



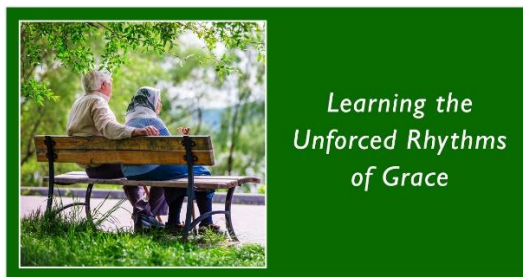
Wesley Wellington

75 Taranaki Street
www.wesleychurch.org.nz

Sunday 9 July 2023

Pentecost 6

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

Order of Service

Wesley Methodist Church 75 Taranaki Street
10am Congregation

9 July 2023 Pentecost 6

Leader: Philip Garside. Organist: Colin Scarf.

Piano: Vivien Chiu

Welcome, Introduction & Safety Briefing

Call 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.**

Today We Light the Christ Candle (Candle lighting)

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.

Hymn: I Sing the Grace of God Within You.

Words & Music: Colin Gibson. Hope Is Our Song 68

1. I sing the grace of God within you,
I know that grace within my soul;
and when we honour God in each other
we bring together one gracious whole.
2. I sing the love of Christ within you,
I know that love within my soul;
and when we honour Christ in each other
we come together, one loving whole.
3. I sing the Spirit's life within you,
I know that life within my soul;
and when we honour life in each other,
the Spirit forms one living whole.

Prayer of Approach: 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

In God, we know this truth.

We find healing, wholeness, strength, and courage
—everything we need to be God’s faithful people.

Let us have the courage to open ourselves to the Love that is life itself, the Love that forgives and heals us.

Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

Time with children / Introducing the Theme

Concept: Do some work. Rest. Do some more work. Rest.

Possible learnings: Team work. Questioning frivolous orders. Enjoying a rest.

Props: 10 Concrete paving tiles. Sheets of hardboard 1m square to protect carpet. A towel to rub the dirt of their hands. Water to drink - jug and cups

At start of service have the paving tiles in untidy heap, next to lectern on board. Have the other board on the top level of the sanctuary to one side of the altar.

Ask children to come forward. Ask them to take the pavers and lay them on the 2nd board in a tidy pattern like a part of a path. Don’t offer any ideas about how to do this.

When they have finished praise their efforts, invite them to walk on the “path”, then sit down on the sanctuary steps. Offer them a cup of water.

Then in an arbitrary fashion say that the path is not in the right place. Move the empty board up to the other side of the altar and ask the children to rebuild the path there. Thank them for their efforts. Ask them to sit and offer water again.

Say that the Bible talks about the week having a pattern of work days followed by Sabbath rest days. Thank them for their help.

Hymn: Song of Peace.

Words: Lloyd Stone (1912-1993) Music: (Finlandia) Jean Sibelius (1865-1957)

1. This is my song, O God of all the nations,
A song of peace for lands afar and mine,
This is my home, the country where my heart is,
Here are my hopes, my dreams, my holy shrine;
But other hearts in other lands are beating
With hopes and dreams as true and high as mine.
2. My country's skies are bluer than the ocean,
And sunlight beams on clover leaf and pine;
But other lands have sunlight too, and clover,
And skies are everywhere as blue as mine.
O hear my song, thou God of all the nations,
A song of peace for their land and for mine.

Reading

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30 [The Message Bible – Eugene Peterson]

¹⁶⁻¹⁹“How can I account for this generation? The people have been like spoiled children whining to their parents, ‘We wanted to skip rope, and you were always too tired; we wanted to talk, but you were always too busy.’ John came fasting and they called him crazy. I came feasting and they called me a boozier, a friend of the misfits. Opinion polls don’t count for much, do they? The proof of the pudding is in the eating.”

²⁵⁻²⁶Abruptly Jesus broke into prayer: “Thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth. You’ve concealed your ways from sophisticates and know-it-alls, but spelled them out clearly to ordinary people. Yes, Father, that’s the way you like to work.”

²⁷Jesus resumed talking to the people, but now tenderly. “The Father has given me all these things to do and say. This is a unique Father-Son operation, coming out of Father and Son intimacies and knowledge. No one knows the Son the way the Father does, nor the Father the way the Son does. But I’m not keeping it to myself; I’m ready to go over it line by line with anyone willing to listen.

²⁸⁻³⁰“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

Sermon: Learning the Unforced Rhythms of Grace

“...I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me— watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

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 life-force and our burden carrier. Amen.

I have titled this sermon: Learning the unforced rhythms of grace, Learning the unforced rhythms of grace.

When I’m preparing to lead a service and preach, I go online to the Bible Gateway and copy and paste the text of the four or five lectionary Bible readings for the day into a Word document. I get the text in two translations, the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition – the latest version of the NRSV – and also The Message Bible by Eugene Peterson. I then read through all the readings in both translations and make notes about what comes to mind. Generally one or two of the readings in either the NRSV or The Message will grab my attention. I then stop and put the readings to one side.

Over the next day or two I let the readings rest in me, and let my subconscious mind process them.

I then sit down at the computer, choose the one or two readings I’m actually going to use, jot down some more notes and start writing my sermon.

For this Sunday I was going to use the NRSV translation of the reading from Matthew. It has the familiar phrase “my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” This is the text of one of the choruses in Handel’s *Messiah*, which I have sung with Festival Singers.

But then... I noticed this in Eugene Peterson’s text, “Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.” What a stunning, beautiful phrase! And what depths of meaning it contains. It’s our theme for today.

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There are a cluster of keywords I want to explore with you: Learn • Unforced • Rhythms • Grace. To which we add: Work • Rest • Sabbath.

Learn

How do you learn? How do you acquire new skills?

I'm good at reading and following instructions. In the days when computer software came in a box with CD ROMs and an thick instruction manual, I was in my happy place, exploring the new things the software would let me do. Later, if I got stuck, I would go to the index or table of contents to find the section of the manual I needed to re-read.

These days I learn a lot by watching instruction videos online. It is many years since I sat in a classroom being taught by a teacher or expert at the front of the room.

Yet, this is how Jesus taught people. In the countryside or in a public space in town, Jesus would sit and talk to people who gathered round him. His overarching idea was the establishment of the Kingdom of God or God's Realm here on earth. It is a big idea and can't be taught all at once.

Matthew's gospel is full of instances of Jesus teaching people who gather around him. He said different things to different groups of people as he travelled around. He tailored what he said to the audience in front of him. He was the master of telling parables to challenge people's attitudes. And there are short one-liner aphorisms, that were remembered after he journeyed on.

The reading from Matthew is a different sort of instruction. Jesus is sharing his best wisdom. He is holding nothing back. If you are exhausted by life, if your religious faith and church give you pain, then follow me and I will teach you a better way to live. This is an active sort of learning. Jesus invites the people (and this includes us today) to walk with, work with and watch him. To accompany him.

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Unforced

You really can't change the way people think and act by forcing them to do something.

An example. When I was a part of the young adults group here in the early 1980s and our group led a service, we thought it would be a great idea if the congregation would sit closer to the front of the church. So we roped off a few rows of the back pews and encouraged people to come forward. Some people who usually sit at the back did come forward. But others ducked under the ropes and sat in their usual place. Next week when the minister led a normal service, people sat where they were most comfortable – just as we do today. The congregation didn't take up the new learning the young adult's group offered them.

Jesus invites us to follow his way. We are free to do so. And we are free not to do so.

The Roman Empire offered peace through victory, peace through violence, through force. Jesus strategy is to strive for a peaceful and just society through non-violent resistance.

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Rhythms

One of the patterns in the gospel stories about Jesus is that he would engage with a group of people, healing and teaching them, then retreat to a quiet place to pray and rest, before continuing his ministry the next day. Act, pray and recharge, ready to act again.

In Matthew 11, Jesus is frustrated with the people who just don't get the message he is trying to share with them. So he turns to prayer – in public this time. He then comes back and teaches simply and with compassion, and probably more effectively. Note that prayer is the reset button, the circuit breaker.

Many people find the discipline of daily devotional reading - either first thing in the morning or in bed at night – is a helpful part of the pattern of their lives.

Words can have rhythms too.

I want to read you a poem I wrote in 2016. Writing it was an unusual experience. I picked up my pen and the words just flowed through me and onto the page. It's a work of the Spirit. There is a strong rhythm to the poem. Note in

the second stanza a variation on the usual carrying the burden phrase: All people share it, lighten God's load. Here's the poem:

Jesus is risen, the people rejoice

Jesus is risen
the people rejoice
Clapping and singing
jubilant noise

The cross is no burden
one man to carry
All people share it
lighten God's load

Hold ideas closely
process and ponder
Head links to heart
with glorious wonder

Death cannot stop
passionate justice
Vision and fury
pulsating life

Here and now, catch it
open-mouthed stare
Diminished, the devil
slinks back to his lair

Death overcome
by passionate heart
Story still spinning
we've just made a start

Tell out the wonder
spell out the joy
Craft image and music
all talents employ

Invited to follow
step firm on The Way
Gentle the prodding
to be still and pray

Open the big book
what did they say?
First babe, then adult
faith boosted today

A clarion call
can it be good news?
Yes, say the people
and stamp in the pews

Mystery, misery
unbidden truth
Open to all
both refined and uncouth

The whole earth vibrates
the bow string aquiver
Myth mingles with fact
God's love to deliver

Yes, Jesus is risen
the people rejoice!

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Grace

An important Methodist idea is that salvation comes through God's grace. We have been saved; we are being saved, we will be saved – not because of our own merits or actions – but because God offers this to us.

At the end of our services, we say the grace together:

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

When Nicola or Hugh lead services, we say the grace in Māori, which adds another layer of richness to our worship.

Here is a key to lightening our burden. We don't need to worry about being personally saved by Jesus, through our actions or meeting some artificial, impossible standard. God has taken care of this already. We are saved. It's a charism, a gift from a loving God. We are invited to turn around, face the light, and live the best lives we can. What a relief.

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Let's address the last three keywords together: Work, Rest and Sabbath.

Even when our daily paid or unpaid work is fulfilling and brings us joy, we get tired and need to stop for a rest.

The Jewish custom of taking a break from work one day a week, and keeping that day as a Sabbath, as holy, is a very good idea. Jewish people observe Sabbath every week beginning at sunset on Friday evening and ending after dark on Saturday evening.

I'm currently reading Diarmaid MacCulloch's book *A History of Christianity*. Heather and I have recently watched the six part BBC documentary series of the same name presented by him. The way that Christianity has spread throughout the world is remarkable. As is the great diversity of ways that Christian faith is expressed. It's a fascinating series.

Talking about Jesus' often cavalier attitude to obeying the finer details of Jewish laws, MacCulloch in his book notes:

“Maybe the answer is that Jesus did not care a great deal about being consistent on the issue, given his concentration on the imminent coming of the kingdom, in which all laws would be made anew. So he was not especially worried about special observance of the Jewish weekly holy day (the Sabbath), or various rules for ritual purity, but he cared a great deal about oaths, in particular about an agreement to enter marriage.”

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Jesus encourages us to adopt the underlying principle, that we all need regular times of rest. He isn't worried about the details of how we do this.

How do we in this congregation honour the idea of the Sabbath? We come to church to worship on most Sundays.

Our family is now spread over three households and three generations. We usually gather on Sunday evening for a shared meal. I tried to avoid doing business related work on Sundays.

Marva Dawn in her book, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting*, makes a broad and deep study of what the Sabbath can be about for us today. She focusses on the Sabbath as adding to our lives. She says:

“To choose to reserve for Sabbath times some things that are exceptional in our families merely requires a little planning. To have cocoa for breakfast instead of tea, to eat out with friends or host a dinner party or plan a potluck for a congregational care group, to enjoy one's favorite foods only on Sunday, even to use especially precious bowls or mugs—these are a few simple examples of intentional ways to mark the Sabbath as a time for feasting, as a day of delight.”

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In a statement that links with the idea of salvation through God's grace, she also says:

“It grieves me that our Christian communities get tied into the world's value system and forget this constant message of the Scriptures: that we are worthy

because we are loved by God.”

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Walter Brueggemann, in his book *Sabbath as Resistance*, notes:

“In our own contemporary context of the rat race of anxiety, the celebration of Sabbath is an act of both resistance and alternative. It is resistance because it is a visible insistence that our lives are not defined by the production and consumption of commodity goods.”

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Gathering to worship each Sunday is important. It is a gentle signal to the rest of our community, that business and competition are not the only values that are important.

Jesus says, “My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

He invites us to, “Keep company with him and learn to live freely and lightly.”

Will we accept his invitation?

Amen.

10am Singing Group: *Spirit of God in the clear running water.*

Accompanied by Vivien Chiu on piano.

Composer Miriam Therese Winter, 1976. Original 3rd verse omitted.

1. Spirit of God in the clear running water
Blowing to greatness the trees on the hill.
Spirit of God in the finger of morning:
Fill the earth, bring it to birth,
And blow where you will.
Blow, blow, blow till I be
But the breath of the Spirit blowing in me.
2. Down in the meadow the willows are moaning
Sheep in the pastureland cannot lie still.
Spirit of God, creation is groaning:
Fill the earth, bring it to birth,
And blow where you will.
Blow, blow, blow till I be
But the breath of the Spirit blowing in me.
3. Spirit of God everyone's heart is lonely
Watching and waiting and hungry until
Spirit of God, we long that you only
Fill the earth, bring it to birth,
And blow where you will.
Blow, blow, blow till I be
But the breath of the Spirit blowing in me.

Community Time

Sharing the Peace

Let's greet each other saying: **"Peace be with you."**

Notices

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

Prayers of Intercession

To the bidding, "Gracious God, in your mercy..." please respond by saying, **"hear our prayer,"** and then singing: **"Living God's love, acting for the common good."**

Living God's Love

Text: 10am Leaders Group

Tune: Philip & Heather Garside

Two staves of musical notation in 3/4 time, key of D major. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 100. The lyrics are: "Liv-ing God's love, act - ing for the com-mon good." The melody is simple and repetitive, with a final cadence on the second staff.

Lord's Prayer [Sung] With One Voice 676

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)

In worship of the God who loves, we bring gifts because we love, to the church begun in love, to do the work of the Lord of love.

Holy One, the God who loves, bless these offerings we bring in love to fund the church's work of love, in a world much in need of love. Amen.

Hymn: I take Thy promise.

Words: Henry Legh Richmond Deck (1853-1910). Music: Jonathan Berkahn (2011)

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.

Blessing

Go back into the world, knowing that God is an affectionate Parent, God is an understanding Messiah, God is a compassionate Comforter.

Go back into the world, knowing that God the Holy Trinity is calling and equipping you to live lovingly, to behave graciously and to speak wisely, this day and every day.

Go back into the world, knowing that in your going you take with you the blessing of the eternal, the merciful, the tender-hearted God, who is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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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Sources

Call to Worship, Candle lighting, Prayer of Approach, Blessing of Offering, Blessing: *Prayers for Southern People* by Joy Kingsbury-Aitken; PGPL (2023).

Intercessions: *Let Us Pray*, Janet Nelson, HarperCollins (1999).

Words of Assurance: *Gathering Pentecost 1 2023*, United church of Canada

Cover photo of couple on bench:

Photo [71371053](#) © [Photobac](#) | [Dreamstime.com](#)

Books mentioned in sermon:

- *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, Marva J. Dawn, Eerdmans (1989)
 - *Sabbath as Resistance*, Walter Brueggemann, Westminster John Knox (2017)
 - *A History of Christianity*, Diarmaid MacCulloch, Penguin Random House (2009).
- See also the six part BBC documentary series of the same name presented by MacCulloch.

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

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

Or the 10am Congregation's Facebook Page:

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