



Sunday September 5th 2021

*This week's theme is Justice and mercy
May the worship be a blessing for you*

Welcome – Rev Pete

We gather here to worship God, whose steadfast love endures forever. We gather surrounded by God's Holy Spirit, who encourages us to walk faithfully with Christ. Praise be to God, whose goodness and mercy fill our days. Praise be to God, whose ways lead to peace and justice.

Scifres, Mary; Beu, B. J.. The Abingdon Worship Annual 2021 (p. 202). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.

Opening Prayer (Proverbs 22) Rev Pete

God of abundant life, you want the best for your people around the globe. You bring healing, wholeness, and new life to all your children. On this day, may our eyes be open to the presence of Christ in one another. May our ears be open to the needs of our community. May our hands be open to serve the forgotten. And may our hearts be open to receive your Holy Spirit along this journey of faith.

In the name of the risen Christ, we pray. Amen.

Scifres, Mary; Beu, B. J.. The Abingdon Worship Annual 2021 (p. 202). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.

Meditation – Rev Peter – Available on zoom recording and Sway

Words of Illumination: Rev Pete

God, may your word rumble in our chests, may we find comfort where we need it and discomfort where we are too comfortable.

Readings – Peter Cox

James 2:1–17

2 My brothers and sisters,^[a] do you with your acts of favouritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?^[b] **2** For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, **3** and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet,"^[c] **4** have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? **5** Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters.^[d] Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? **6** But you have dishonoured the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? **7** Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?

8 You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." **9** But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. **10** For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. **11** For the one who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. **12** So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. **13** For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy, mercy triumphs over judgment.

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers and sisters,^[a] if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? ¹⁷ So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

Mark 7:24-37

The Syrophenician Woman’s Faith

²⁴ From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre.^[a] He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, ²⁵ but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. ²⁶ Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷ He said to her, “Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” ²⁸ But she answered him, “Sir,^[b] even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” ²⁹ Then he said to her, “For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.” ³⁰ So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Jesus Cures a Deaf Man

³¹ Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. ³² They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. ³³ He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. ³⁴ Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” ³⁵ And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. ³⁶ Then Jesus^[c] ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. ³⁷ They were astounded beyond measure, saying, “He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.”

©NSRV National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Sermon - Rev Tina

Justice, Love and Mercy

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, amen.

I went to Coles the other day and was in a rush and only had ten minutes to get home for a zoom meeting. As I pushed the trolley out into the carpark, I saw a woman in her forties lying on the ground with a raincoat over her. It was a cold day and she looked cold. I didn’t have any money and didn’t want to offend her by giving her groceries. I wondered what was happening for her. I felt helpless and wished I had a card to give her with my number or referral card for Uniting. Perhaps she was homeless. I thought of our cluster refuge at Mountview. When I got to my car, I loaded my groceries and saw my woollen poncho or wrap around and picked it up and walked back to her and gave it to her. She took it and said: *Thank you* and smiled. I said: *You’re welcome*. I wish I had stayed and spoken with her longer. When I walked away, I prayed for her and for others to stop and help her too. I was moved to contact Uniting and they are sending me some referral cards so that if I find another homeless person at least I can refer them somewhere for support and help. I’ve asked for 100. Let me know if you’d like some of those cards.

This is a timely encounter. The reading from James speaks of discrimination based on social class and favouritism with acts of discrimination or hurtful partiality or favouritism based on outward appearances and social position. James speaks of the royal law – You shall love your neighbour as yourself. Rich or poor, all are our neighbours.

My heart goes out to the homeless. This week I’ve listened to stories of how easy it is for people to become homeless. Losing a job and not being able to pay the rent, facilities or buy food. Domestic violence. Addictions or mental health issues. My time on the streets with teams from city churches involved in outreach revealed how many young people are homeless due to domestic violence or being kicked out of home because of addictions or mental health issues. The greatest heartache for homeless youth is loneliness and lack of love.

I was curious about Bill and Melinda Gates, who are divorcing but still working together with their foundation, a foundation that works to eradicate Malaria and Aids and improve access to immunisation in poor countries. They have donated \$4 billion to Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, a key player in distributing

Covid vaccines in poor countries. Many Asian nations need help. New Guinea needs help. Those living in poverty in Nepal near the Indian border are dying from Covid, with almost a million cases so far.

My experience of poverty in Nepal changed my perspective. My first trip was 1996. A woman came up to the group I was with asking for antibiotics and she took off a filthy band aid on the heel of her baby's foot. Underneath it was clear that the child's foot had developed gangrene. The memory still haunts me. The lack of medical resources and clinics and hygiene leads to many deaths in a nation where in remote areas, the ambulance is a basket on the back of a family member and a week or longer walk to a hospital. I've also heard there are three communities of people with leprosy in Nepal and poverty and a lack of hygiene makes it worse. In Nepal leprosy is a taboo. People with leprosy experience discrimination and shame. Years ago, a man with leprosy was begging in the streets of Nepal. His hands were bandaged, and I placed money in his hand. I was ignorant then. I recently watched the Leprosy Foundation's DVD about communities with leprosy and it deepened my understanding. People in Nepal greet one another by saying Nameste and cup their hands together. A dead giveaway for leprosy is people's hands become deformed when they don't seek help early and when they greet people their leprosy is revealed. The treatment for leprosy is a medication used for TB and after one tablet people are no longer infectious.

A friend was in Nepal when she was at university, about fifteen years ago and she found seven disabled women living in a tin shed. She rang her mum and asked: *All I've got is US\$100. Do you think I can make a difference?* Her mum said: *Go for it.* She founded a charity called *Seven Women* and brought home crafts to sell at university and it went from there. Today the charity has helped thousands of women. They have a house, a cooking school, shop and guest house and the original seven women are part of the team who manage the charity in Nepal. The church at my last placement had a fundraiser for them and the money paid for a dozen stove tops. This is the team.



Last time I was in Nepal an elderly lady was collecting wood and asked for money for me to take her photo. Perhaps she would make enough to buy food. Her face looked like it had been burnt. Perhaps she fell in a firepit as a child.



In remote areas of Nepal most children don't have a lot of clothes or any toys. The children are beautiful like this little girl.



The reading from James challenges those who judge by appearances and discriminate based on wealth. James says: *"Mercy triumphs over judgment."* He asks a question:

"What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food and one of you says to them: "Go in peace, keep warm, and eat your fill" and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So, faith by itself, if it has no works is dead."

We might ask what is happening in today's gospel? Is it about mercy triumphing over judgment?

A Greek woman comes to Jesus asking him to help her daughter and in front of his disciples he seems to insult her and discriminate against her. Jesus makes it clear his priority as a Jew is to bring about God's kingdom for the Jews, where his vocation is messianic, and his journey is to the cross. *"Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."*

At a time when women had no rights or a voice, the woman accepts the insult and turns it to her advantage, saying: *"Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."*

The woman insists on not being excluded, discriminated, and denied the benefits of the kingdom of God. Her insistence on behalf of her daughter leads to her daughter's healing. Jesus is offering the blessings of the kingdom to all Gentiles. Meanwhile all disciples are being taught a lesson. Old barriers and taboos are being set aside to make way for the kingdom Of God.

When we look back over history, from the moment of Jesus' words to the woman, all those who have been excluded have been set free. Slaves, disabled, people of different races and faiths, women and more recently the aged in the west are being set free and empowered.

We find evidence of discrimination in our own nation with Aboriginal people living in third world conditions. I had a taste of how difficult life is in Alice Springs for aboriginals and hope to show a slide show and have a fundraiser for Indigenous Hospitality House in Melbourne where indigenous people come to stay when having medical treatment in Melbourne. I hope you will support that charity. Please let me know if you are prepared to support this fundraiser. We seemed to have slowed down on fundraisers during lockdown when we can do fundraisers online and watch presentations.

James states clearly there are no favourites in the kingdom of God. All are free and all share in the blessing of the kingdom of God. I read part of Dr Martin Luther King Jnr's speech; I have a Dream. We all have a dream for our world. Part of that dream is that all of us are equally loved and blessed by God. James went as far as saying: *"If you show partiality, you sin."*

Micah 6:8 says:

*What does the Lord require from us?
"To do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with God."*



This is a woman pushing another woman in her wheelchair through the sand along a beach. It wasn't an easy thing to do, but I could see the joy on both their faces. I wonder what would bring joy to each one of us and whomever we choose to bless?

This is certainly not a time for us to hide within our homes. The world is suffering, and we can make a difference. We can do a lot from our homes. We can fundraise and contribute to charities. Last year our churches partnered with Whitehorse Churches Care, the Police and Centre 81 to organise hampers for those who are disadvantaged in our community.

What will we do this year? How can we do justice, be kind and compassionate and fulfill the royal law of Jesus? *"You shall love your neighbour as yourself."*

Our neighbours are poor and homeless, are living in poverty in a third world nation or being excluded and discriminated against in our own nation.

What is stirring your hearts?

The good news is today's gospel invites us to bring the kingdom of God into people's lives today. Not just within our own community but also to the wider world. We can turn our faith into action!

Song: John Bell's Hymn 665 Jesus Christ is waiting
[Jesus Christ is Waiting \(5vv\) \[with lyrics for congregations\] - YouTube](#)

© 1988 WGRG / The Iona Community, admin. GIA Publications Inc.

Prayers of the People – Geoffrey Willis

Dear Lord, we pray for our world, for other churches in our region and for those whom we love and for whom we care. We know, Lord, that you want the best for your creation, and that we, in partnership, have our part to play in making that happen.

In the World Council of Churches prayer cycle we pray today for the West African nations of **Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, and Togo**. These countries are blessed with beautiful landscapes, many natural resources and fascinating wildlife. But unfortunately, their governments are undemocratic and prone to corruption. Dear Lord of justice, we pray for honest leaders who are willing to prioritise what the people need most. Poverty, illiteracy and hunger is experienced by many in these countries, and we pray for those who are working to alleviate these problems. We remember the churches of these nations which are faithfully preaching the gospel and encouraging their folk to serve each other. We especially pray that churches will cooperate with each other and show greater respect for the ways that other faiths express their spirituality. Dear Lord of hope may your people be agents for restoring hope in those who are victims of conflict, disease and human rights abuses.

Dear Lord of peace, we pray for the difficult situation in **Afghanistan**. Many are fearful for their lives as the Taliban and other organisations threaten and bomb civilians. Lord, protect those who fear for their lives and bless those working for aid organisations who are risking their lives to assist those in need.

In our local ecumenical prayer cycle we pray today for the leaders and people of **Mitcham Baptist Church**. Lord, please bless their team of leaders led by Senior Pastor the Rev Dr Andrew Menzies and their Pastors to Seniors, to Youth and Young Adults and to the Chinese Congregation. During lockdown,

many of their programs are in recess, but they provide an active online presence. Bless their people as they serve one another and their community.

In our Presbytery, we pray for the leaders and people of the **Heathmont Uniting Church**. Bless their Minister, the Rev Brendan Byrne, their Church Council and their fellowship groups. COVID-19 has had a significant effect on their Community Centre which has been closed. We pray for the Heathmont folk as they decide on the future of this outreach centre.

Today, Lord, we pray for the **chaplaincy ministry of the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre**. May the chaplains be gifted to bring comfort to those who are cancer sufferers and to their families.

Lord we pray for our State Government as it juggles priorities to provide leadership of a community which is suffering the effects of the pandemic. We pray for wisdom in decision making. We particularly remember those whose livelihood has been threatened by the closing of businesses; for parents who have had to organise home schooling; for those on the front line, doctors, nurses, aged care workers, police and emergency services personnel; for those who operate quarantine facilities, often with inadequate training; for those administering COVID tests and delivering vaccinations. Lord, bless each of these folk as they work to make our communities safe.

Dear Lord, we pray for our Cluster of Congregations. Be with and empower our ministry team as they work out how best to serve our three churches. May we each be open to new ways of faithfulness and service as we grow together.

Lord, we pray for those of our members who need your comfort and healing. May those in special accommodation, in permanent care, in hospital or rehabilitation be aware of your love and be supported by their families' care and concern. May those experiencing pain or who find sleep difficult be aware of your comfort. May those awaiting medical results put their trust in you, O Lord. May those who mourn the death of loved ones be conscious of your loving presence.

We pray all these things in the name of Jesus our Lord in the words which he taught us:

*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 forever. Amen.*

Candle prayers: George and family, Mason and Mikayla. - Rev Tina

Song: Here I am Lord - tMt video

<https://youtu.be/2oK9xByJpyg>

The Lord's Prayer: Maori and Polynesia

Eternal Spirit,
Earth-maker, Pain bearer, Life-giver,
Source of all that is and that shall be,
Father and Mother of us all,
Loving God, in whom is heaven:
The hallowing of your name echo through the universe;
The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world;
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings;
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom
sustain our hope and come on earth.
With the bread we need for today, feed us.
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.
In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.

From trial too great to endure, spare us.
 From the grip of all that is evil, free us.
 For you reign in the glory of the power that is love,
 now and forever. Amen.

Benediction: Micah 6:8 – Rev Peter

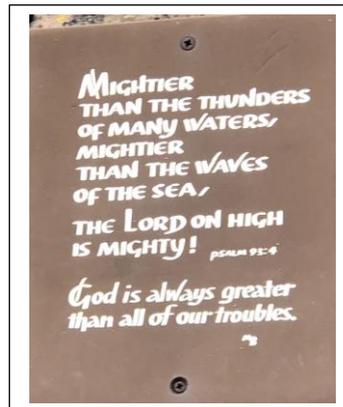
He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
 And what does the LORD require of you?
 To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly^[a] with your God.

Song: May the feet of God - tMt video

<https://youtu.be/YhiG-Vj8CGU>

Tips for Self-Care – Rev Tina

What sustains us when we face a storm? Often in the midst of the wind and darkness comes a message of hope. Like the plaque I found on a rock face beside the sea. Such a contrast.



Poems can be like an oasis during our time in the wilderness, especially when weary. Jesus often was weary and sought solace in David's Psalms, poetic insights into human nature.



This week I'll share with you some poems.

From Corry Skilbeck, Forest Hill.

HOPE

*Hope springs from the deep desires of the Heart.
 It always has an element of Optimism.
 It can bring some Peace and is a Prayer in itself.
 It needs to be Exercised by a step of faith.*

VALLEY FERN

*Under the trees and mid the tangled undergrowth I see you
standing a little apart.
Your soft refreshing beauty does not catch the eye, as the springtime wildflowers.
You sit quietly, clinging, among the rocks,
fronds gently drooping.
And as the marbled sunlight catches the dewdrops caressing your green,
I see a star-shine of reflected light.
Peace, serenity.
The soft movement of your fronds to touch the world around you.*

*But I have known the valley in a storm
when the peaceful trickle at your feet has become a raging flood.
When the eddy pool which reflects your patient stance
becomes a swirling mass of destructive debris.
You cling to that rock,
laid flat,
battered.
It is only those roots which have found a stronghold
and your tenacious will that keeps your centre anchored.*

*The storm abates.
Your immediate world is changed.
Bare somehow.
Exposed.
What is left of you just now does not seem a thing of beauty.
You cannot hold up your head.
The mud of the deluge clings to you.
Disaster.
Devastation.
But the roots are holding,
and that central tangly fragment that is your life-spring is intact.*

*To what purpose the clinging roots, Valley Fern?
Does it all seem a waste?*

Who cares?

*Time passes, and I watch a miracle.
The soft curl of new life emerges
tentatively...
Then opening out into a freshness and vibrance of green,
changing the landscape.
Bringing hope of new beauty.
A new beginning.*

*The browned edges of the past are memories only.
The storm has swept away the clutter
leaving potential for more serenity and beauty than before.
Yes, you are still vulnerable.
But I look with thankfulness at the lessons your tenacity has taught.
Persistence.
The stabilizing power of the Rock.
And, that peace and beauty need not be destroyed by the deluge,
but somehow renewed, changed, refocused.*

*When I walk in the valley
I can look at you Valley Fern
... and be blessed!
Corry Skilbeck 24.5.1985*

Resurrection Ferns

When I was trekking the Larapinta trail in the desert in Northern Territory there were ferns that looked as if they were dead. They were called resurrection ferns because after it rained these little resilient plants came back to life. In the same way we will experience resurrection as a community once the lockdowns finish and we are all fully vaccinated. Then we will gather freely to worship God as community. Meanwhile our faith makes us resilient.



The next poem for the week comes from Joyce Suto from her book Poet's Corner which was published during the midst of the long lockdown last year when Joyce was 97. This is a photo of Joyce holding her book. (Joyce attended Mountview Uniting and recently passed away.)



Compassion

*No water and no money and no hope
In blood and dust and burning sun he lay.
Fly-blown his wounds and distant far his home.
Had all roads led to this his final day?*

*Hallucinating though his pain he dwelt
On yesterdays' arrival of a friend.
Bearing his family's joyful news and sad,
A baby born, a brother's tragic end.*

*With money and emotions rightly stored
Through a long absence, he had journeyed down.
The long and hazardous deserted track
Which led to loved ones in the distant town.*

*Now, shattered by the robbers' blows and greed,
He waited death, for though two travellers eyed
His torn and naked body by the road,
They merely passed by on the other side.*

*Yet scarcely had their footsteps died away,
Compassion filled the face which swam in view
Strong arms were lifting, hands compassionate
Would heal and would restore the life he knew.*