

St Andrews Uniting Church Glenbrook

Worship from Home

18th October 2020

OPENING WORDS

Church is not for the likes of us.

How true!

Church is not for the good or the righteous
or the pious
or the holy.

Praise the Lord!

God welcomes in
the outcast and the stranger,
the awkward characters and the social misfits.

God welcomes those
who do not abide by the rules,
those who do not even know the rules,
traditions and expectations.

God welcomes all of those who are not like us.

So we come into God's company,
we who are misfits, and we who fit in perfectly fine,
or we who are hanging onto faith by the skin of our teeth...
Come gather round Christ's table in the world
where all are welcomed and loved.

SONG: 'For Everyone Born' by Shirley Erena Murray

For everyone born, a place at the table,
for everyone born, clean water and bread,
a shelter, a space, a safe place for growing,
for everyone born, a star overhead, and
and God will delight when we are creators
of justice and joy, compassion and peace:

yes, God will delight when we are creators
of justice, justice and joy!

For woman and man, a place at the table,
revising the roles, deciding the share,
with wisdom and grace, dividing the power,
for woman and man, a system that's fair,
and God will delight when we are creators
of justice and joy, compassion and peace:
yes, God will delight when we are creators
of justice, justice and joy!

For young and for old, a place at the table,
a voice to be heard, a part in the song,
the hands of a child in hands that are wrinkled,
for young and for old, the right to belong,
and God will delight when we are creators
of justice and joy, compassion and peace:
yes, God will delight when we are creators
of justice, justice and joy!

For just and unjust, a place at the table,
abuser, abused, with need to forgive,
in anger, in hurt, a mindset of mercy,
for just and unjust, a new way to live,
and God will delight when we are creators
of justice and joy, compassion and peace:
yes, God will delight when we are creators
of justice, justice and joy!

For gay and for straight, a place at the table,
a covenant shared, a welcoming space,
a rainbow of race and gender and colour,
for gay and for straight, the chalice of grace,
and God will delight when we are creators
of justice and joy, compassion and peace:
yes, God will delight when we are creators
of justice, justice and joy!

For everyone born, a place at the table,
to live without fear, and simply to be,

to work, to speak out, to witness and worship,
 for everyone born, the right to be free,
 and God will delight when we are creators
 of justice and joy, compassion and peace:
 yes, God will delight when we are creators
 of justice, justice and joy!

PRAYER OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION

Lord God,
 you invite one and all, so here we are.
 You make space for us whoever and wherever we are.
 May we feel your welcome
 and extend that same grace to others.
 Wherever we have been,
 whatever brings us to this act of worship,
 may we encounter your presence,
 and may that encounter transform our lives.

O living God,
 however unlikely it may seem,
 transform our despair into hope,
 our fear into joy
 and our loss into new beginnings.

Even in this online and at home worship space
 may we know ourselves seen and heard by the living God,
 loved as we are
 and made new by the intimacy of relationship.

Forgive what we have been,
 renew what we shall be
 and take us from here
 inspired to serve you in the world.
 Keep on working in us and through us
 until we extend our hope
 and our arms in welcome
 and you are seen in
 every darkened and forgotten corner of the world.
 In the name of Christ.
 Amen.

GROWING FAITH TOGETHER: 'The Red Tree' illustrated and written by Shaun Tan

Sometimes the day begins with nothing to look forward to

And things go from bad to worst

Darkness overcomes you

Nobody understands

The world is a deaf machine

Without sense of reason

Sometimes you wait and wait and wait and wait and wait and wait and wait but nothing ever happens

Then all your troubles come at once

Wonderful things are passing you by

Terrible fates are inevitable

Sometimes you just don't know what you are supposed to do

Or who you are meant to be

Or where you are

And the day seems to end the way it began

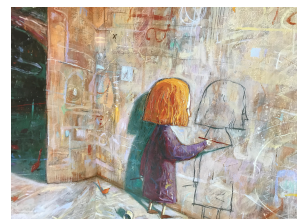
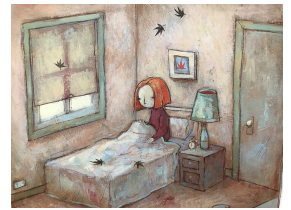
But suddenly there it is

Right in front of you

Bright and vivid

Quietly waiting

Just as you imagined it would be.



BIBLE READINGS: Psalm 139

O Lord, you have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
 you discern my thoughts from far away.
You search out my path and my lying down,
 and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
 O Lord, you know it completely.
You hem me in, behind and before,
 and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
 it is so high that I cannot attain it.
Where can I go from your spirit?
 Or where can I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
 if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
If I take the wings of the morning
 and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
 and your right hand shall hold me fast.
If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
 and the light around me become night,"
even the darkness is not dark to you;
 the night is as bright as the day,
 for darkness is as light to you.
For it was you who formed my inward parts;
 you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
 Wonderful are your works;
that I know very well.
 My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
 intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
In your book were written
 all the days that were formed for me,
 when none of them as yet existed.
How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!

How vast is the sum of them!
 I try to count them—they are more than the sand;
 I come to the end—I am still with you.
 O that you would kill the wicked, O God,
 and that the bloodthirsty would depart from me—
 those who speak of you maliciously,
 and lift themselves up against you for evil!
 Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord?
 And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?
 I hate them with perfect hatred;
 I count them my enemies.
 Search me, O God, and know my heart;
 test me and know my thoughts.
 See if there is any wicked way in me,
 and lead me in the way everlasting.

INTRODCUTION:

One day in June I received a message from a stranger via Facebook.
 Naomi wrote that she driven past our church and saw the beautiful woollen
 rainbow bell and woven welcome sign outside the church, and went home and
 Googled us.
 Her message said " Thank you for existing"
 Since then we have shared coffee and stories and discovered we have friends in
 common, and Namoi is now teaching yoga in our church hall.
 I am delighted to welcome Naomi to be our preacher for today - may her story and
 deep faithfulness be a blessing to you - as it has been for me.

REFLECTION: "Belonging" by Naomi Pryde

Have you ever wanted to belong? You know like really belong.. To be part of
 something, a community, a group? A family?

But maybe that comes with conditions. Maybe you need to make yourself small to
 fit in some places? Maybe you need to hide that part of who you are to be fully
 embraced. I'm currently in a season of feeling this to the core of my being.

I live in Thailand, I 'belong' there, that is where my friends are, my spiritual
 community, but I can't get home - the borders are closed, our short visit to
 Australia has blown out until who knows when!

I left Australia 10 years ago, most of my friends who once lived in the inner city where we were, moved away, scattered all over the country and indeed the world. And in recent months I made a decision to be honest about what I believe, and it cost me my belonging in the last stable part of my life in Australia - the church. In these past few months I have gone on a journey of feeling disposable, thrown out, unworthy, too much, not enough. And yet.... I am also on a journey to showing up in my life, to be fully seen, and fully known, and take my place as a beloved Child of God.

Brene Brown writes: " Belonging is the innate human desire to be part of something larger than us. Because this yearning is so primal, we often try to acquire it by fitting in and by seeking approval, which are not only hollow substitutes for belonging, but often barriers to it. Because true belonging only happens when we present our authentic, imperfect selves to the world, our sense of belonging can never be greater than our level of self-acceptance. – Brené Brown"

The beginning of this Psalm speaks about the God who sees us. The God who has examined our hearts and knows everything about us, that sees us when we travel and when we rest and who is behind and before. One of the names for God in hebrew is El Roi, or "The God who sees". God sees you and knows everything about you - and loves you, not "anyway" but just loves you, full stop.

The Psalmist goes on to say that God made all the delicate parts of us, our inner most being, knitted in our mother's womb. "Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex". "How precious are your thoughts about me, O god - they can not be numbered".

God thinks about you...all the time, they can't be numbered, and they are precious thoughts?

Friends I want to say to you today, that you are good, this physical body that you inhabit is good. When you truly examine yourself can you say that? In my upbringing, I somehow got a very clear message that I was a wretch and that there was nothing good about me, my spirit, that might be ok because of Jesus, but my flesh is sin or at the very least, irrelevant - and yet here we see the psalmist declaring the works of God's hand in creating him as Good.

Can you look at who you are, mind, body, soul and say "How wonderful are your thoughts about me O God" Can you find a sense of belonging to yourself.

Because who you are is deeply rooted in how God sees you - fully examined before God and still wonderful!

Can you present your authentic, Imperfect self into the world and accept yourself as enough and beloved, because the Creator's precious thoughts about who you are can not be numbered, His workmanship is wonderful. You know that you are enough.

One of my favourite authors Barbara Brown Taylor writes "We would rather lock up our bodies than listen to what they have to say. Where Christians are concerned, this leaves us in the peculiar position of being followers of the Word Made Flesh who neglect our own flesh or—worse—who treat our bodies with shame and scorn.

I came late to understanding that God loved all of me—not just my spirit but also my flesh.

And that is where the pretty Tea towel version of Psalm 139 ends, because if you keep reading what you discover is this jarring moment where it goes from beautiful imagery about creation and love to anger, hatred and death. It's quite unexpected and a harsh transition. But I want to take us there, into the shadow side.

"O God if only you would destroy the wicked, get out of my life! Shouldn't I hate those who hate you?"

In the middle of this beautiful Psalm is this angry, ranty man, who is cursing everyone around him and wishing death upon people.

Ruth Hayley Barton writes: Psalm 139 fits into a category of Psalm in which David expresses emotions of righteous anger and hatred toward God's enemies in ways that were common for God-fearing Jews at the time. But If we focus solely on the literary genre these verses fit into, we run the risk of missing the point. David was a man in the process of spiritual transformation.

Because David feels so secure and safe and unconditionally loved in the presence of God he feels safe letting all the mess and muck come out in front of God. He can rant and rage, and bring it all to God, not hide it away because it would so ungodly to do such a thing...

It doesn't justify being hateful and angry and wanting everyone dead but it does create a safe space where you can be fully seen, fully known, and exposed. The good marvelously made parts and the ugly, horrible, shadow sides of ourselves

that we would rather no one sees. And here too - God sees. And God still loves.

It is in this place of the depths of anger and mess and despair and sin that the Psalmist asks "Search me O God, and know my anxious thoughts, Point out any way in me that offends you and lead me in the way everlasting.

Anxiety, Anger, Hatred. Lashing out. Destruction.

Psychologists know there is a link between anxiety and anger as both anxiety and anger have been equated with the loss of control.

Search me O God, know my anxious thoughts, Point out anyway in me and lead me in the path everlasting.

I came to this space with God, late last year of laying it all bare in front of God... no more hiding, fully examined. Through some deep soul work, and some deep theological work I realised that for 37 years I have thrown out my brothers and sisters in Christ. I realised that for 37 years I thought I had the monopoly on truth. On correct theology on "rightness", and during that 37 years, I can't even tell you how much damage that stance has caused, and I am ashamed.

In the presence of God - I learnt that I was wrong - and I was still loved.

Though asking God to point out these ways and lead us in the way everlasting is a process, and it has its moments.... BUT I can go there, because I am loved and I belong to God.

The first step of that process was to go to the organisation that we have been part of for 12 years that sent us to Thailand and India and to no longer hide and tell them that our theology has changed on the welcoming of LGBTQI people into the church and the family of God. We have realised that we were wrong in our biblical interpretation of those texts and there is more nuance that we were once led to believe. This sadly, led us to be kicked out of our organisation and subsequently kicked out of every supporting church that financially or prayerfully supported us, bar one.

We lost our spiritual family from the last 37 years. BUT... God Remains. Jesus Remains. He is before us, and he is behind us, and within the process of spiritual transformation...

God is carving out a new way in this 'wilderness', a new way of living for an audience of one, I am loved, and I am enough. And it's not because I belong to a certain group. It's not because I belong to an organisation, a denomination or an ideology. You see, I didn't realise that I valued my belonging in that space until it was taken from me, and I was no longer held up as the "good girl" but instead the "backslidden girl". I found my identity in the approval of others, and it was not steady ground.

In the arms of God, in the safety of being able to ask God to search us and all the anxieties and all the fear even here we are loved.

And when I ask God today, to search me. To know my anxious thoughts, and to point out anyway that offends and lead me along the path of everlasting life - I still lay out before God a messy, ugly blanket of hurt, bitterness, anger and grief and anxiety as I feel confronted with feelings I can't deal with, and a girl who wants to go back and belong to people who were, or are still, my friends.

I want to scream, I want to rage, I want to give snarky remarks, I want burn it all down...I want to never go near a Christian, they let me down, they kicked me out AND I have a mountain of evidence stacked right here to prove it. This is my shadow side, and it's not ok. It's not right.

Because I also have a mountain of evidence on this side too, of Christians who came out of the woodwork and said "me too", of old friends that have stood beside us, of supporters who stayed and of new Christian friends who have welcomed me into to their communities, like where I am today. God has given me a new family.

I can bring all that hurt before God and tenderly, He will say, "You are marvelously made, but this right here, this is not the way. You belong to me FIRST and that is enough."

God tends to those wounds, because whilst all those horrible thoughts of and destructive and anger are there, the root of them is anxious thoughts, they are thoughts of a little powerless girl who doesn't really believe that she is loved and who is scared. Who for far too long held their belonging above their place as a beloved child of God, and that HAS TO Be the center.

Friends, grow deep roots in your identity as a beloved, marvelously made child of God. Grow deep down in your belonging to Christ and Him alone. God is behind you and before you. God sees every part of you, and loves you anyway. You are

enough.

Amen.

A POEM by *Morgan Harper Nicholls*

If you feel overwhelmed

by the fragility of it all

and how everything

could change

whether or not

you have a say,

I hope you know

you are not alone

in feeling this way.

You are still within grace

where there is room to feel.

So feel.

Please feel.

Even if you do not know how

the wounds will heal.

You may not have answers

for this shakiness,

but this is also true:

you are not alone

in what you are going through.

Even if everyone else

seems calm and composed around you.

Turn to Light

and be reminded

you do not have to carry

these shadows

on your own.

You are allowed to have questions.

You are allowed to wonder why.

You are allowed to need peace

at morning

2pm

and midnight.

Take a deep breath

whenever you can.

May the exhale give you

the smallest, sweet release

amidst all you do not understand.

SONG: 'Here I Stand' by Peter Hobson

1. Here I stand.
Here I give it all away.
Knowing it's you, it's you who's calling me.
2. Here I dream.
Here I dare to fly.
Knowing it's you, it's you, who gives me wings.

**Chorus: And that still small voice:
"Follow me" (x2)**

3. Here I hope,
Here I fall,
Knowing it's you, it's you who's holding me.
4. Here I believe,
Here I surrender fear,
Knowing it's you, it's you who walks with me.

**Chorus: And that still small voice:
"Follow me" (x2)**

***Follow me – take the good news to the poor
Follow me – let the broken heart be healed
Follow me – let the captives be set free
Follow me – may the Kingdom be revealed***

***Follow Jesus – take the good news to the poor
Follow Jesus – let the broken heart be healed
Follow Jesus – let the captive be set free
Follow Jesus – may the Kingdom be revealed***

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS AND OURSELVES

Inclusive God,
why is your world so divided?
Why are we so binary?

Good or evil,
black or white,
male or female,
straight or gay,
rich or poor,
young or old,
we seem incapable of seeing the whole colourful spectrum that you created
and each of us as created in your image.

We have a compulsion to label and to categorise,
to separate and demonise.
Anything that saves us having to own one another as family
and justifies us withholding all that we feel we have earned.

And while we are busy hoarding,
your children continue to suffer
and we are too busy to notice
far less make a difference.

Lord give us wider arms
and bigger hearts
and greater understanding
to know that sharing what we have will not diminish us.

You bless us so that we might bless others.
So as we pray for wars to end,
may we refuse to invest in all that causes destruction.
As we pray for homes for the homeless and food for the hungry
may we be willing to share the space and the wealth that we hold tightly.
Prise open our hands and our hearts, to care and share freely.
Heal the blindness
that prevents us from seeing
and our muteness that prevents us from speaking out against injustice
wherever it is found
and give us wisdom
to know how to change things for good
and how to empower others
to enable change too.
Inclusive God,
inspire us to be inclusive too. Amen.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Offering: In our recent newsletter you would have seen a notice from our Treasurer David, that our offerings have significantly decreased and now with changes to Job Keeper, which had given us much needed support, our financial situation needs some prayerful attention.

We know that many people are under financial stress and we don't want to add to that burden. Please, give some time to consider your giving priorities and capacity, so that we can continue to be a life-giving and generous church.

For the gifts that you give this day - gifts of money, time and care - May God bless them abundantly. Amen.

Congregational Meeting: On the 25th of October at 10:30 we will be holding our Congregational Meeting via Zoom. One of the important items for this meeting is a proposal from church council that offers a plan for Worship at St Andrews under our Covid 19 reality. Details of how to register for this meeting will be sent out shortly, but let me encourage everyone who is able to please attend.

BLESSING *written by John O'Donohue*

May you arise each day with a voice of blessing whispering in your heart.

May you find harmony between your soul and your life.

May there be kindness in your gaze when you look within.

May you never place walls between the light and yourself.

May you be generous in your embrace of loss.

May you have the courage to speak for the excluded ones

And may you be embraced by the God in whom dawn and twilight are one.

Amen.