



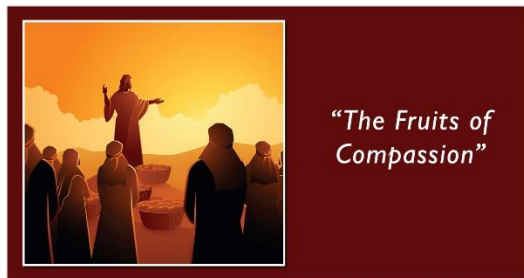
Wesley Wellington

75 Taranaki Street
www.wesleychurch.org.nz

Sunday 17 September 2023

Pentecost 16

Haere mai ki tēnei Whare Karakia
Welcome to this House of Prayer



Living God's Love – Acting for the Common Good

We are a multi-racial Christian community:
Methodist in affiliation – Ecumenical in intention
Diverse in theology – Inclusive in outreach.

Kia ora koutou katoa — Talofa Lava
Malo e lelei — Bula Vinaka Greetings to you all!

Order of Service
10am Congregation
Sunday 17 September 2023
Pentecost 16

Leader: Philip Garside Organist: Colin Scarf
Guitar: Heather Garside

Welcome & Introduction

Call to Worship: *The Blessing of Assembling To Worship*

We come together each week in a regular rhythm of worship.

**In the company of friends we gather
to meet with God our Parent again.**

We sing words of praise and thanksgiving for all God the Son has done.

**We offer up words of petition
for what we hope God the Spirit will do.**

We read and reflect on the scriptures listening for what God has to say.

**We come knowing the blessing
of assembling together to worship today. Amen.**

Lighting the candle

Today we light the Christ Candle

in honour of the One who brings light to the world.

Lord bring light to all who are in places of darkness.

Today we light the Christ Candle

in honour of the One who brings the gift of abundant life.

Lord protect all whose lives are threatened by violence and famine.

Today we light the Christ Candle

in honour of the One who redeems the world.

Lord deliver the world from evil, and us from complacency.

Today we light the Christ Candle

in honour of the One who revealed the Father
and sent the Spirit to be our Advocate.

May our worship today be pleasing to the Triune God. Amen.

Opening Prayer

God of the Land of Living Skies,
your enlightened labour has given us the bounties of the earth.
You have fashioned all life.
You provide nourishment for all, with generosity.
Exultant are we with you in our lives,
for we would be downtrodden without you.
We praise your magnificent works,
in our comings and our goings,
in our reflections and thoughts.
Humbly, we ask you to enlighten and inspire us
in living with respect in creation.
We glorify you, Sustainer of Life.
Be with us always, as you are our hope and salvation. **Amen.**

Hymn: Immortal, invisible, God only wise

Words: Walter C Smith (adapted). Hymns & Psalms 9. St Denio

1. Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious, thy great Name we praise.
2. Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
Nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might—
Thy justice like mountains high soaring above
Thy clouds which are fountains of goodness and love.
3. To all life thou givest, to both great and small;
In all life thou livest, the true life of all;
We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
And wither and perish—but nought changeth thee.
4. O Great One of glory, O Great One of light,
Thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight;
All laud we would render: O help us to see
'Tis only the splendour of light hideth thee.
5. Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious, thy great Name we praise.

Prayer of Approach & Words of Assurance

The Truth that Sets Us Free

It's not just any truth that sets us free
but the truth contained within your word,
which if we faithfully follow will free
us from the bondage of erroneous beliefs.

**The error of thinking we can be totally self-reliant
and have no need for the blessings of God.
It is not just our bodies that need refreshing,
our souls need to be fed by the word of God.**

The error of thinking our ways are always right
and we have no need for divine instruction.
Our damaged world shows our lack of judgment,
that the choices we make are often not good.

**The error of thinking we are in complete control,
that the earth is ours to dominate and exploit.
Disease epidemics and other natural disasters
prove beyond doubt how vulnerable we are.**

God help us embrace the truth that frees us
from the deceptions of human arrogance.
Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin,
but when the Son makes us free we are free indeed. **Amen.**

Words of Assurance

The God of infinite love has forgiven us.
Through God's grace, we begin again,
as it has ever been, and as it will ever be. Amen.

Introducing the Theme / Story Time

Create a mimed drama based on the parable of the ungrateful servant Matthew 18:21-35, i.e. the slave who couldn't repay his big debt to the king, begged for forgiveness of the debt which he was granted, and then didn't show the same compassion to another slave who couldn't repay the small sum he had lent him. I'll be the narrator and give instructions.

I'm going to use books in the place of money and a librarian and book borrower instead of the king and slave.

The set up will be the borrower borrowing a big bag of books from the library and then lending two children's books from that bag to his friend on the way home.

When its time to return the books, the librarian sends a messenger to the borrower, who goes to the librarian, says he needs more time to finish reading the books and is granted another two weeks by the librarian.

On the way home the borrower goes to his friend and demands that they give him the two children's books now, rather than passing on the two week grace period.

The messenger see this and reports what happened to the librarian who demands that the borrower return all the books immediately, and puts him in the "naughty corner" as punishment.

Hymn: Saviour, I Heard Thy Voice Gently Say

Words & Music: David Burt. Arr Chris Norton and Rosemary Russell. No 5 *Servant Songs* 1987.

Refrain:

Saviour, I heard thy voice gently say:
Seek you my face, come, walk, child, with me;
Lord Jesus Christ, thy face will I seek,
My heart replies in worship to thee.

Hear, O my Lord, when I call with my voice,
have mercy upon me and answer my cry
In your sweet presence my heart will rejoice,
to our tender call my heart will reply.

Refrain:

Hide not thy face from me, oh Lord
and turn not thy servant in anger away;
My constant help thou hast been till today
so do not forsake me or leave me, oh God.

Refrain:

In your great mercy teach me your way
and out of your paths let me never depart.
Wait on the Lord, be of courage, I say,
and his loving kindness shall strengthen your heart.

Refrain:

Readings

Romans 14:1-12. (*The Message Bible*. By Eugene Peterson)

Cultivating Good Relationships

Welcome with open arms fellow believers who don't see things the way you do. And don't jump all over them every time they do or say something you don't agree with—even when it seems that they are strong on opinions but weak in the faith department. Remember, they have their own history to deal with. Treat them gently.

For instance, a person who has been around for a while might well be convinced that he can eat anything on the table, while another, with a different background, might assume he should only be a vegetarian and eat accordingly. But since both are guests at Christ's table, wouldn't it be terribly rude if they fell to criticizing what the other ate or didn't eat? God, after all, invited them both to the table. Do you have any business crossing people off the guest list or interfering with God's welcome? If there are corrections to be made or manners to be learned, God can handle that without your help.

Or, say, one person thinks that some days should be set aside as holy and another thinks that each day is pretty much like any other. There are good reasons either way. So, each person is free to follow the convictions of conscience.

What's important in all this is that if you keep a holy day, keep it for *God's* sake; if you eat meat, eat it to the glory of God and thank God for prime rib; if you're a vegetarian, eat vegetables to the glory of God and thank God for broccoli. None of us are permitted to insist on our own way in these matters. It's *God* we are answerable to—all the way from life to death and everything in between—not each other. That's why Jesus lived and died and then lived again: so that he could be our Master across the entire range of life and death, and free us from the petty tyrannies of each other.

So where does that leave you when you criticize a brother? And where does that leave you when you condescend to a sister? I'd say it leaves you looking pretty silly—or worse. Eventually, we're all going to end up kneeling side by side in the place of judgment, facing God. Your critical and condescending ways aren't going to improve your position there one bit. Read it for yourself in Scripture:

“As I live and breathe,” God says, “every knee will bow before me;
Every tongue will tell the honest truth that I and only I am God.”

So mind your own business. You've got your hands full just taking care of your own life before God.

Forgiveness

Then Peter came and said to him, “Lord, if my brother or sister sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

“For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him, and, as he could not pay, the lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt.

But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him by the throat he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’ Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt.

When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt.

So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

Sermon/Reflection: The Fruits of Compassion

“Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?’”

“O let us see another day!
Bless us all this night, I pray,
And to the sun we all will bow
And say, goodbye – but just for now!”

Let’s pray:

May the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts
and minds be acceptable to you O God, our rock and our
redeemer. Amen.

I have called this sermon The Fruits of Compassion, The Fruits of Compassion.

Eugene Peterson in his *The Message Bible* paraphrase of Romans 14 offers us clear and engaging prose. The next time someone at your table is reluctant to eat their greens, you can tell them they should, “eat vegetables to the glory of God and thank God for broccoli. It’s in the Bible!”

The apostle Paul, the writer of this letter to the followers of Jesus in Rome in the early 60s of the first century, is making a more important point. We should be tolerant about those who have different views to us. We shouldn’t assume that we know all there is to know on a topic and that our views are the correct ones.

Here is some of Paul’s wisdom.

“Welcome with open arms fellow believers who don’t see things the way you do.” I find this hard. I think of myself as a Progressive Christian and I don’t take all the stories in the Bible literally. I’ve read a lot of books, listened to a lot of podcasts and watched a lot of videos to reach this point on my faith and theological journey. A part of me thinks, why don’t others think the way I do, isn’t it obvious...?

Some Christians in my extended family have a different theology, which is just as important to them as mine is to me. Are they going to change their views – no! Am I going to change mine – no! So, what then?

Look for the things that we have in common and focus on them. On one notable Sunday recently, my brother-in-law Kevin was leading the service at his church in Christchurch, my brother-in-law Glen was leading the service at the church which he and Leila are establishing from scratch in Oxford, and I was leading worship here at Wesley. We have in common a faith in God and a desire to share the message of the Good News of the Way of Jesus with others.

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Paul goes on to say, “Remember, they have their own history to deal with. Treat them gently.” The word “remember” is key here. We are starting to open up what it means to be compassionate. We have to imagine ourselves in the shoes of the other person. We don’t know what hardships they have endured. Over time, if we make the time to listen, another person might share with us some of their life story and faith journey.

Were you surprised when you heard Paul say in the reading that it is OK for one person to set aside a day as holy – like our sabbath day, Sunday – but for another person to treat all days as the same and not observe any holy day. Paul says we are all free to follow the convictions of our conscience on this matter.

Several pacifist members of this church in the middle of the last century, were conscientious objectors who refused to take part in war, because of their faith and were jailed because of this. They followed the convictions of their conscience. I wonder how each of us would respond today if our country was at war, and the government called on us to join in the fighting.

The second half of the reading from Romans 14, tells us that we are answerable to God, not to each other. And that we will all end up, side by side, kneeling before God in the place of judgement.

I think we are entitled to challenge that theology. Is it healthy to assume that God is in control of our lives, and that the purpose of our lives is to get a favourable judgement from God when we die, so that we can enter heaven?

Nonetheless, there is some good advice here. We should stop petty squabbles. We should stop criticising our brother or being condescending to our sister. Stop all that nonsense. Free yourself from it. Focus on what really matters. Listen to, support and encourage other people, mentor them, be concerned for their welfare. Show them the compassion we would like them to show us.

We also need to show compassion to the earth. The big picture is that we are failing in our duty to be guardians of God's creation. Our weather will get more extreme. In this country we have seen in the last year lots of flooding caused by high rainfall, in a short time, where we don't want it. Farmers in dry parts of the country are already worried about drought this summer and whether they will have enough grazing to feed their livestock.

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Let's turn now to our reading from Matthew's Gospel about forgiveness.

First some comments. The ten thousand talents that the king lent to his slave is a vast sum – millions of dollars. A hundred denarii is much less, say \$100. And Jesus says we must forgive one another "Not seven times, but, seventy-seven times." Master storyteller Jesus is using exaggeration for affect.

Notice also that Jesus does not criticise the system of slavery, as we would today. Masters having slaves was a vital part of the Roman economy during Jesus' time. It is the accepted background against which this story is told. Paul is often criticized for the same thing in his letters. Apart from Paul's short letter to Philemon, challenging him to treat as an equal in Christ, his slave Onesimus, who has also now become a Christian, Paul doesn't have much to say about slavery.

It is interesting that the slaves in Jesus' story have some personal agency. They can borrow money from their master or king and spend the money on whatever they wish to – just so long as they can pay the loan back when they are called on to do so.

Also, the writer of Matthew's gospel was a Jew writing for a Jewish audience, trying to convince them to start following the Way of Jesus. Jewish people do not name God directly as we do. So Matthew uses the phrase "kingdom of heaven", not "kingdom of God" as you will find in the other gospels.

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What response did Jesus want his audience to have to his telling of this parable. I think he wanted them to say – “that’s not fair.” I softened the harsher parts of the parable for the drama we acted out during Storytime. But I hope the message was still clear – “that’s not fair.”

The parable follows the expected story line. King lends money to slave. Slave can’t pay it back when the king asks him to. The king is going to sell the slave, his wife and children and all his possessions to recoup the debt. The king is perfectly entitled to do this. Slave begs for more time to repay the money.

Now the story takes an unexpected turn. “And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt.” Instead of just giving the slave more time, the king forgives the whole debt. The slave walks out of the palace, still a slave, but freed of the debt that was weighing him down.

Why did the king do this? The king put himself in the shoes of the slave. He imagined what the slave’s life was like, and this brought a change of heart and a compassionate response.

The story moves on. The slave who has just had his massive debt cancelled, demands with menaces and violence that the slave to whom he had lent 100 denarii, immediately pay it back – or else. The second slave asks for more time. The first slave throws the other into prison, to be locked up until he can repay the debt. I do wonder how, stopping the man from working, by putting him in jail, is going to help get the debt repaid?

Now comes the climax of the story. Other slaves report to the king what has happened. The king calls the first slave back before him and castigates him. I showed you compassion, why didn’t you follow my example and show compassion to the one who owed you a small sum? Exit first slave to be tortured, with the debt reinstated.

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How does this story challenge us today? What should we do? We should show compassion to other people and forgive them when we think they have wronged us.

But where does compassion come from, how do we become compassionate.

I'm convinced that being able to imagine yourself in some else's shoes is the key. And one way to learn this skill is to read books. (Yes, I'm a publisher and bookseller, so of course I would say that!)

But seriously, when a child has a picture book read to them, or when we as adults read novels, we will be attracted to and identify with one character, either the heroine or the villain. While we read the story we start to think like that character, we take their side as the narrative develops.

I have a lot of books by Agatha Christie. The eccentric detective Hercule Poirot is the hero in many stories, and sharp, hyper-observant, spinster Miss Jane Marple is the heroine in others. Poirot solves murder cases by using method and logic. Miss Marple solves her cases by remembering archetypes of people in her past who are like the suspect today. These books are all rather delicious and engaging, because I identify with the characters. Remember though, that in real life people don't fit into neat boxes with tidy solutions to their problems.

I'd like to tell you a little about the remarkable life story of Barbara Walker, whose book *Purple Hands* I published in 2020. Barbara has a strong Christian faith. She demonstrated practical compassion towards others, by serving in many countries with international aid agencies over a 20 year period up the mid-1990s.

[slide - Barbara the midwife. St. Helen's, Auckland – 1974.]

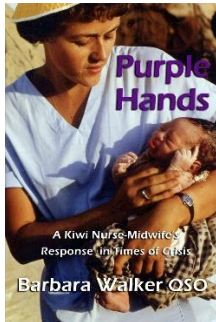


Barbara decided in her teens that she wanted to be a nurse and felt a call to serve others. She has dyslexia and found study hard, but became a nurse, midwife, Anglican chaplain and priest and gained a Masters' degree based on research she did in Africa. Barbara learned how to perform trachoma operations to restore sight to women in rural Kenya. Barbara has retired to Invercargill and is currently a rural chaplain in Southland.

Barbara's first posting was the Sakeo One Refugee Camp in Thailand, where she cared for those fleeing Pol Pot's regime in Cambodia in a make-

shift bamboo-framed field hospital. Her last placement in Mozambique ended due to a death threat.

[Slide – book cover]



One of her toughest posts was to the Las Dhure Refugee Camp, in Somalia in 1980. On the book cover is a photo of Barbara holding the first baby she delivered in the camp. The story behind the title of the book is that before delivering a baby one night there was no water available to wash her hands. So in her medical kit, she found a bottle of gentian violet, a bright purple antiseptic dye and washed her arms and hands with that.

[Slide - Las Dhure Camp, Somalia – 1980, after being there a number of months. It was tough.



The next photo shows Barbara after several months at the camp. You can see how she is being worn down by the work and the desperate plight of the children there.

[Slide – Barbara, hospital chaplain at Hawkes Bay Fallen Soldiers' Memorial Hospital, Hastings – 2019]



Here's a 2019 photo of Barbara in her role as a chaplain at Hastings Hospital.

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I'd like to close by listening to a choral setting of the *Sunset Poem* from Welsh poet, Dylan Thomas's radio play *Under Milk Wood*. It is also known

as “Eli’s Prayer.” Welsh male voice choirs sing it at funerals when a choir member dies.

The recording is from Festival Singers concert in St Mary of the Angels church in August. I had covid and was disappointed not to sing this prayer.

I have in mind an image of a old priest standing at his front door looking down over his town and asking a blessing from God to keep the people safe until morning.

[Play recording via Powerpoint – slides for each verse]

A song to listen to: Sung by Festival Singers:

Sunset Poem, (Eli’s Prayer) from Dylan Thomas’ radio play Under Milk Wood

Every morning when I wake,
Dear Lord, a little prayer I make,
O please do keep Thy lovely eye
On all poor creatures born to die.

And every evening at sundown
I ask a blessing on the town,
For whether we last the night or no
I’m sure is always touch-and-go.

We are not wholly bad or good
Who live our lives under Milk Wood,
And Thou, I know, wilt be the first
To see our best side, not our worst.

O let us see another day!
Bless us all this night, I pray,
And to the sun we all will bow
And say, goodbye – but just for now!

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Sometimes compassion just looks like praying for another person or situation.

We can all do that.

Amen.

Song: Love is Your Way

Music: Per Harling. Words: Shirley Erena Murray. No 95. Hope is Our Song.

1. Love is your way, love is your nature,
blessing each creature, lighting each day;
grace is your sign, gift of forgiveness,
chalice that changes water to wine:

Refrain:
God, in your grace, God in your mercy,
turn us to you to transform the world,
turn us to you to transform the world.
2. Pathways we choose, undeserved freedom,
earth as our kingdom, still we abuse;
much we have done, gross human error,
misuse of power darkens the sun:
3. Terror and tears, wounds without healing,
hearts without feeling mirror our fears;
life without trust, greed and high prices,
conflict and crisis grind us to dust:
4. Let us stand still, look at each other,
sister and brother thwarting your will;
teach us good care, grace to seek pardon,
reclaim your garden, riches to share:

Community Time

Sharing the Peace

Let's greet each other saying: "God's peace be with you."

Notices

Sharing Joys, Things we are Grateful for, Sorrows & Concerns

Prayers of Intercession

To the bidding "...and in your mercy" would you please respond **"hear our prayer."**

Lord's Prayer

**E tō mātou Matua i te rangi
Kia tapu tou Ingoa
Kia tae mai tou rangatira-tanga.
Kia meatia tau e pai
ai ki runga i te whenua,
kia rite ano ki to te rangi.
Homai ki a mātou aianeī
he taro mā mātou mo tēnei ra.
Murua o mātou hara
Me mātou hoki e muru nei
i o te hunga e hara ana ki a mātou.
Aua hoki mātou e kawea kia whaka-waia;
Engari whaka-orangia mātou, i te kino:
Nou hoki te rangatira-tanga,
te kaha,
me te kororia,
Ake, ake, ake.
Āmine.**

Offering

(We also acknowledge offerings made by automatic payment and online banking)

Blessing of Offering (said together)

**God, we are committed to living our lives for you,
giving of our time and talents for you,
giving of our substance to you.
May these offerings we give to you
further the mission you have us do.
We thank you for all you give to us.
Bless the little we give back to you. Amen.**

Hymn: Song of faith that sings forever. FFS 57.

(Words: Shirley Erena Murray. Music: Colin Gibson. Tune: Abbeyfield.)

1. Song of faith that sings forever
through God's people, ages long,
Word that holds the world together
when our hearts take up the song
always, always somewhere sounding,
though the source we do not see,
counterpoint to all despairing,
it is hope that sets the key.

2. Song of faith in exultation,
rising through the vaults of prayer,
tune of simple celebration
offered up in open air,
song in chapel and cathedral,
descant to our daily tone,
song from sickbed or in prison:
faith must often sing alone.
3. And when life would overwhelm us,
when there seems no song to sing,
hear the constant voice of courage
out of fear and suffering:
all who've loved and trusted Jesus,
all who lift us to be strong,
endless, endless are the voices
of the faith that makes the song.

Sending forth / Benediction

The light of God is shining on us and on everyone in this world,
not just today but every day. Go from here today in hope and in love,
taking with you the promise of a better tomorrow
and the conviction of faith to make it happen.
May God bless and keep you until we meet again.

The Grace

**Kia tau ki a tātou katoa,
te atawhai o to tātou Ariki o Ihu Karaiti,
me te aroha o te Atua,
me te whiwhinga tahitanga
ki te Wairua Tapu. Amine**

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Liturgy for this service was sourced from:

Let Us Pray, Janet Nelson, HarperCollins 1999;
Prayers for Southern People, Joy Kingsbury-Aitken, Philip Garside Publishing 2023;
Gathering Pentecost 2, United Church of Canada 2023.

The book mentioned in the sermon is:

Purple Hands, by Barbara Walker, Philip Garside Publishing 2020

To keep up-to-date with services and news, visit the parish website:

<https://wesleychurch.org.nz/>

And the 10am Congregation's Facebook Page:

<https://www.facebook.com/wesleywellington.methodistchurch.10am>

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