



Worship at St. Stephens Williamstown

August 23 2020 – Pentecost 18

Bible readings for this week: Exodus 1:8-2:10, Psalm 124,
Romans 12:1-8, Matthew 16:13-20

Leaders Service prepared by Elaine Peck

Call to Worship

Come one and all from nearby and distant
Come as you are to join in spirit as
St Stephens Congregation to worship God
to give thanks for God's faithfulness
to be renewed and refreshed
as members of God's beloved family.

A Gathering Song

Bond of Love' © R. Scott Kearns

We are joined together in a bond of love,
with cords of freedom and of duty.
Connected in the spirit, our spirits are strong
in a bond of wonder and of beauty.
Made by all of us, for all of us,
fashioned by ev'rybody's hands.
All our differences all we share,
woven into many coloured strands.

*And this bond will hold us through the storm
and encourage us when hope seems gone
Knowing that together we belong
we'll extend our care to the ends of the earth,
and love will ever be our song.*

Shared by all of us, with all of us,
offered with love that's full and free.
Cords of sympathy, cords of joy,
stronger for our mutuality.

And this bond will hold us..... (etc)

Opening Words: Selected words: Matthew 16 13b-15

....he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

Prayer of Thanksgiving

We praise you, O God, for breaking through to us in the person of Jesus, your Son, our Lord.

When the words of the prophets went unheard and when their actions were ignored, you spoke the creative word once more.

You brought order out of chaos again – this time not to bring a world into being but to bring your love into the world in the Person of Jesus of Galilee.

Thanks be to God

Song: 'At the name of Jesus' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OI2rKRCWmOU>

Bible Reading: Exodus 1:8-2:10

⁸Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. ⁹He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. ¹⁰Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." ¹¹Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. ¹²But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. ¹³The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, ¹⁴and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

¹⁵The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, ¹⁶“When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live.” ¹⁷But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. ¹⁸So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?” ¹⁹The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.” ²⁰So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. ²¹And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. ²²Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, “Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live.”

²Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. ²The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. ³When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. ⁴His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

⁵The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. ⁶When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him, “This must be one of the Hebrews’ children,” she said. ⁷Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?” ⁸Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Yes.” So the girl went and called the child’s mother. ⁹Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages.” So the woman took the child and nursed it. ¹⁰When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, “because,” she said, “I drew him out of the water.”



Reflection

This past week has been an interesting one, where I have been reflecting on the importance of rules laid down by authorities and why they should be obeyed, although sometimes not! We have heard so much in the media lately about who did what and who didn’t do the right thing regarding rules.

I discovered some hard truths while out riding this week (for exercise). I endeavoured to ride my bike through the subway under the railway line in Williamstown. There had been a sign there saying “no bike riding here” but that has disappeared and seeing that I had accomplished this feat the day before, I thought I could manage it again, even though there was probably a good reason why this was usually not permitted. Alas, on the second turn round the barrier that needed to be executed, I oversteered, ran into the bluestone side of the subway, fell forward, crashed by chin on the wall, fell to the ground with the bike crashing on top of me and there I was stuck with my leg pinned under the bike frame. What a dill I felt and probably looked. Fortunately, Jodie was ahead and came back to remove the bike and help me up. I was very lucky – a few bruises but no broken bones and a good lesson learnt – rules are mostly made for good reasons.!

So, in the suggested readings for this week’s worship about Moses in the Bulrushes, I have questioned whether there is something to be learned from this ancient bible story regarding rules, and how they affect the way we treat other people and how that colours the society we live in. A charming story of the rescue of an innocent baby boy hidden away by his Hebrew mother, but a story with a horrific background when you consider why he had been hidden: because the Pharaoh of Egypt had ordered his people to throw all boys born to Hebrew mothers into the Nile to drown at birth.

Why had the Pharaoh ordered this drastic action? Because his instructions to Hebrew midwives to intervene in the birthing of Hebrew baby boys had been ignored. The midwives invented a good story that the mothers very capable and their babies strong and healthy. The midwives were ignoring his order and the Hebrew people threatened to become more numerous and more powerful than the Egyptian nation.

The bible story tells us that 'God dealt well with the midwives; and the people became very strong.' (Gen. 1 :20)

Why were the Hebrew people living in Egypt? We have heard the story of Jacob's son Joseph over the past few weeks, through a remarkable set of circumstances becoming right hand man to the Pharaoh of Egypt and being in a position to assist his Hebrew family when they came begging food when drought and famine had forced them to relocate from their home in Beersheba. Jacob's family grew from a small number of 70 at this time and were apparently offered food and a place to call home.

This led me to ponder on the rules that our Australian Government has put in place with regard to people coming to our country to seek food, shelter and a place to relocate. We often hear rumblings from some quarters of our population, pointing the finger and saying things like: "there's too many of them! They will take over the country! They are threatening our livelihoods and our way of life." Fortunately, I must say, our Government has not resorted to killing babies at birth, but locking families up in detention centres is not a good way to treat those who come seeking a healthier and more peaceful way of life. We have witnessed a number of remarkable individuals who have dared to break rules and stick their necks out to challenge the unfair and unjust treatment of refugees in Australia. I would like to think that God deals well with them and blesses their intentions and their achievements.

My thinking this week regarding the treatment of people who are different to ourselves has also been coloured by a documentary entitled 'Kanyini' which we fortunately discovered on NITV on Monday evening while the 'other' in this house was channel flicking.

The documentary was beautifully produced, but extremely sobering as the presenter, Rob Randall, a member of the Yankunytjatjara people, and one of the listed traditional owners of Uluru, outlined events occurring over the past 150 years that have brought his people to despair and ruin.

Our forefathers came to this country because they were looking for a place to relocate because poverty, illness, overcrowding and crime were forcing them out of their own situation. The First Nation People did not kill off our colonial babies because the white people were becoming too numerous and too powerful, despite the fact that the newcomers did not integrate peaceably into the manner of society already existing here, but took over the place, believing the existing inhabitants to be non-existent, but those who inexplicably were here, to be not of worth and their way of life meaningless. Our systems and regulations are still to this day causing death, despair and poverty to our indigenous peoples and unless some existing written and "unwritten" laws can be broken or better still re-imagined the future of these people, who have lived in harmony with their land for thousands of years, is doomed.

Laws and rules, I believe, should be well thought out and definitely require a lot of love, wisdom and God's blessings to influence their legislation. And some may still have to be seriously questioned.

However, when it comes to Covid-19 rules laid down by the Government Health Dept. Please observe them, stay safe and God's blessings on you all.

The documentary 'Kanyini' can be found on SBS on Demand and I commend it to you:
<https://www.sbs.com.au/ondemand/video/1771766339779/Kanyini>

Prayer of Confession

God of love and infinite wisdom, we confess that there are times when we conveniently ignore rules, just because it suits us.

Forgive us when we put the lives of others at risk through our selfish deeds.

Forgive us when we do not speak up in order to denounce clearly outdated rules that have an adverse affect on others.

Forgive us when we tolerate rules that permit bigotry and racism to flourish in our society.

We look to you, dear Lord, for wisdom and strength to promote positive change.

In the name of your dear Son Jesus, we pray and ask that you will forgive us. **Amen**

Song TIS 657 God of freedom, God of justice

Tune Westminster Abbey TIS 432

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=waPGZ7XKIoA>

God of freedom, God of justice,
God whose love is strong as death,
God who saw the dark of prison,
God who knew the price of faith:
touch our world of sad oppression
with your Spirit's healing breath.

2. Rid the earth of torture's terror,
God whose hands were nailed to wood:
hear the cries of pain and protest,
God who shed the tears and blood:
move in us the power of pity,
restless for the common good.

3. Make in us a captive conscience
quick to hear, to act, to plead;
make us truly sisters, brothers
of whatever race or creed:
teach us to be fully human, open to each other's need.

Benediction

Go into the week with the love of God inscribed upon your heart,
the life of Jesus Christ imprinted within your being,
and the energy of the Holy Spirit giving you life.