Andersen*  
 Deep within my heart, I feel voices whispering to me.  
 Words that I can't understand; meanings I must clearly hear!  
 Calling me to follow close, lest I leave myself behind!  
 Calling me to walk into evening shadows one more time!

So I leave my boats behind!  
 Leave them on familiar shores!  
 Set my heart upon the deep!  
 Follow you again, my Lord!

In my memories, I know how you send familiar rains  
 Falling gently on my days, dancing patterns on my pain!  
 And I need to learn once more in the fortress of my mind,  
 To believe in falling rain as I travel deserts dry!  
 So I leave my boats behind!  
 Leave them on familiar shores!  
 Set my heart upon the deep!  
 Follow you again, my Lord!

As I gaze into the night down the future of my years,  
 I'm not sure I want to walk past horizons that I know!  
 And I need to learn once more like a stirring deep within,  
 Restless, 'til I live again beyond the fears that close me in!

So I leave my boats behind!  
 Leave them on familiar shores!  
 Set my heart upon the deep!  
 Follow you again, my Lord!

#### DEDICATION OF OUR GIFTS

As you have given all for us,  
 we offer ourselves in dedication to you our God,  
 for your work, your mission, and your kingdom.  
 We offer our gifts and money  
 as a sign of our determination to continue to bear witness  
 to your unending love for all peoples.  
 Amen.



## PRAYERS FOR OTHERS AND OURSELVES

Generous God,  
 we pray for your blessing on this community,  
 as we seek to find you in the midst of fear and trouble,  
 as we search for hope in times of uncertainty,  
 shine your light into the lives of each one of us,  
 that we may know your love is with us always.

We pray for your whole church,  
 a people attempting to live in your example  
 and spread your love and hope throughout the world.  
 We recognise and feel deeply the difficulties and limitations of this time  
 and still seek to bear witness to you.  
 We ask that you strengthen your church in your love,  
 help us to be faithful  
 and by your spirit to flourish.

We pray for those on the edge,  
 those living in pain, fear, hurt, or loneliness or with insecurity of unemployment or  
 isolation from loved ones.  
 We pray that we, your people,  
 may be places of comfort, understanding and support.

We pray for our global community,  
 as the world seems ever smaller,  
 where one country is not immune from the troubles of another,  
 we ask that leaders and citizens will follow your example  
 of peace, love, and forgiveness,  
 and work towards a better world for all peoples.

We pray that each one of us  
 will show your love to the world  
 welcoming friend and stranger alike,  
 bringing your kingdom ever closer, Amen.

## SENDING WORDS

Lord help us...  
 Lord, hear us...  
 Lord hear the cries of your people....  
 Go into the week with faith.  
 Go forward into all that awaits you in this week, with faith.  
 For the love of God is with you;  
 surrounds and upholds you.  
 Amen.