

**WESLEY UNITING CHURCH, FORREST, ACT.**  
**PENTECOST 15**  
**10:45am Liturgy**  
**Sunday, September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024**



**‘Tending the Heart of Virtue’**

These last five weeks, the lectionary has diverted us from the rhythm of readings from the Gospel of Mark to the Gospel of John. From a practical perspective, this should be no surprise in as much as Mark’s Gospel is the most economical of the four gospels and needs some help to last a whole church year. That said, John while different to Mark – imparting a more developed theology – also bears similarities, not least, some narratives that John receives and then re-interprets. This has been the case during the month of August as Mark’s story of the Feeding of the 5000 is reinterpreted by John in a sacramental light: ‘Jesus as the Bread of life’. Each in their own way, Mark and John, affirm that *Jesus is fundamental to a life well lived*.

Today we return to Mark and unsurprisingly the turn is to this well lived life. While Jesus is fundamental to life, learning to live well is a journey, a process, where virtue flourishes. Questioning the arid ‘rules-based externalism’ of the scribes and pharisees, Jesus underscores that a life of virtue emanates from a properly ordered heart and mind, where faith is not an escape from the snares of the world and from dangerous desire, but as Thomas Aquinas would have it, faith is a ‘transforming desire for moral and ethical ends’, virtue grounded in and expressed through Christ.

**THE GATHERING OF GOD’S PEOPLE**

**Prelude**      **Jesu Joy of Man’s Desiring**, by J.S. Bach (arranged for organ by Harvey Grace)

**News and Notices**

**Introit**      Create a clean heart in me, O God      Charles Giffen © 2015, words from Psalm 51

Create a clean heart in me, O God.  
Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness;  
in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense.  
Thoroughly wash me from my guilt,  
and of my sin cleanse me.

**Acknowledgement of First Nation’s People**

Let us acknowledge the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples,  
The first inhabitants of this place,  
part of God’s good creation.

We honour them for their custodianship of the land,  
on which we gather today.

### **A Safe Space**

The Uniting Church in Australia believes that all people are made in the image of God, and so we accept every individual regardless of race, age, creed, sexuality and gender.

### **Welcome and Invocation of the Trinity**

In the name of the Father,  
And of the Son,  
And of the Holy Spirit  
**Amen**

### **Collect**

Almighty God,  
whose only Son has opened for us  
a new and living way into your presence:  
give us pure hearts and steadfast wills  
to worship you in spirit and in truth,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord

### **Gathering Meditation (Inspired by toady's Epistle, James 1: 17-27)**

Listen! It's not normal to shut up.  
Shhh...I have to remind myself to listen:  
So I won't speak too soon  
So, I won't say what I'll later regret.  
Now...slow yourself  
Slow down anger  
Slow down careless thought  
Slow down...  
long enough...  
to hear God whisper  
the right things to do and say.  
Listen! Pause and hear!

### **Lighting the Community Candle from the Christ candle**

**Hymn 209** And Can It Be Thomas Campbell (1825), words by Charles Wesley(1707-88)

### **A Prayer: Hungering to be Real (Inspired by the Epistle, James 1:17-27)**

The Book of James is really a series of exhortations to live 'the good life' but understood differently to the pre-Socratic or even post Socratic philosophers of antiquity who shape much of modern thought. The Reformer, Martin Luther, held the epistle of James in scant regard, referring to it as an "epistle of straw". His reason was that it did not bear the depth of theology of the apostle Paul and appeared to have no understanding of the "doctrine of justification by grace through faith", so dear to Luther. Even so James is not unimportant as an ethical guide, reflecting very much what has come to be known in contemporary theology as "God's preferential option for the poor." The point of this prayer is to mirror James' conviction that Christians are to be, 'no respecters of people' ... meaning in ancient world parlance, that we do not take note of peoples social standing or wealth, differentiating the way we think about them or respond to them. In 1:19-21, James advises about how we should respond to people. He suggests that listening is an art where we deliberately leave space for others to be, not to feel we have to fill in the gaps or exercise some kind of control.

We gather today hungry to be real  
with genuine smiles  
and actions that match our songs of praise.  
**No more lip service! We want to be real!**

We are not content to just master the ‘power handshake of strength’.  
We want also to master the ‘partner handshake of mutual respect and mutual support’, where we all feel safe.

**No more lip service! We want to be real!**

We yearn to rise above culture and prejudice  
to a mindset where foreigners and strangers are welcomed,  
and all are invited to God’s table.

**No more lip service; we want to be real!**

### **Our Confession and Reconciliation**

Let us be still and listen to the voice of God

*Silence*

Let us confess

When the busyness of our lives erodes the intentions of our hearts:  
Merciful God, **forgive us.**

When our personal agendas take precedence over others:  
Merciful God, **forgive us.**

When we keep putting off being more active “doers of the word”:  
Merciful God, **forgive us.**

When we resist change, knowing that our acting and thinking  
are limited by our prejudice and ignorance:  
Merciful God, **forgive us.**

When we only half-listen to those who cry out to be fully heard:  
Merciful God, **forgive us.**

*A time of silence to contemplate*

### **(Sung) Kyrie**

Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy.  
Christ have mercy, Christ have mercy, Christ have mercy.  
Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy.

### **Declaration of Forgiveness**

We are the only species  
with needs that exceed our grasp.  
We are the only species who ask questions  
about the purpose of our existence  
which our reason is unable to answer.  
With all our accomplishments  
we stretch out for consolation and explanation.  
Amid our restlessness and anxiety  
the good news is this: we are forgiven, released. **Thanks be to God.**

### **(Sung)Gloria**

Glory to God in the highest,  
and peace to God’s people on earth.  
Lord God, heavenly King,  
almighty God and Father,  
we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.  
Lord Jesus Christ,  
only Son of the Father,

Lord God, Lamb of God,  
 you take away the sin of the world:  
 have mercy on us;  
 you are seated at the right hand of the Father:  
 receive our prayer.  
 For you alone are the Holy One  
 you alone are the Lord,  
 you alone are the Most High,  
 Jesus Christ with the Holy Spirit,  
 in the Glory of God the Father, Amen. Amen.

## THE SERVICE OF THE WORD

### All Age Story

**Readings** Song of Songs 2:8-13, pew bibles p. 544.

Song of Songs is part of the Wisdom literature attributed to Solomon. Looked upon askance because of its erotic allusions, it is precisely these allusions which offer insight into the relationship between God and God's people. In Jewish tradition the bridegroom has been interpreted as Yahweh and the bride as the Jewish people. The poem then becomes a retelling of the relationship between them from the Exodus onward through the exilic experiences and the restoration of the people in the land. Christian interpretations included Origen's belief (185-254 CE) that although the Song might be shaped on the marriage of Solomon with Pharaoh's daughter, underneath this was the allegory of Christ as the groom and the bride as the church. This was adopted by Jerome, Augustine, John Wesley and the editors of the King James Version. For many Roman Catholic scholars, the bride became the Virgin Mary.

<sup>8</sup>The voice of my beloved! Look, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills. <sup>9</sup>My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look, there he stands behind our wall, gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice. <sup>10</sup>My beloved speaks and says to me: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; <sup>11</sup>for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. <sup>12</sup>The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. <sup>13</sup>The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

James 1:17-27, pew bibles, pp. 980-981.

James is a collection of exhortations, loosely linked together, but presented in the name of James, the brother of Jesus, who became the head of the Jerusalem church and was known for taking what others (like Paul) would have seen as a very conservative attitude towards the Jewish Law, i.e. the Law of Moses as set out in the first five books of the Old Testament. At some points the advice could easily come from another branch of Judaism, but every now and again distinctively Christian emphases also appear. It stands in the tradition of writings which offer wisdom, like Proverbs and Sirach (in the Apocrypha).

<sup>17</sup>Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. <sup>18</sup>In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

<sup>19</sup>You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; <sup>20</sup>for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. <sup>21</sup>Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls. <sup>22</sup>But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. <sup>23</sup>For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; <sup>24</sup>for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. <sup>25</sup>But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing. <sup>26</sup>If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. <sup>27</sup>Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

**Hymn 643** I want to walk with Jesus

Kathleen Thomerson (b. 1934)

The Gospel: Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23, pew bibles, pp. 818-819. This is one of the most important passages in the New Testament for gaining an insight into the way Mark and Jesus, before him, handled scripture. It is also one which makes us aware of the major cultural gulf which separates us from the ancient world. Central to the ancient ethos was externalism: that things impact upon ritual purity. This was not just about obsessive scrupulousness, but rather the honouring of the Hebrew law. Here, according to Mark, Jesus is declaring such laws not only invalid, but never valid. They make no sense. They never did. How can such external things affect spirituality? What goes on inside us and how those shapes relationships and our world view, is what matters.

<sup>7</sup>Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, <sup>2</sup>they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. <sup>3</sup>(For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; <sup>4</sup>and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.) <sup>5</sup>So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" <sup>6</sup>He said to them, "Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written,

'This people honours me with their lips,  
but their hearts are far from me;  
<sup>7</sup>in vain do they worship me,  
teaching human precepts as doctrines.'  
<sup>8</sup>You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition."

<sup>14</sup>Then he called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand: <sup>15</sup>there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile."

<sup>21</sup>For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, <sup>22</sup>adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. <sup>23</sup>All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

The Gospel of the Lord

**Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ****Anthem** *Condescension* Daniel Read (1786), words by Isaac Watts based on the Song of Solomon 2:14-17

Hark! the redeemer from on high	Dear Lord, our thankful heart receives
Sweetly invites his favourites nigh.	The hope thine invitation gives;
From caves of darkness and of doubt,	To thee our joyful lips shall raise
He gently speaks and calls them out.	The voice of prayer and of praise.

Be like a hart on mountains green,  
Leap o'er the hills of fear and sin;  
Nor guilt nor unbelief divide  
My love, my Saviour, from my side.

**Homily****Prayers for the Church and World**

Today we pray for the peoples of Benin, the Ivory Coast (Côte d'Ivoire) and Togo, lands that served as locations for the European slave trade from which massive European wealth was born. We dare not forget in our hearts and minds the peoples of Gaza, the West Bank, Israel, the people of Sudan and Dafur, the people of Ukraine as they continue to live under the imposition of war, and the people of Russia as they themselves live under repression. We offer the Bidding: Lord...**Hear our prayers.**

**Offering** *Music is played as the offering is received. The congregation stands as the offering is received by the minister and prayers are offered over the gifts.*

## EUCCHARIST

### **The Peace**

*We greet each other with the words, "The peace of the Lord be with you" with the response "And also with you", or if from a distance, the hand over the heart, or the hands clasped.*

**Hymn 474** Here in this place Martyr Haugen (b. 1950)

### **Invitation**

This is the table of the Lord.

It is to be made ready for those who love him and who want to love him more.

So, come, you who have much faith and you who have little, you who have been here often and you who have not been for a long time, you who have tried to follow and you who have failed.

It is our Lord who invites you.

It is his will that those who want him should meet him here.

### **Great Prayer of Thanksgiving**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them to the Lord**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise**

Gratitude, praise, hearts lifted high,  
voices full and joyful,  
These you deserve O God.

For when we were nothing you made us something.  
When we had no name and no faith and no future,  
You called us to be your children.  
When we lost our way or turned away,  
you did not abandon us.  
When we came back to you,  
your arms opened wide in welcome.

You loved the world so much  
that you sent your only Son  
to bring us life eternal.  
Dying he destroyed our death.  
Rising he restored our life.

And so we praise you  
with the faithful of every time and place,  
joining with choirs of angels and the whole creation  
in the eternal hymn

### **(Sung) Sanctus and Benedictus**

Holy, holy, holy Lord  
God of power and might.  
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.  
Hosanna in the highest.  
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest.

Lord God, as we come to share the richness of your table  
 we cannot forget the rawness of the earth.  
 We cannot take bread and forget those who are hungry.  
 Your world is one world and we are stewards of its nourishment.

**Lord, put our prosperity at the service of the poorest of the earth.**

We cannot take wine and forget those who are thirsty. The ground and the rootless, the earth  
 and its weary people cry out for justice.

**Lord, put our fullness at the service of the empty.**

We cannot hear your words of peace  
 and forget the world at war.

Or, if not at war, then preparing for it.

**Show us quickly, Lord, how to turn weapons into welcome signs and the lust for power into  
 a desire for peace.**

We cannot celebrate the feast of your family and forget our divisions. We are one in Spirit but not  
 in fact; history and hurt still dismember us.

**Lord, heal your church in every brokenness.**

### **Institution**

On the night in which Jesus gave himself up to death,  
 He took bread, gave you thanks,  
 broke it and said:

This is my body given for you.

Do this for the remembrance of me.

When the meal was ended, he lifted the cup,  
 and again giving you thanks,  
 gave it to his friends and said:

this cup is the new covenant  
 sealed by my blood.

Do this, whenever you drink it,  
 for the remembrance of me.

And so, in remembrance of all you have done for us,  
 we take this bread and this cup,  
 and offer ourselves as a holy and living sacrifice,  
 made worthy by the perfect offering of Christ,  
 our great high priest.

### **The Blessing of the Bread and Wine**

With this bread and this cup  
 we do as our Saviour commands:  
 we celebrate the redemption he has won for us.

### **(Sung) Acclamations**

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

By your Word and Holy Spirit,  
 bless these gifts that we may truly share  
 Christ's body and blood,  
 and become by grace, his body given  
 for the sake of the world.

**(Sung) Acclamations**

Blessing and honour  
and glory and power  
are your for ever and ever.  
Amen.

**The Lord's Prayer**

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,  
now and forever. Amen.

**The Breaking of the Bread**

Look, the bread of Heaven is broken for the life of the world.  
Here is Christ coming to us in bread and wine.  
The gifts of God for the people of God.

**(Sung) Agnus Dei**

Jesus, Lamb of God have mercy on us.  
Jesus, bearer of our sins, have mercy on us.  
Jesus, redeemer of the world, grant us peace.

**The Distribution** *The elements are distributed to the congregation: initially the bread and then the 'wine'. We hold the elements and take together.*

**Prayer after Communion**

Open our eyes. Open our hands.  
Free our hearts to see and respect your presence  
in all and through all.  
We will respond with gratitude, joy, and grace.  
We will give our lives to the promise of Easter Love and friendship always rising up in our midst.  
**May it fully be so.**

**SENDING OUT**

**Hymn 687** God gives us a future John Brierley (b. 1932), words by Elizabeth Smith (b. 1956)

**Commission and Blessing**

...Our service has ended.  
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord **In the name of Christ.**

**Postlude Allegro, first movement from Concerto in D Major, RV 230** by A. Vivaldi (transcribed by J.S. Bach as BWV 972)

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**Liturgist/Preacher:** Rev'd Dr. Geoff Dornan / Rev'd Dr. Bruce Stevens

**Music Coordinator:** Jade McFaul

**Organist:** Jayden Lowe

**Wesley Music Scholars:** Evangeline Osbourne and Phoebe Bourke (choir)

**Reader:** Bruce and Lyn Bowman

**Duty Elder:** Heather Hart

**Video & Sound:** Simon Cowling and David Benger

**Flowers:** Ann Sutton



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