



## St Stephen's Williamstown Uniting Church in Australia

### Service of the Word for the Gathered at Home

Proper 23 (28) Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost / Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> October 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.

Readings: Exodus 32:1-14; Psalm 106:1-6, 19-23; Philippians 4:1-9; Matthew 22:1-14



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

**We Gather as the People of God**

**Call to Worship** *Adapted from Psalm 106*

Praise God wherever you gather.

Give thanks for life, shelter, food, and love.

The days are long in lockdown and many grow restless.

Who will stand in the gap between God and God's restless children?

Gather, therefore; draw strength in worship, in God's presence. **Amen.**

*Please remain standing as you are able*

**Song: TIS 83 Let us with a gladsome mind** <https://youtu.be/c0L2Qwva3PU>

*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. 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.**

### Opening Prayer

Living God,

At times we cannot see you; help us know you are near.

When we stray; welcome us home.

In your presence, we wrestle needlessly, that we should be with other people.

Help us bridge the gap between you, God, and the people we love.

We pray in Christ who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

**Song: TIS 279 The king of glory comes** <https://youtu.be/p9ENDwUhOYY>

**Prayer of Confession:** *God blesses us, even as we choose to go our own way.*

*And in her mercy, God seeks to bring healing and wholeness to all.*

*Let us now confess all that would separate us from God or from one another. Let us pray:*



When we have fashioned idols of our own desire or worshiped the temples of our own tradition,

**Lord, have mercy.**

*Personal reflection and confession*

When we denied your invitation, Lord, to the banquet of love and justice, or failed to extend the invitation to others,

**Christ, have mercy.**

*Personal reflection and confession*

When we adorn ourselves with worry failing to be gentle, knowing you are ear,

**Lord, have mercy.**

*Personal reflection and confession*

### Words of Assurance

Sisters and brothers, God invites us each by name to the kingdom of heaven.

Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say, Rejoice: our sins are forgiven.

God's steadfast love endures forever. **Praise be to God!**

**Song: TIS 739 Nothing Can Trouble / Nada te turbe** <https://youtu.be/UuQXTTjx3U8>

*Please be seated*

### Young People's Time:

Exodus 32:1-14 – *the Golden Calf* <https://youtu.be/w29ryNWNHnY>

Matthew 22:1-14 - *the Parable of the Wedding Banquet* <https://youtu.be/LEbwiQvo5k4>

## We Listen for God's Word

Exodus 32:1-14 – the Golden Calf    Matthew 22:1-14 - the Parable of the Wedding Banquet

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

**Reflection:**    *Where does our help come from?    -Rev. S. Juliette Maua 'i*

*Have you heard the saying: "When the cat's away, the mice will play!"? I am sure you have. But others, people from different cultures may not know this. So, for those like myself, as an example, when mum or dad leave home with instructions like, "behave yourselves while we are out", usually means (as kids do) is we do quite the opposite and completely play up! I have exaggerated a bit, but you understand the point.*

*In today's Exodus reading of the Golden Calf (32:1-14), we capture a similar point in what happened when God takes her time – and Moses, their leader, is taking his sweet time in getting back to camp. The people are not sure Moses will return. Aaron has no clue, and the people grow impatient at the bottom of the mountain, waiting for Moses!*

*Is it really necessary to cross into overtime absenteeism with God up on the mountain? Where is, Moses? "We do not know what has become of him." (32:1). In today's sacred text, the people are restless. Some scholars share the view that the people recognise Moses' presence, with the presence of God. If Moses is with them, that is the Israelites, then they perceive that God is also present with them.*

*The forty days and forty nights up the mountain (24:12-18) translates that Moses is not seen and therefore, he is not with them, and God is also absent. Perhaps fear remains from the Exodus from Egypt. God has abandoned them and Moses, as leader, has left them. What do they do? In the wilderness on their own (though Aaron is with them), no action plan, wanting reassurance as there is no visible God/leader, a recipe for nervousness and angst!*

*Left in charge, there is some 'people pressure' to contend with, Aaron responds. Did Aaron discern that by making the golden calf, it was not to say the people have forgotten God but a temporary reassurance? (Our presupposed thoughts today may be tainted by the Ten Commandments movie). However, a golden calf was fashioned, an idol and false god, and the people worshiped this idol.*

*But let's pause... this is a current problem; not a problem defined in ancient biblical times. This time we have all been forced into restrictions/lockdowns because of the pandemic (the initial cause). Our leaders, and world leaders, have had to navigate this unprecedented situation we are experiencing. Yet, we have seen or heard via media and other communications that there is unrest, leading to strong criticism all around, and our Victorian State and Premier is an example of targeted protest. Our leaders are present, whereas Moses was up on the mountain, with God!*

*Some of our State Leaders/Ministers have resigned or asked to resign. We do not know the full picture; we assume by what is reported to us. Like the Israelites waiting at the bottom of the mountain, we assume and form views too with or without knowing the full context. More than this, to us all, people of God in our context and others in their contexts, do we hasten to distance ourselves from God?*

*Might those who are flouting the current restrictions, to the point of physical and verbal angst towards the keepers of the law (some law enforcement officers actions are questionable), quick to forget that no one, nor our leaders (in Victoria, in our country, and world leaders) have had any experience in dealing with a Coronavirus Pandemic?! And that, I think, our leaders are doing the best they can. As a leader in other contexts and as a present leader, I have made mistakes and will no doubt make more. I can learn from my mistakes, but I may not always see them. Together, I hope you will raise your concerns with your minister just as I will with you. We may think that we would never act or make decisions like our leaders have. Perhaps, that is the false god, our misconception.*

*In hindsight, and since the outset of this global pandemic, mistakes have occurred, errors of judgments, lack of communication and checks/balances questioned; and yes, deaths. Some of us in our community have lost a beloved during lockdown or know of someone. My points are: how would you lead? What are the false gods and idols present in your own contexts? Where have you placed God in your opinions offered, in your discernment, or final decisions?*

*It is easy to think in our time of the first Commandment being more relevant in ancient times, when worshipping idols was a big problem. And that it was a commandment, a law, more commonly broken in those days, that we focus more on the next Commandments, about taking God's name in vain, honouring the Sabbath, etc. Do we maintain the Sabbath and keep it holy? How often do we take God's name in vain? "The Law" is not as simple to follow (our twenty-first century laws of the land are not always simple either), and some of you have stood in the gap as Teachers, Lawyers, Judges, Advocates, as Parents, as one stepping in for a stranger, a saviour of animals, and flora etc.*

*The people are growing restless, vulnerable, and worried of being without their leader, one who stands in for God. In saying this, perhaps they were needing someone or something to stand in for God, for Moses was absent. Some scholars say that they did not turn to foreign gods but simply wanted the reassurance, the comfort, of something/someone else standing in Moses' place. Walter Brueggemann, for example, finds it likely that the golden calf is "an alternative representation of God," and "not idolatrous, but simply a competitor to the ark of the covenant as a proper sign of divine presence" (Introduction to the Old Testament). What do you think?*

*I am not sure I agree with Brueggemann this time round. Aaron's leadership is of interest. As a leader, I think of Moses, and Aaron. Probably Aaron more in this context. Was Aaron just wanting to appease the people? In the opportunity that arose, without Moses' presence and God, did Aaron seize the moment to finally take charge? What was Aaron's theology and thought process? It is at these times as a leader, we need help, some good sound ears and eyes to discern with; someone to thrash out what is on our hearts and mind and soul; someone to stand in the gap; God being the first. It can be a lonely place being a leader – you will have experienced this, I am sure. Aaron may have felt the same isolation, as did the people, who unbeknown to them Moses was wrestling with God – pleading the people's case before God, "O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people..." (32:11-13). God changed his mind (32:14) and the Israelites were spared of God's wrath (for now). God was appeased. Moses had stood in the gap for them all. Amen.*

**Song: TIS 576 O For A Closer Walk With God**

<https://youtu.be/THv6sPbBRXc>



**Intercessory Prayers:** *People of God: St Stephen's community – I invite you in this time of worship and prayer, to think of someone, or a family, or organisation, for whom you would like to pray for in your intercessory prayer today. Then I encourage you to either text, call, email, or video call, them next week to let them know that you upheld them in Prayer today.*

God of mercy and healing, you who hear the cries of those in need, receive these petitions of your people that all who are troubled may know peace, comfort, and courage. We pray your will be done; grant wisdom to world leaders, and all leaders, for peace and justice. We pray for our Uniting Church and Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress that we may be one in Christ Jesus.

We pray for St Stephen's congregation and the communities we live and serve, remembering our precious children whose beautiful faces we have not seen in a while.

Life-giving God, heal our lives, that we may acknowledge your wonderful deeds and offer you thanks from generation to generation through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught his disciples 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** – Moses stood in the breach between God and humanity.

It is our turn to do the same. What will you give to extend God's love and care to others?

Your giving helps our St Stephen's community for God's mission in Jesus' name. Your offering is gratefully received.

**Offertory Prayer** - *Offering brought forward*

Abundant God, many are needing our assistance – spiritually, mentally, and physically.

Receive the gift of our lives and our offerings of our services to carry your love from this place to a world in need.

We pray in the name of Jesus whom with you and the Holy Spirit, reign in our hearts and lives, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

**We Are Sent Forth into the World**

**Song: TIS Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love...** <https://youtu.be/jX3T5sL0pzY>

**Blessing/Dismissal**

Go into a new week, standing in the gap as mediator, friend, and ministry agents of change for God's kingdom, inviting all to the eternal banquet, rejoicing in God.

And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

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

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**"RBG" – Ruth Bader Ginsburg – Former Associate Justice of the US Supreme Court**

On leadership - "Fight for the things that you care about, but do it in a way that will [lead others to join you.](#)"