



St Stephens Williamstown Uniting Church in Australia

Service of the Word for the Gathered at Home

Proper 11 (16) Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Sunday 19th July 2020 – 9:30AM

Prepared by Rev S. Juliette Maua'i

NO HOLY COMMUNION... Place a cross and Bible on a table (if possible) with a **Green** cloth - today's Liturgical Colour. **If safe**, light a candle **OR** turn on a lamp. Open internet: copy then paste link **OR** click on link.

Readings: Genesis 28:10-19a; Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24; Romans 8:12-25; Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43

Song: TIS 87 You are before me Lord... <https://youtu.be/PRnQtCPw9Sk>

We Gather as the People of God

Call to Worship Based on Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24 & Genesis 28:10-19a

Eternal One,

You know everything and everyone,

You surround us on all sides - behind us and before us,

Your hand gently on our shoulder.

Through dreams and visions,

You open the hearts and hope of your people

To your covenant amidst of trial and exile

It is the most amazing feeling to know

how deeply 'love' calls to us.

We come as we are to worship you, God. **Amen.**

Please remain standing as you are able

Song: TIS 112 Through all the changing scenes of life... <https://youtu.be/p9yWo-jXPF8>

Please be seated

Acknowledgement to Country

I acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of this Land, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

I pay my respect to their Elders: past, present, and emerging.

Greetings / Welcome

The grace of the Lord be with you. **And also with you.**



Opening Prayer Based on Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24 & Romans 8:12-25

Eternal God,

from a distance, you know our hearts before we speak.

Your reassuring presence, coming and going

is too much, too wonderful, for words.

We are debtors, not to the flesh

but as your children led by your Spirit.

We cry out to you, "Abba! Father!"

that your Spirit may bear witness with our spirit

as your children,

joint heirs of God and with heirs with Christ

suffering with You that we may also be glorified with You.

in the name of Jesus. **Amen.**

Song: TIS 177 In suffering love the thread of life... (no YouTube clip found but offering this piece of the Tune Walsall this hymn can be sung to) <https://youtu.be/ufpwtmvuc10>

Prayer of Confession

Heavenly God,

our lives are not our own when we stray from your kingdom and kin-dom,
though we strive to be fruitful, we often fall short.

In our complacency we sleep rather than be vigilant

overlooking the sins of our own lives

and the injustice in the world.

We are slow to call out that which separates us from our neighbours,



therefore, separating us from you.

Grant that we may be willing to transform the weeds of sin to salvation in Christ, so that your Beloved Community in heaven may come to fruition on Earth.

Have mercy and forgive us.

Keep us awake so that we can produce the lives you call us to live. **Amen.**

Words of Assurance *based on Romans 8:12-25*

In the words of the apostle Paul,

“You did not receive a spirit of servitude to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption.”

As God’s children, in God’s embrace, you are forgiven and free.

Thanks be to God! Amen.



Song: TIS 417 Loving Spirit, loving Spirit... <https://youtu.be/2xUG3qzPBZM>

Please be seated

We Listen for God’s Word

Readings: Genesis 28:10-19a *Jacob’s dream at Bethuel*

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 *The Parable of Weeds among the Wheat & Jesus explains the Parable of the Weeds*

Lord, may we meditate on these words of scripture and come to a deeper understanding of their meaning for our time.

Song: Jacob’s Ladder (Children) <https://youtu.be/8R73dY1m4j0>

Reflection: *The Good, the Bad, and all is Black and White – Right?!* Rev S. Juliette Maua’i

Sibling rivalry steps up a massive gear, and more, as Esau has plans for his brother, Jacob, as Isaac’s days of draw near. Esau’s plea before Isaac’s imminent death to receive Isaac’s blessing as the older son, cannot be reversed. Esau’s anger is fuelled having been cheated by his younger sibling, Jacob, and we must not forget their mother, Rebekah, had a hand in the deceit (Genesis 27:5-17).

Esau’s anger could be said to be justified but Esau has been cheated not once, but twice! Esau in a strange way is comforted as he plans

Jacob is sent away to escape Esau’s anger! Do him? Why?

Today, we meet Jacob in our Hebrew northern city of Haran, to his mother, land God promised his ancestors Abraham has done, he must also leave behind his family sends Jacob away after Isaac has blessed and Rebekah’s family in Paddan-aram to stay there that he must not marry a Canaanite woman

We assume Jacob travels alone as today’s leaves his parents, Isaac and Rebekah, his no mention how Jacob must have felt. Along to sleep as the sun is going down and ‘at the pillow, and sleeps (Genesis 28:10-11).



we do not know if that it is how God sees it. Jacob received Isaac’s blessing (vv.1-40), and to kill his brother, Jacob. (vv. 32-42).

you think Jacob deserves what is coming to

Scripture reading on his journey back to the Rebekah’s family, away from the promised and Sarah (Genesis 12:1-9). For all that Jacob in the southern city of Beer-sheba. Isaac charged Jacob to journey to his mother, for a time (Genesis 28:1-5), and Jacob is told (Genesis 28:6).

passage does not mention otherwise. He furious brother, Esau, and his home. There is his solo journey toward Haran, Jacob prepares place’, he takes one of the stones using it as a

We are not told if Jacob realises ‘the place’ where "his grandfather Abram, upon reaching the Promised Land, had built an altar to the Lord (12:8)" (*The Lectionary Commentary: The Old Testament and Acts*). God had been with Abraham, Jacob’s ancestor, and grandfather, building up and fulfilling the covenant God ordained. Perhaps Jacob was not aware of the place he settles down to rest for the night because of the manner and circumstances in which he is leaving the Promised Land. There must have been a lot on his mind.

Such circumstances in which Jacob flees home. That is, because of his own wrongdoings and evil plot, sin renders Jacob with ‘no vision’ to see ahead, except that he must escape the fury of his twin brother, Esau. In this ‘odd place’ or ‘unknown place’, perhaps the last thing on Jacob’s mind in this place of rest was that no way would he encounter God.

But Jacob is about to encounter God! God appears to Jacob in a dream (Genesis 28:12-15). God meets Jacob in the vulnerable place of sleep and openness of dreaming (cf. the ‘Dreaming’ or ‘Dreamtime’ of our First Peoples, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples). How aware of you of God in the vulnerable place of sleep? Where have you encountered God when you least expect it? In your wrongdoings, sin, evil, or brokenness, whichever words you may wish to use, would you expect God to call on you? If not, why not? If so, why so?

In the place of dreams, Jacob meets God. The dream unveils the hidden yet active presence of God. God’s activity in the world and in

Jacob's dislocated life is revealed in a striking vision of stairs reaching from earth to heaven. In Mesopotamian cities like Babylon, meaning "gate of the gods", the structure of a *ziggurat* or terraced compound was said to be uniting heaven and earth, and is prominent in Mesopotamian.

God, in Genesis, appears to a terrified refugee. In the journey Jacob is fleeing from, he encounters a vision of God's angels running errands, ascending and descending, to fulfil God's work in the world. At the gate, God appears at the highest point or apex. Jacob is surprised to recognize this place, the "house of God" and the "gate of heaven (Genesis 28:17) of God's indwelling, the Hebrew meaning of "Bethel".

Like Abraham, Jacob dedicates his rock pillow as a memorial pillar. Jacob names what will become the major Israelite shrine of Bethel. (cf. Abraham's, earlier calling on the name of the LORD, at an altar east of Bethel in Genesis 12:8.)

In the unexpected, and unexpected places; in 'the Jacob' within us all that is, the good, the bad/evil/sin, within each of us, God unexpectedly turns up, meeting us where we are at; not where we *think* God will be! To this end, as the Church in the world, ours is not to judge but to recognise God, as judge! As the Church in the world, our is to meet our fellow human beings where they journey, where they rest, and with all they come with, and this applies to us all in the Church!

From Esau and Jacob, who is blessed and who is cursed? We might also ask the same question in our Gospel of Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43, is it the wheat that is blessed, and the weed that is cursed? I do not think there is a black and white answer.

In her book, *The Seeds of Heaven*, "Learning to Live with Weeds", Barbara Brown Taylor says parables "behave more like dreams and poems instead, delivering their meaning in images that talk more to our hearts than to our heads. Parables are mysterious... Left alone, they teach us something different every time we hear them, speaking across great distances of time and place and understanding".



Parables are mysterious, and as soon as we think we "know" what a parable means, we're probably mistaken. However, if we are made uncomfortable by the challenge of a parable, then we are probably getting a little closer to the heart of its meaning.

This week's Matthean gospel, the sower seemingly uses good ground, but because of the actions of the evil one, the enemy, he gets mixed results. Only in Matthew's Gospel is there talk of furnace of fire and weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 13:42).

Tension and conflict is this week's gospel story, active not passive resistance to the work of God, the sower. Maybe the early Christians were acutely aware of their own hopelessness, feeling small, exposed, but good, in opposition to the powerful wicked (evil) forces around them.

The parable does not address the reason for the enemy's actions, but the focus is on the church's response. The parable could be heard in the context of our local and our wider realities. In other words, on one level regarding the church and another level in relation to the world. We can relate then to what to do about less committed, less faithful, perhaps even trouble-making members of the church? This question can also be asked of our Genesis 28:10-19a passage from the Hebrew Scriptures, of Isaac and Rebekah, and of Esau and Jacob.

Do we dare to ask about the "sinners" in our midst! You know, the less committed, less faithful, the trouble-making members and ministers of the church?! Remember those stories of Jesus eating with sinners, tax collectors, touching the lepers, having a conversation with a Gentile Woman at the well in the middle of the noonday, or Jesus' words about not judging one another - after all, the Church should work for perfection and purity, right?!

Fred Craddock, speaks of a tension between the urge to purge imperfection and the "obligation to accept, forgive, and restore....the task of judging between good and evil belongs not to us but to Christ" (*Preaching through the Christian Year A*).

To this end, how do you distinguish, in our Matthean narrative today, between the weeds amidst the wheat in the Church? Who is to say will fall into the 'weed' category or 'wheat' category? Whether it is in the world, or in the Church, I think the Church and church people should err on the side of caution lest they become, "judge"!

To keep ourselves accountable, perhaps we need only to look close to home at ourselves, at the good, the bad, that is not black and white. But to keep at heart, "the Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers" (Matthew 13:41), for God judges us and meets us in unexpected places. We are a mix of good and evil, sometimes faithful and sometimes unfaithful (Thomas Long).

In our place of rest, in the vulnerability of dreamtime or sleep, may we ascend and descend the divine mystery in the stairway to heaven, where God's activity is present in the world during this global covid pandemic, and close at home, in our lives. We are called, broken people – weed and wheat - to remain in covenant with God, for the purposes of God in the world and in the Church, and in whose hope, we are granted salvation in the resurrected Christ! **Amen. Thanks be to God!**

We Respond to God's Word

Song: TIS 547 Be thou my vision... <https://youtu.be/ihJAJA4ibEs>



Offertory Call

What we have received comes from seed sown in us by Jesus Christ.
Having received the blessings of the harvest begun in us,
let us return to God fruits of the blessings we have received.

Offertory Prayer - *Offering brought forward*

Loving God,
we offer back to you what we have been given in daily bread:
our treasure, our time, and our lives.
Bless these our gifts, and multiply them for your purposes. **Amen.**



THE LORD'S PRAYER... *(prayerfully pray the Lord's Prayer in the language/ version of your choice)*

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 for ever. Amen.**

We Are Sent Forth into the World

Song: TIS 536 An upper room did our Lord prepare... <https://youtu.be/GHCcAfdVLT0>

Blessing/Dismissal

God's spirit is always with you.
Wherever you go, **God is there!**
If you ascend to heaven, **God is there!**
If you settle in the Outback's of this land or across the limitless seas, **God is there!**
In all places, in all seasons, **God holds you fast!**
May you know deeply the presence of God:
Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit.
Go well and go with God! **Amen!**

Rachel Naomi Remen, Author, 21st century

"Perhaps the most important thing we bring to another person is the silence in us, not the sort of silence that is filled with unspoken criticism or hard withdrawal. The sort of silence that is a place of refuge, of rest, of acceptance of someone as they are. We are all hungry for this other silence. It is hard to find. In its presence we can remember something beyond the moment, a strength on which to build a life. Silence is a place of great power and healing.

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Sunday / Monday (rest day) / Tuesday (work from home) / Thursday

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