

Order of Service
Wesley Methodist Church, 75 Taranaki Street
10am Congregation
26 September 2021 Pentecost 18
Leader: Philip Garside.
Organist: Colin Scarf. Guitar: Heather Garside

Welcome, Introduction & Safety Briefing

Kia ora tatou.

Welcome.

Great to be back in Church: pews, banners, organ, gathering together in one space.

We are also livestreaming on Facebook for people at home. You can also watch the video of the service on Facebook afterwards, whenever you want to.

We should still be sensible about wearing masks and keeping our distance.

Singing with a mask is OK. We have worn masks for our last 2 Festival Singers' rehearsals.

18th Sunday in the season of Pentecost, or Ordinary time. The six months between the day of Pentecost and Christ the King Sunday in November.

Our theme today is about being free as a bird, which comes from Psalm 124.

The bird picture on the front of our Orders of Service was drawn by our daughter Rosemary for a peace service when she was quite young. There is a vitality and naïve directness about her bird image that still appeals to me.

The second part of our theme is about being forgiven when we mess up and it comes from the letter of James.

Let's join now in our call to worship.

Call to Worship — Psalm 124 (The Message)

If GOD hadn't been for us –

all together now, Israel, sing out!

If GOD hadn't been for us when everyone went against us,

We would have been swallowed alive by their violent anger,

Swept away by the flood of rage, drowned in the torrent;

We would have lost our lives in the wild, raging water.

Oh, blessed be GOD! He didn't go off and leave us.

He didn't abandon us defenceless,

helpless as a rabbit in a pack of snarling dogs.

We've flown free from their fangs, free of their traps, free as a bird.

Their grip is broken; we're free as a bird in flight.

GOD's strong name is our help,

the same GOD who made heaven and earth. Amen.

Hymn: Awake, awake to love and work. H&P 631 (Sheltered Dale)

1. Awake, awake to love and work,
The lark is in the sky,
The fields are wet with diamond dew,
The worlds awake to cry
Their blessings on the Lord of life,
As he goes meekly by.
2. Come, let thy voice be one with theirs,
Shout with their shout of praise;
See how the giant sun soars up,
Great lord of years and days!
So let the love of Jesus come,
And set thy soul ablaze —
3. To give and give, and give again,
What God hath given thee,
To spend thyself nor count the cost,
To serve right gloriously
The God who gave all worlds that are,
And all that are to be.

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: God's peace is in the small things

It is easy to feel overwhelmed by events in the wide world, to wonder what can I do? But we can find hope by experiencing and sharing God's love in our ordinary lives. Let's pray.

Lord, open our eyes to your creation:

A fiery sunset on a wide horizon

A spider's delicate web spangled with dew

The vibrance of a child's painting

The miniature world of life in a rock pool.

God's peace is in the small things that we see every day.

Lord, open our ears to: A tui's song,

Children's laughter in the playground

Music of the city street and traffic's hum

The joy of a choir singing.

God's peace is in the small things that we hear every day.

Lord, help us savour:

A meal prepared with love for us by another person

The tang of an exotic fruit

The morning's first cup of coffee or tea

An ice cream at the beach.

God's peace is in the small things that we taste every day.

Lord, help us breathe in the smell of:
Salt spray on the wind
Dripping wet native bush on a walk
A new born baby's head
Mahoe tree flowers on a still night.

God's peace is in the small things that we *smell* every day.

Lord, help us to feel:
The warmth of a handshake or hug
A pat on the shoulder when we are sad
The smoothness of a river pebble
The softness of an animal's fur
The round handcrafted ends of our wooden pews

God's peace is in the small things that we *touch* every day.

Lord help us as we:
Smile shyly at a new neighbour or classmate
Make a cuppa for a friend
Serve on a committee
Sing in a choir

God's peace is in the small things that we *do* every day.

Lord help us to wonder at:
Coming to church each week and leaving refreshed
Pohutukawa blossom at Christmas
Holding a child's hand as they walk to school
The Southern Cross on a clear night

God's peace is in the small things that we *keep in our hearts*. Amen.

Time with children / Introducing the Theme

I messed up recently and didn't know what to do next. When I was driving through Kelburn where the road was narrow, I hit a parked car by mistake.

When you have a car accident you are meant to stop and check that no one is hurt and also to give your name and phone number to the other driver so you can talk to your insurance company about getting the damage repaired.

But I got a fright when I heard the crunch of me hitting the parked car, and there wasn't a safe place to pull over and stop because of the yellow lines at the side of the road, so I just kept driving home.

The next couple of days I still didn't do anything. I didn't even tell Heather. I sort of hoped the problem would go away if I said nothing. But I didn't feel good inside and I knew I had to do something to fix my mistake.

So I phoned my insurance company. I didn't know the registration number of the car I hit, so they just said they would record the details in case the car owner's insurance company contacted them.

Then I told Heather that I was going to report the accident to the police and she went with me down to the police station in Victoria Street. I filled out a form saying what happened.

The police said they wouldn't investigate the accident as no one was hurt, but if the driver of the car I hit reported that their car had been damaged the police would let me know so my insurance company could then sort out getting the other car repaired.

Then wow! I felt much better. I had done the right thing and told my insurance company, Heather and the police what happened.

[show slide] My secondary school was Mana College in Porirua. I was there from 1973 to 1977. The college had a motto **"Akona Te Mahi Pai"** which we interpreted then as **"Learn to do that which is right"** or **"Learn to do the right thing."** I remembered that motto and it helped me to do the right thing about the accident.

Our Bible reading from James Letter says, "And if you've sinned, pray to God and you'll be forgiven – healed inside and out."

So that's my message for you. When you make a mistake, tell someone, pray about it and **do the right thing**. Then you will be OK.

Song/Round: I Know that someday I'll be free

I know that someday I'll be free,
deep down in my soul,
I know that someday I'll be free,
deep down in my soul,
I said a'deep, deep, I said a'down, down,
deep down in my soul
I said a'deep, deep, I said a'down, down,
deep down in my soul.

Reading: James 5:13-20 (The Message)

Prayer to Be Reckoned With

Are you hurting? Pray. Do you feel great? Sing. Are you sick? Call the church leaders together to pray and anoint you with oil in the name of the Master. Believing-prayer will heal you, and Jesus will put you on your feet. And if you've sinned, you'll be forgiven – healed inside and out.

Make this your common practice: Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed. The prayer of a person living right with God is something powerful to be reckoned with. Elijah, for instance, human just like us, prayed hard that it wouldn't rain, and it didn't – not a drop for three and a half years. Then he prayed that it would rain, and it did. The showers came and everything started growing again.

My dear friends, if you know people who have wandered off from God's truth, don't write them off. Go after them. Get them back and you will have rescued precious lives from destruction and prevented an epidemic of wandering away from God.

Sermon: Free as a bird

“...We’ve flown free from their fangs, free of their traps, **free as a bird**. Their grip is broken; we’re free as a bird in flight...”

“...Believing-prayer will heal you, and Jesus will put you on your feet. And if you’ve sinned, **you’ll be forgiven – healed inside and out...**”

Let’s pray:

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

I’ve called this short sermon “Free as a bird, Free as a bird.”

Looking back at my response to hitting the parked car and telling the children and you about it this morning, I feel a bit foolish. Yes, I made a mistake hitting the parked car, but I made a bigger mistake by not facing up to what I had done and not quickly taking the action I knew I should have done to put it right.

The accident happened on Friday afternoon, and I didn’t report it to my insurance company or the police until Monday. The problem of what to do niggled me over the weekend. The longer I delayed putting it right, the bigger the problem felt. Our car had a scraped left hand wing mirror and a couple of light scuff marks on the left hand side panels, but its 21-years-old and built like a tank, so I wasn’t bothered about it.

I seriously considered just closing my eyes, keeping quiet and not telling anyone ever about the accident. I would probably have gotten away with it.

But deep down that didn’t feel right. I remembered the Mana College motto **Akona Te Mahi Pai** and the truth it speaks about learning to do the right thing.

And I knew that I couldn’t, in good conscience, stand in front of you and lead worship, let alone preach the good news, until I had dealt with the problem.

Can you think of a mistake or mistakes you have made in your life, which you need to tell someone about, to pray about perhaps, and take some action to fix, to put it right?

[pause]

When I found out on Wednesday night that I was going to lead this service, I checked the Bible readings for this Sunday. The “free as a bird” quote from Psalm 124 and the “being forgiven – healed inside and out” quote from James leapt off the page.

If we go back to the slide with the Mana College motto, you will see that the current English translation, which I took from the college website, is different to the one I remembered from the 1970s. The Māori words **Akona Te Mahi Pai** haven’t changed, but their interpretation has. The emphasis on learning is still there, but the object of the learning is now on working and enjoying the challenge of working. And that’s fine, I get it. But I prefer the translation I grew up with about doing the right thing.

This is a reminder that Bible translations and the interpretation of scripture also change over time. For many years, I have looked first to the New Revised Standard Version which was published in the late 1980s and is reckoned to be a sound, scholarly translation into English, of the original Greek and Hebrew texts. But it can be a bit boring and stodgy.

More recently, and especially as we have been worshipping over Zoom in the last few weeks, I have been drawn to use The Message translation by Eugene Peterson. It is a paraphrase, in everyday English. I enjoy the frankness and directness of this translation, and both our Call to Worship and reading from James are taken from it.

Psalm 124 remembers the time when God saved the Israelites as they escaped from Egypt in the Exodus. God parted the sea to allow them to pass through safely, but then the sea flooded back and overwhelmed the Egyptian soldiers in their chariots.

This Psalm is all about praising God and being thankful for the way God saved and protected the Israelites. In the NRSV translation, it is

attributed to King David. The psalmist tells us that “GOD’s strong name is our help.” So even God’s name, or the idea of God, has power to help us. We are invited to sing praise to God. We can bring any of our troubles to God.

[pause]

The reading from James also picks up those themes. “Are you hurting? Pray. Do you feel great? Sing.” This is not an either or situation. We are in the midst of God and God’s loving support for us, whether we are in pain or want to jump for the sheer joy of being alive.

And if we have sinned, if we know we have done the wrong thing, then we will be forgiven and healed, inside and out. As I found, I could have said nothing about the accident and given the outward appearance of life being OK for me. In this case, being healed inside was the challenge.

We are always in the presence of God, and God knows what is going on inside us, the things that we don’t even tell our wife, or husband, or best friend or minister. God can change our hearts and help us to work through and deal with our problems.

Psalm 51 says: “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.” If we open ourselves to GOD, to the work of the spirit, then we will be put right with God and with the world. But we have to make the first move, to invite God in.

What do we have to do, what is asked of us, in return for the blessings and loving support that God gives us? We have to make a habit of firstly, confessing our sins to each other and secondly, of praying for each other, so that we can live together whole and healed.

It can be hard to open ourselves up in a large group, such as our congregation sitting in the pews here today. One of the strengths of the early Methodist church in the 1700s, was that John Wesley encouraged church members to meet regularly in small house groups, to pray for and support each other. Perhaps we could consider creating small home groups for our congregation?

The last part of the reading from James poses a pastoral challenge for us. We need to contact people who used to come to church here, but

have stopped doing so, and drifted away. We need to invite them back to join our fellowship and faith community.

And what is our reward for walking the narrow path of life in the presence of God, of owning up to each other when we mess up, of gathering to worship, sing and pray, of being God's hands and eyes in our community.

It is freedom. The freedom of a bird in flight. The freedom of the tui, kaka, keruru, riroriro, pīwakawaka, blackbirds and sparrows that grace our garden with their nests and their songs.

The freedom to live without shame, with peace in our hearts.

Amen.

Song: I take Thy promise

(Words: Henry Legh Richmond Deck. Music: Jonathan Berkahn)

1. I take Thy promise, Lord, in all its length,
and breadth, and fullness, as my daily strength;
into life's future fearless I may gaze,
for, Saviour, Thou art with me all the days.
2. Days may be coming fraught with loss and change,
new scenes surround my life and faces strange;
I thank Thee that no day can ever break,
Saviour, when Thou wilt leave me or forsake.
3. There may be days of darkness and distress,
when sin has power to tempt, and care to press,
yet in the darkest day I will not fear,
for, 'mid the shadows, Thou wilt still be near.
4. Days there may be of joy and deep delight,
when earth seems fairest, and her skies most bright,
then draw me closer to Thee, lest I rest
elsewhere, my Saviour, than upon Thy breast.
5. And all the other days that make my life,
marked by no special joy or grief or strife,
days filled with quiet duties, trivial care,
burdens too small for other hearts to share.
6. Spend Thou these days with me, all shall be Thine,
so shall the darkest hour with glory shine.
Then when these earthly years have passed away,
let me be with Thee in the perfect day.

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: "...and, in your mercy," please respond with: **"hear our prayer."**

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 prayer

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

Holy Spirit, we give thanks for all the blessings that have come our way.

We give thanks for blessings poured out and for the love that we have received.

**May these our gifts be a blessing for many and a love offering for all.
Amen.**

Hymn: O God, Each Day You Bless Us

(Words: Carolyn Winfrey Gillette – 2004. Tune: Ellacombe)

1. O God, each day you bless us with gifts of your shalom:
You give us peace and justice, you welcome lost ones home.
You care for your creation and set your people free;
You offer us salvation and build community.
2. You make us sons and daughters baptised and reconciled!
You show us: Each peace-maker is blest as your own child.
You fill us at your table with strength for each new day;
Then Spirit-filled we're able to live your peaceful way.
3. We'll worship, pray, and study, to learn new skills for peace;
We'll work as one strong body so justice will increase.
We'll build new global friendships, seek peace in every land,
Protect the earth you gave us and give with outstretched hand.
4. You give your church a vision, a way of life, a prayer:
Your will is done in heaven; now bring in your reign here!
And when we wonder, grieving, at what the nations do,
God, may we work, believing there's hope in serving you.

Benediction

Go forth today bathed in the warmth of the love of God
and aware of the relationship God wants to have with you.
In the days ahead, may you be blessed with worship, joy, and connection, and
find time each day to rest at the feet of Jesus.

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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Dove cover painting: Rosemary Garside. Liturgy for this service was sourced
from: *Gathering Pentecost 1 2021 (Year B)* – United Church of Canada; *Let Us Pray*,
Janet Nelson 1999; Philip Garside.