



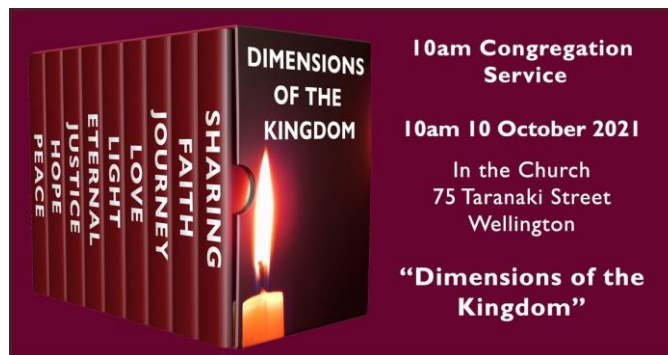
Wesley Wellington

75 Taranaki Street www.wesleychurch.org.nz

Sunday 10 October 2021 Pentecost 20

Haere mai ki tēnei Whare Karakia

Welcome to this House of Prayer



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

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

Order of Service

Wesley Methodist Church 75 Taranaki Street

10am Congregation

10 October 2021 Pentecost 20

Leader: Philip Garside

Organist: Colin Scarf **Guitar:** Heather Garside

Welcome, Introduction & Safety Briefing

Call to Worship

We are called: **Called to gather in this holy place**

We are called: **Called as people of God**

We are called: **Called to a time of rest from our labours and troubles**

We are called: **Called to rejoice in word and song**

We are called: **Called to have our hearts uplifted by your Holy Spirit**

We are called: **Called to worship you, O God. Amen.**

Lighting the Candles

As we light these candles:

Kindle a flame within our hearts, O God
and let your *light* shine through

Kindle a flame within our hearts, O God
and let your *justice* shine through

Kindle a flame within our hearts, O God
and let your *hope* shine through

Kindle a flame within our hearts, O God
and let your *peace* shine through

Kindle a flame within our hearts, O God
and let your *love* shine through. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Gentle yet powerful,
You are such a gracious Host,
Lord God of all creation,
You are here in this place now;
we stand here to worship you,
your Spirit is here with us,
Speak to us this hour
so that we might become makers of your peace
in our homes, communities and the whole world.
In your gentleness guide us.

Amen.

Philomena Nziramasanga (2015)

Hymn: God who sets us on a journey. Words: Joy Dine. Tune: Hyfrydol

1. God who sets us on a journey
to discover, dream and grow,
lead us as you led your people
in the desert long ago;
journey inward, journey outward,
stir the spirit, stretch the mind,
love for God and self and neighbour
marks the way that Christ defined.
2. Exploration brings new insights,
changes, choices we must face;
give us wisdom in deciding,
mindful always of your grace;
should we stumble, lose our bearings,
find it hard to know what's right,
we regain our true direction
focused on the Jesus light.
3. End our longing for the old days,
grant the vision that we lack –
once we've started on this journey
there can be no turning back;
let us travel light, discarding
excess baggage from our past,
cherish only what's essential,
choosing treasure that will last.
4. When we set up camp and settle
to avoid love's risk and pain,
you disturb complacent comfort,
pull the tent pegs up again;
keep us travelling in the knowledge
you are always at our side;
give us courage for the journey,
Christ our goal and Christ our guide.

Prayer of Approach

Ever-Abundant God, we open our hearts to you this day, and offer these truths:

Today we live in the fear that encompasses us.

Today we live with the prejudice that is right in front of us.

Today we live with the ignorance that dwells within us.

Today we live with the doubt that holds us back.

**Help us, we pray, that we will find courage in unlikely places,
discover the world with new and gracious understandings,
move to those places where love is needed,
and have faith that you are with us.**

This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Words of Assurance

Friends hear the good news that God listens to our prayers,
understands our concerns, and holds us close
in this time of confession and truth telling.
Know today that we have been given the grace and the courage
to go into the world and spread this good news. **Amen.**

Time with children / Introducing the Theme

In our Bible reading today from Mark's gospel, Jesus says something funny. "It's easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich person to get into God's kingdom."

Let's explore this.

Here are some sewing needles and some thread. We are going to pass the thread through the eye of the needles as if we are getting ready to mend a tear in a shirt. [Hand out needles and thread to children. Get an adult to join us to help if necessary. Show them how to thread the needle. Make sure every child succeeds doing this.]

Well done everyone!

But the Bible reading talks about threading a camel into the eye of the needle.

[Get camel soft toys from hiding place and give them to the children]

OK, let's try. [Attempt to put camels through the eyes of the needles.]

Well that doesn't work!

Some people translating the Bible into English wonder if Mark got the bit about the camels wrong. They say the Greek or Aramaic word we translate as camel really means rope.

So the challenge is to get a length of rope through the eye of the needle.

Let's try that. [Hand out lengths of rope and all try to thread them through the eyes of the needles]

Well that doesn't work either.

There is one more way the original gospel text was translated by some scholars 800 years after Jesus.

This suggests that there was a small gate through the wall of the city of Jerusalem, called "the eye of the needle," and that maybe a camel could just barely pass through.

The problem with this idea, is that there was never a small gate called the "eye of the needle" in the wall of the Jerusalem. So that idea doesn't work either.

So why did Jesus talk about a camel.

We need to think back to Jesus' time when a camel would have been the tallest and biggest animal that people were familiar with. Jesus liked to use everyday objects in his stories, parables and teaching, because this helped people to understand his message.

What Jesus is saying is that trying to become part of the Kingdom and still hold onto all your wealth is almost impossible. It's like trying to put this really big thing a camel or some rope, through a really tiny thing, the eye of a needle.

So the message for all of us this morning is that if we want to follow Jesus and enter God's Kingdom, we may have to give up some things that we treasure.

Thank children for taking part, and send them to their activities with

Hymn: There's a wideness in God's mercy (With Heather on guitar)

Words: Frederick W Faber 1854 (adapted) Music: Jonathan Berkahn.

Refrain:

There's a wideness in God's mercy
like the wideness of the sea;
There's a kindness in His justice
which is more than liberty.

1. There's a welcome for the sinner,
and more graces for the good;
There is mercy with the Saviour;
there is healing in His blood.
There is nowhere that our sorrows
Are more keenly felt than Heaven;
There is nowhere that our failings
have such kindly judgement given.

Refrain

2. But we make his love too narrow
by false limits of our own;
and we lose the tender Shepherd
in the judge up on the throne;
for the love of God is broader
than the measure of our mind,
and the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.

Refrain

To Enter God's Kingdom

As he went out into the street, a man came running up, greeted him with great reverence, and asked, “Good Teacher, what must I do to get eternal life?” Jesus said, “Why are you calling me good? No one is good, only God. You know the commandments: Don’t murder, don’t commit adultery, don’t steal, don’t lie, don’t cheat, honour your father and mother.”

He said, “Teacher, I have – from my youth – kept them all!”

Jesus looked him hard in the eye – and loved him! He said, “There’s one thing left: Go sell whatever you own and give it to the poor. All your wealth will then be heavenly wealth. And come follow me.”

The man’s face clouded over. This was the last thing he expected to hear, and he walked off with a heavy heart. He was holding on tight to a lot of things, and not about to let go.

Looking at his disciples, Jesus said, “Do you have any idea how difficult it is for people who ‘have it all’ to enter God’s kingdom?” The disciples couldn’t believe what they were hearing, but Jesus kept on: “You can’t imagine how difficult. I’d say it’s easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye than for the rich to get into God’s kingdom.”

That got their attention. “Then who has any chance at all?” they asked.

Jesus was blunt: “No chance at all if you think you can pull it off by yourself. Ev’ry chance in the world if you let God do it.”

Peter tried another angle: “We left everything and followed you.”

Jesus said, “Mark my words, no one who sacrifices house, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children, land – whatever – because of me and the Message will lose out. They’ll get it all back, but multiplied many times in homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and land – but also in troubles. And then the bonus of eternal life! This is once again the Great Reversal: Many who are first will end up last, and the last first.”

Sermon: Dimensions of the Kingdom

Jesus said: You know the commandments: Don't murder, don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't lie, don't cheat, honour your father and mother."

He said, "Teacher, I have – from my youth – kept them all!"

Jesus looked him hard in the eye – and loved him! He said, "There's one thing left: Go sell whatever you own and give it to the poor. All your wealth will then be heavenly wealth. And come follow me."

Let's pray:

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts and minds, be acceptable to you, O God, our strength and our liberator. Amen.

I have titled this sermon: **Dimensions of the Kingdom, Dimensions of the Kingdom.**

A couple of weeks ago I tried out some free templates for the Adobe Photoshop software that I use on my computer to design book covers and posters. What these templates let me do is to take a two dimensional image like a book's front cover, and then create the illusion of a three dimensional image on the screen, that looks like you are viewing the object on an angle and can see the front and one of the sides. Back in 3rd form tech drawing we called this two point perspective.

Here is an example of a flat front cover of a book in two dimensions. [show slide]

Now using the template, I can add an image of the spine of the book, which in this case says SHARING, and "hey presto" we have a 3D image. [show slide]

I have been trying to figure out how to do this for a while, to make more eye-catching images of the books I publish and sell online. I was so pleased with the free samples that I bought the whole commercial collection of templates, which are going to help me create some attractive book promotion images in future.

As you can see on the front of your Orders of Service, the templates also let me create a mock-up of a boxed set of books. There are 9 volumes in this image. I just add an image for each book's spine and the software does the rest. [Show slide]

There are templates that let me create boxed set images for between 2 and 25 volume sets. This is especially helpful for selling eBook series or sets, as there aren't physical, printed books to photograph.

Just quietly, I'm very excited about the templates and I wanted to find a way to use these three dimensional images in a service. Let's see how this might work.

* * * *

The gospel stories about what Jesus said and did can usually be understood on several different levels.

On the surface are the words in the Bible. The surface level of our reading from Mark today is fairly simple.

A wealthy person wants eternal life and asks Jesus how to get it. Jesus says you have to sell all your possessions, give the money to the poor, and follow me. The rich person can't bring themselves to do this and leaves. Jesus makes an exaggerated comparison to a camel going through the eye of a needle. And ends with, by the way, the first will be last and last will be first.

By itself, this summary has plenty of drama and points to ponder. But it is only the front cover of the book. We can tell the book is 6 inches wide by 9 inches tall, and now want to open it to look inside, or even turn it over to read the blurb on the back. So two dimensions are not enough. We need to add a third dimension – depth. We need to explore some more layers of meaning.

* * * *

William Placher's 2010 commentary on Mark's gospel in the Westminster John Knox Press' Belief series, has some instructive ideas. I found the book listed online as an eBook special offer and took a punt on buying it. I thought it would be a bit dry, but it is actually very readable and has lots of sound, stimulating things to say.

Earlier in chapter 10 of Mark are stories about divorce and children. In verses 17-31 the topic is wealth.

Jesus and his disciples are on the road, somewhere in the Judean countryside, close to the River Jordan, but not in Jerusalem yet.

Do you notice that the man approaches Jesus as a good and respected **teacher**. There is no hint here that Jesus is thought of publicly as the Messiah.

The man approaches Jesus in an excited but respectful manner.

Then the man asks his question, **what must I do to get eternal life?** The man is not asking Jesus to give him eternal life and doesn't appear to believe that Jesus could give it to him. The man wants to know **what action he can take** that will secure eternal life for him after he dies.

An underlying issue is whether by **our** actions **we** can gain eternal life, can be saved or sanctified. This raises the issue of whether our faith or our works can save us. The Letter of James explores this in depth.

Jesus doesn't give the man a straight answer. Jesus challenges the man by saying that only God is truly good, and then reminds him about all the commandments that he should be keeping. The man tells Jesus that he has kept these commandments all his life. It is interesting that the particular commandments Jesus mentions, all have to do with our external actions when we engage with others. It is at least possible that the man's claim is true.

Jesus looked him in the eye. I can imagine Jesus thinking, "Yeah, Right!" but then it says that Jesus loved him. Jesus could see that the man was sincere and showed him compassion.

Now comes the crunch. Jesus offers the man a pathway to follow, to gain eternal life. "Sell all you possess, give it to the poor, so that the only wealth you have will be heavenly wealth. Then follow me." The man can't do it. (And if we are honest with ourselves, nor could we.)

The man wasn't expecting Jesus to say that getting eternal life would be easy, but he hoped that Jesus would show him how to make it possible. Placher says, "The man had good reason to be shocked. Traditional Jewish piety would usually have said that wealth was a blessing from God, a sign of divine favour." The man leaves with a heavy heart.

Clive Sansom wrote a series of poems in the 1950s called *The Witnesses*, which Drama Christi has performed in the past. The poems tell the stories of Bible characters meeting Jesus and the effect he has on them. In his poem about the man asking for eternal life, Sansom has the man say this in the second and third stanzas of the poem:

‘Sell all,’ he replied, ‘And follow me.’
An easy saying.
He, a carpenter, a carpenter’s son,
Sacrificed nothing.
And his man Peter – smirking, self-righteous –
What did he lose
But some worn nets, a boat-share,
And trade in the market?
It wasn’t myself I was thinking of –
Ease and possessions –
But the responsibility of wealth
Towards its dependents.
What of them, if I had obeyed him –
What of my servants?

That’s what I tell myself, now –
But do I believe it?
Then – silent – I walked away,
Watching my sandals,
While his voice, the voice of my heart,
Followed me homeward.
In misery, I stopped by the lake.
Hid by the crowd-wall,
I heard him speak of the Kingdom of God,
The camel, the needle.

I think Sansom gets it right. The man simply has too many possessions and too much responsibility for his family and servants, to leave them and follow Jesus.

* * * *

Jesus now shifts the focus from eternal life, to entering God’s Kingdom. I wonder, are they the same thing, perhaps two sides of the same coin?

It seems to me that becoming part of God's Kingdom is something we could work towards, by being part of a faith community and doing the best we can to help others. And by being compassionate in our relations with other people.

By loving God and loving our neighbours. By displaying the qualities of the volumes in our 9 book boxed set: Sharing, Faith, Journey, Love, Light, Eternal, Justice, Hope, Peace. Maybe Eternal doesn't belong in this list? What are other qualities and actions we could add in its place – there is space for 25 of them?

To the amazement of his disciples Jesus raises the bar for entry to God's Kingdom too.

We have to ponder the futility of trying to force a camel through the eye of a needle, getting a very big thing to pass through a tiny thing. Impossible! Or is it?

Here is the next layer of meaning.

The disciples – remember that's us too really – ask Jesus, “Then who has any chance at all?”

Eugene Peterson gives us Jesus' blunt reply: “No chance if you think you can pull it off by yourself. **Every chance in the world if you let God do it.**”

I'll say that again, “**Every chance in the world if you let God do it.**”

I like to be in control. To assess the alternatives in a situation, around an issue, or an opportunity, and to then make a firm, prompt decision and move on. Make a plan, then stick to the plan. **Letting God do it**, isn't **my** first instinct.

How do **you** make decisions and move forward?

What might **letting God do it** look like?

We might spend more time reflecting about our lives and the issues we face, before we take action. I find that sitting still for a few minutes and closing my eyes as I mull over something, helps to make the way forward clear. It is surprising how new ideas pop

into my mind if I let my thoughts drift. This is kind of like praying and kind of like meditating. It is certainly creative and helpful.

And we need to keep looking at the big picture, not just our congregation, but the wider parish and the community that surrounds us here, at our workplaces and our homes. How will what we do affect other people and the planet? What should we do more of, what should we do less of?

* * * *

Our hymns today reflect aspects of **letting God do it**.

Joy Dine's hymn talks about being on a journey and travelling light, with few possessions holding us back.

Faber's hymn, which we sang to Jonathan Berkahn's wonderful, warm melody, talks about the depth of God's mercy.

Moving Through the Silence invites us to follow the spirit's lead and to see the world through the lens of God's Kingdom.

And Christchurch, Methodist hymnwriter, Bill Wallace's majestic words, encourage us to strive for a better world where peace, justice, freedom, and truth will prevail.

A world turned upside down. A world where the first **willingly** surrender their **place** and **share** their wealth with **those in need**.

Impossible?

With God's help we can make it happen.

Amen.

Hymn: Who is moving through the silence *Song by John Weir and Ian Render*

1. Who is moving through the silence
Gentle as the summer rain?
Who is standing in the doorway
Knocking, asking to come in?
2. Father, you have sent your Spirit
To console your little ones
You have sent your Son to find us
And to lead us safely home.
3. Father, I have seen your Kingdom
In the streets of little towns
In the shadows of the city
When we gather in your name
4. Father, I have seen your Kingdom
in the eyes of those who love.
In the mercy of your people
I have seen your Kingdom come.
5. Who is moving through the
silence,
gentle as the summer rain?
Who is standing in the doorway,
knocking, asking to come in?

Community Time

Sharing the Peace

Let's greet each other by standing and waving to each other from our pews saying: **"Peace be with you."**

Notices

Sharing Joys and Sorrows

Prayers of Intercession

To the bidding "... Refine our thoughts, strengthen our wills," would you please respond **"...Guide us in your Way."**

Gracious God,
we pray for all your creation,
and especially for our world.
We pray for our homelands
and our spiritual homes.

Refine our thoughts, strengthen our wills

Guide us in your Way.

We ask for your blessings on our country Aotearoa New Zealand,
that there may be good governance,
and that people may experience fairness, justice and peace.
We also pray for our leaders,
that they may have wisdom and vision.

Refine our thoughts, strengthen our wills

Guide us in your Way.

We pray for people of goodwill, of all faiths.
We pray for people who have no purpose
or sense of direction in their lives.
We pray for those who have no sense of being loved.

Refine our thoughts, strengthen our wills

Guide us in your Way.

We pray for people we know who are sick, or unemployed or grieving.
We pray also for our parish, for our families and our congregations.
We pray that you will give us the gifts of stability, wisdom, discernment and
unity.

We pray for our children,
that they will do well in the education and careers,
and have satisfying, rewarding work to do.

Refine our thoughts, strengthen our wills

Guide us in your Way.

Compassionate God,
help us to share your love with everyone we meet,
to be the voice for the voiceless,
to bring hope where there is despair
and to listen to others with respect.

We pray for the work of Wesley Community Action
and the other Methodist Missions in this country,
for Downtown Community Ministry
and for Christian World Service.

Refine our thoughts, strengthen our wills

Guide us in your Way.

Loving God,
please continue to exercise the power of light and love within us.

Amen

Lord's Prayer [Sung]

**Our Father in heaven
holy be your Name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Do not put us to the test,
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.**

Offering

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

Blessing of Offering (said together)

They seem so little, and the world is so big and so overwhelming right now, yet we offer these gifts to you, O God.

**Take what we offer and bless it for your mission of love.
In a world of conflict and pandemic, may these gifts,
and we ourselves, become agents of change and transformation,
in Jesus' name of self-giving love. Amen**

Hymn: Deep in the Human Heart. Words: Bill Wallace. Tune: Diademata

1. Deep in the human heart
The fires of justice burn;
With visions of a world renewed
Through radical concern.
As Christians we are called
To set the captives free,
To overthrow the evil powers
And end hypocrisy.
2. This is our task today,
To build a world of peace;
A world of justice, freedom, truth,
Where kindness will increase;
A world from hunger freed,
A world where people share,
Where every person is of worth
And no-one lives in fear.

3. Taking the step of faith,
We leave the past behind
And move into the future's world
With open heart and mind.
By grace we work with Christ,
As one community,
To bring new hope and fuller life
To all humanity.

Benediction

Go from here to be the people of God:
go in the knowledge and love of God
to tell the good news of a new covenant.

With God in our hearts, we will live Christ's reign of peace and justice.

The Grace (Said together)

**The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all. Amen**

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Liturgy for this service was sourced from:
Gathering 2021 United Church of Canada; Philomena Nziramasanga;
10am Worship Team 2015, Philip Garside.

Recommended reading:
William Placher, **Mark: Belief, a Theological Commentary on the Bible.**
Westminster John Knox Press (2010).

Visit the 10am Facebook Page to keep up-to-date
with our congregation's services and news:
<https://www.facebook.com/wesleywellington.methodistchurch.10am>