



St Stephens Williamstown Uniting Church in Australia
Service of the Word for the Gathered at Home
Proper 26 (31) Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost / All Saints Sunday

Sunday 1st November 2020 - Prepared by Rev. S. Juliette Maua'i

Place a cross and Bible (for Reading) on a table with a **Green** cloth - today's Liturgical Colour.

Open internet: copy then paste link OR click on link.

Joshua 3:7-17; Psalm 107:1-7, 33-37; 1 Thessalonians 2:9-13; Matthew 23:1-12/Matthew 5:1-12



Song: TIS 470 Rejoice in God's saints, today and all days... <https://youtu.be/MVViBCI8Yc0>

† In the name of the Creator, the Christ, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

We Gather as the People of God

Call to Worship *Matthew 5:3-10*

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are you, children of God, for yours is the reign of God. **Amen.**

Please remain standing as you are able

Song: TIS 569 Guide me, O thou great Redeemer... <https://youtu.be/ZAN4EojeF0Y>

Please be seated

Acknowledgement to Country:

This land is God's land and God's Spirit dwells here. We acknowledge the Yalukit-willam people of the Kulin Nation, traditional custodians of this land under God. We commit ourselves again to working for reconciliation in this land.

We pay our respects to their Elders – past, present, and emerging.

I also acknowledge those whose forefathers came from distant lands and whose generations call this Land, home.

Greetings / Welcome: The grace of the Lord be with you. **And also, with you.**

St Stephen's Church Council and I will be meeting on the 10th November to discuss our way forward.

2020 has been, so far, a challenging year for all People. Today, we remember our Saints, our Friends, our Beloveds, whose lives remain in our hearts but who now rest in God's eternal love. I acknowledge and light a candle for Nellie, for Nancy, for Andrew, for Hilda, and for all in our St Stephen's church family who have lost family or friends, neighbours, or have come to know of strangers whom God has welcomed into peace and reconciliation. Let us now pay our respects, in holding a minute's silence, for our Sisters and Brothers now in Christ... *Observe one minute's Silence...* In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

Opening Prayer

O Holy Creator,

You have created us and placed us in community for a purpose.

Open your words of life for us today as we gather at home today,
to hear your Gospel, sing your praises, basking in your wisdom and love.

Show us the way to justice and peace in Jesus,

that we may follow you joyfully into the future you hold for us and the world.

We pray in the Three-in-One God. **Amen.**

Song: TIS 455 For all the Saints... (*in memory of Nancy*) <https://youtu.be/WHwouBxfL4>

Prayer of Confession:

Holy Creator,

we have failed to learn the lessons of our ancestors.

We have failed to follow their footsteps in faith.

Instead of gaining wisdom, we often repeat their folly.

We tune out the teachings of old Jesus came to fulfil, thinking we know better,
but fall into the same traps of worldly fame, autonomy, and success.

Call out to us, O God, through the prophets of old who spoke truth to power.

Call out to us, O God, through the wisdom of the elders that continues to tug at our hearts.

Call out to us, O God, in the needs of our neighbours, reminding us that when we love one another, we love You best.

In the name of Christ, who came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it, who came to show us how to live into Your ways,
we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Words of Assurance

God's love is merciful. **Hear then Christ's words of grace to us: 'your sins are forgiven.'** Amen.

Song: TIS 647 Comfort, comfort all my people... (in memory of Andrew...) <https://youtu.be/P1x7V9N583Q>

Please be seated

We Listen for God's Word

Matthew 23:1-12 - A warning against hypocrisy/Matthew 5:1-12 – Intro to Sermon on the Mount/the Beatitudes
Lord, may we meditate on these words of scripture and come to a deeper understanding of their meaning for our time.

Reflection: *Honour our departed Saints is a call to recall Moses' seat with purpose! - Rev. S. Juliette Maua'i*

After last week's questioning by a Pharisaic lawyer of Jesus, compared to today's Matthew 23:1-12 passage, Jesus' words are not as restrained this week. Jesus is no longer patient with the educated church Leaders but lays a few truths on the line! Jesus also lays it on the line to the crowds and the disciples concerning the insincerity of the scribes and the Pharisees. Jesus is shocking the crowds and the disciples so that they will understand the gravity the Pharisees and scribes for "They do all their deeds to be seen by others" (v.5a). Jesus spells it out to the crowds and disciples so they understand that their church leaders and scholars continue calculated acts of burdening others to promote themselves. It must stop! It must not be permitted to go on that Jesus' words of judgment now, and a call to action, are exactly what *must* be heard today.

Here, Jesus' warning is a retelling and reshaping of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12). The behaviour of the scribes and the Pharisees is what living looks like when they do the exact opposite of what Jesus preached on the Mount.

Jesus' opening words in his captivating Sermon on the Mount are so well known that I wonder how faithfully we listen, and live out, Jesus' calling of each of us in our discipleship. Jesus' words are timely. These are words for such a time as now as we, as the Leadership of our congregation now look to meet first to regroup to discuss and begin plans in staging our reopening up again for worship. There is no time for soloists looking to be strategizing without gathering to discern ahead, because it is the safety of our people and vulnerable ones at heart, that is paramount in building the Body of Christ again. Just as important, as Leaders, having been absent for some time in lockdown, the reality of where are we at, what do we have to let go in order to move forward in stability, and to discuss our steady onward ministry and mission, both responsibly and responsively.

Both Gospel of Matthew passages (23:1-12 and 5:1-12) apply to us as we remember in love and in the process of grieving towards the road of healing. They are also applicable to the days ahead as we face our realities of finance, reshaping and re-formation of our community, our families, the wider church, and out in the wider world.

Jesus reminds us that *we live in* the world, but *we are not of* the world. We often get caught up with the frenzy of society rather than breathe, take a step back, and be discerning in our call to action. Many will come out of covid restrictions thinking, "yes, it's business as usual". I hope not! Nothing, is business as usual if we have contemplated wisely our time away from each other and, discerned on what have we/you learned, or should be learning, for the future, whilst having been in isolation. Will each of you be prepared for another isolation? Are you equipping yourself and upskilling yourselves for God's ministry and mission? We all need to be relearning new skills and think much more outside of our inner circle. Jesus does not call one or two... Jesus calls all disciples... for it takes a village/community/family to raise a child!

How purposefully have we sat still, diligent in our praying, in God's presence, contemplating how might our forced house restrictions reorient our reimagination of being disciples once we emerge from lockdown? Blessed are they that remain faithful in Christ; open to refreshed eyes, and eyes and hearts that have been challenged to see what is more important, in life's faith journey. Two weeks ago, Rev Dr Randy S. Woodley* led 75 participants UCA and other Christians in a half a day on, "Re-imagining faith from a non-Western paradigm", something the West has been prone to dismiss. The Uniting Church and in our Synod of Victoria it is noted that there is a huge disproportionate of leadership, of people of colour. Is this also the uncomfortable view towards our Indigenous First Nations Peoples of Australia? I think there is a link, I believe it is time for the Uniting Church to address this for there has been a lot of talk but awfully slow, perhaps reluctant, action. [*Books - *Decolonizing Evangelicalism: an 11:59pm conversation (Randy S. Woodley & Bo C. Sanders)* & *Shalom and the Community of Creation: an Indigenous Vision (Randy S. Woodley)*]

Both Matthew readings, in their original form, and as they get re-presented and re-imagined by Jesus, and then also by how we choose to live, are in Jesus' words to us, ripe for a time such as now where we are re-opening and, re-opening with the rest of Victoria. Neither personal agendas, nor opportunities to be known in the wider community, nor do we need to reignite our influences over and above other leaders. However, I hope and pray that we may have risen out of covid restrictions with a re-imagination of God! That is, re-imagination of God's image through the eyes of our Indigenous First Nations Peoples who are still seeking reconciliation, perhaps reparations, and a long denied equal representation on what is best for their own people and communities by government.



Moreover, that we are resurrecting in Christ Jesus to being disciples willing to live justly, and to be actively pursuing the injustices of all where racial prejudices, whether subtle or obvious towards others, is halted and eradicated. To this end, if I have observed, listened, and engaged in some small way, in my brief time of coming to know, directly or indirectly, Nellie, Nancy, Andrew, and Hilda, it is that they continued to be resurrected in Jesus as disciples

in their pursuit for justice, to help the poor in spirit, comfort and encourage, and give voice to the voiceless, clothing others with the love of God! Let us not forget, we must keep them alive, knowing too that we also move on but will always remember with affection our saints, who also sat on Moses' seat in their faithful discipleship in the world..

So, as we mourn our departed family and friends, both personally and communally, Jesus' words that give comfort and hope, are for us to recall our Sisters and Brothers, our Mothers and Fathers, our Sons and Daughters, both nationally and globally, for Jesus' words to the crowds and disciples are for us today, promising the presence of the reign of God, here and now, and in our future. Let us recall our extended family, people of colour, law enforcement agents, our essential services workers on the frontline, who died at the hands of hate and violence, who died saving the sick, for Jesus' words remind us of how distant righteousness or morality really is; asking each of us the question of how truly thirsty for righteousness are we. Black Lives Matter; All Lives Matter!

Matthew 5, and now again in Matthew 23, are certainly words to inspire resistance and persistence the more our family members, our congregations, and society, follow the kind of anti-Beatitude living to become more acceptable, more popular, more legalized, these are words that call us out of our contentment and custom. In our experiencing the effects of climate change, coronavirus pandemic, national and global trauma of natural and human made disasters, the Gospel messages today are words to believe in, rely on and, to trust.

May the words of Jesus, speaking firmly and in truth, guide all who confess Jesus, as Lord and Saviour, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one with Creator God. **Amen.**

Song: TIS 477 Jesus calls us here to meet him... *(in memory of Hilda)* <https://youtu.be/ModYoPReYYw>

Intercessory Prayers:

Friends in Jesus Christ, God invites us to hold the needs of our sisters and brothers as dear to us as our own needs. Saving God, you sent your Son to seek out and save what is lost, receiving our petitions and thanksgiving. In your compassion.

Now in the silence of our hearts hear our private prayers now, Sustainer of our lives... (personal prayer time)

Redeeming Sustainer, teach us to take one day at a time, trusting in your plans for us, pour out your strength and courage upon us, that we may hasten to welcome you not only in our concern for others but also, in the memories of those we love and have departed this life, whose hopes we carry forward.

We pray for all leaders that they may lead justly.

We pray for communities to work with their leaders, transparently and together.

We pray for our children - leaders, of today and, tomorrow.

We pray to serve You faithfully and generously, serving the least and orphaned, following prophets of ancient days.

We pray in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray:

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.



Offertory Call - *Let us share generously our communal gifts of time, talent, and treasure, helping to undergird our ministry looking ahead faithfully. May we be open to other ways of being disciples; shed old ways and breathe creative ways, reshaping our ministry and mission. Your offering is gratefully received for Christ's mission.*

Offertory Prayer - *Offering brought forward*

Abundant God, today we offer all that we have and all that we are.

Bless our offerings so that through these we will minister in compassion to the least in our world, so that one day we may stand amidst the multitude that gathers at your heavenly throne.

We pray this in the name of our Saviour and Redeemer, Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

We Are Sent Forth into the World

Song: TIS 640 Yesu Yesu fill us with your love... <https://youtu.be/yAnMY93grhI>

Blessing/Dismissal

Let us go forth as leaders into this troubled world:

honest, courageous and faith-filled,

to love and serve in the name of Jesus:

†In the communion and blessing of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Song: One day at a time, sweet Jesus... *(in memory of Nellie)* <https://youtu.be/fBnZ8bmEOTM>

Parker J. Palmer, "Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation" – 21st century
"Before I can tell my life what I want to do with it, I must listen to my life telling me who I am."