



**St Stephens Williamstown Uniting Church in Australia**  
**Service of the Word for the Gathered at Home**  
**Proper 25 (30) Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Sunday 25<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: Deuteronomy 34:1-12; Psalm 90:1-6, 13-17; 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8; Matthew 22:34-46**

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

**We Gather as the People of God**

**Call to Worship**

Mothering God:

We gather here today aware of all that is happening in the world.

Gather us, O God!

Gather us to draw on all you would give us  
to be more fully yours in soul, mind, body and spirit.

We come to worship you, O God! **Amen.**

*Please remain standing as you are able*

**Song: TIS 560 All my hope on God is founded** <https://youtu.be/W3LCGh02Vew>

*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.**

**Opening Prayer**

Mothering God you know our hearts,

Guide our hearts through all situations.

Creator God you know our tendencies,

Mold our ways into your heavenly pathways.

Heavenly God call our spirits to you.

Call us now that we will call on you in this life.

So we may know you in the Life beyond.

We pray in the radical love of Jesus, united in the Spirit, one with you, O God. **Amen.**

**Song: Lord, for the years...** <https://youtu.be/wbkNICEt7iE>

**Prayer of Confession:**

Happy are all who turn away from the counsel of the wicked.

Such counsel can be seductive – it draws us in, holds us fast, distracts our priorities,  
obstructs our capacity to love.

For whatever ways we don't, we confess.

In whichever ways we sin, we repent.

We seek wholeness. **Hear our prayers, O God!**

In your grace and mercy, Loving God:

We are sorry for our unfaithfulness – for words we cannot bear to say, for memories we cannot bear to relive  
for thoughts we cannot bear to admit.

For whatever ways we don't, we confess.

In whichever ways we sin, we repent.

We seek wholeness. **Hear our prayers, O God!**

Forgiving God, in your mercy:

Relieve us of our burdens, bind our hearts not to the unbearable but rather, to you, O God, may we live in the joy of your salvation In and through the delight of your loving embrace. **Amen.**

### **Words of Assurance**

Happy are you beloved people as you receive God's forgiveness.

**Hear then Jesus' words of grace: 'your sins are forgiven.' Amen.**

**Song: Freely, freely, you have received...** Carol Owens <https://youtu.be/mo3MGpcBC5M>

*Please be seated*

### **We Listen for God's Word**

**Matthew 22:34-46**

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

**Reflection:** *Have we lost the true meaning of LOVE that Jesus speaks of? - Rev. S. Juliette Maua 'i*

How many times has a newcomer been tested when stepping into a long-established community? Is it to welcome the stranger? Is it for our own agendas? Is it to safeguard the status quo, rather than being a neighbour? Would walking alongside each other, together, be possible?

The following two questions, I have long pondered... What happened to simple and plain straight talking? Why is being open to what 'the other' brings to the relationship, so reluctant to be embraced?

The biblical scholars in the gospel reading from Matthew today, Jewish like Jesus, the kind of people others looked to because of their high status in the church, able to influence, and influence society and governance perhaps with their own agendas. The Pharisaic lawyer was just another 'tester' from the long-established synagogue community!

*Agenda* – yes, he wanted to entangle Jesus in a trap by asking Jesus to promote one law above all the other laws.

*Simple, plain straight talking* – no, he was bent on forcing Jesus to refute the belief that all commandments should be ranked as equals.

*Being open to embracing a new relationship* – not likely, Jesus should assimilate/conform to the status quo.

No one can presume to know the mind of God! Jesus did... his simple and revolutionary response: firstly, to love God, and second, to love your neighbour. Simple! Because "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (v. 40). Why then are these two commandments so difficult to uphold?

As a core principle, LOVE, may seem so simple, but is it still radical or helpful in the face of serious matters as the many unjust social issues, climate change, white supremacy, and irresponsible leadership?

If LOVE isn't the answer, if LOVE is not our core principle, then that means God and Jesus are not the answer either.

We have belittled the word, *love*, that it gets thrown around so much as the answer to everything. To this end, the word itself can easily be reduced to simplistic instructions and overrated use. Something is missing! Something needs to change and, change profoundly!

Where then does our faith sit in Jesus' commandments to the lawyer in Matthew 22:34-46 and to us, that becomes important for some of us to see through the BS? Certainly, self-interest is a driving factor in the actions of many. We only need to look around at what is happening in our society. However, if life was all about self-interest, then many faithful believers would not be interested in living it. Instead, I am hopeful that many faithful believers prefer to believe that life is made meaningful by something else. That is, LOVE! The LOVE, Jesus speaks of!

At the end of the day, it is why I choose to have faith in God. Many of you also choose to have faith in God because you love God, through Jesus, and in the unity of God's Spirit. In saying this, we will know of people in our circles, and family, who do not choose to love God and therefore have no faith in God. Maybe it is time for each of us to have some sobering conversations with those in our circles, and family, in fulfilment of the two greatest commandments Jesus responded with, and which rattled the questioning lawyer and his community, the Pharisees.

To love in the struggles for justice, to love even when we do not know how a relationship will end up, to love 'the other' even if we dislike who they are or what they do; surely LOVE must be undergirded by faith!

In my wrestling with my sense of call, John 3:16-17 and Matthew 22:37-39 were my guiding principles. Before my

sense of call, the Matthew 22:37-39 scripture, and the core principle of LOVE, was the turning point in my acceptance of two gay family members. It came one day as one had telephoned from overseas... as she conveyed how she was travelling in life, her voice seemed to dim, and John 3:16 came to mind and the word, LOVE, kept reverberating. Next thing, tears fell as I continued to listen in our conversation. When we concluded, I said to her, "I love you!" After our call, I felt like the blind man whose sight was granted to him (John 9:35-41), it was my epiphany that led me to Jesus' two great commandments (Matthew 22:37-39).

This understanding was the core principle undergirded by my faith in God that guided me in my discernment regarding same-gender marriage at the last UCA Assembly gathering. Indeed, I find that LOVE was the simple response God granted in that telephone conversation that day and it was LOVE that was the radical miracle that unveiled my blindness. †In the name of the Triune God. **Amen.**

Song: TIS 699 A new commandment I give unto you <https://youtu.be/yy7W8avIXIY>



### Intercessory Prayers:

Gracious God we pray:

for those who cannot see the promised land out of the months of restrictions.

Guide the Heads of Governments; may they remember the love and life of your Peoples in this world.

Refrain us from being of this world; enable us to live in this world as Jesus would have us live as his disciples.

Equip us for the days ahead following these months we have had to face, is our reality.

Let us not be disturbed and distracted away from your kingdom, O God,  
for all who are hurting, the sick, the poor, the homeless, and unemployed.

But may we be ever focused on the gospel of our resurrected Jesus,  
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

*Anyone who has ever loved knows that to love is to give – to give from the place we feel it most.*

*This giving may be sacrificial, but the sacrifice is compromised if it cannot be done joyfully.*

*May we join together in the delight of giving freely.*

### Offertory Prayer - *Offering brought forward*

Before you, O God, we give for your mission Jesus calls us in our discipleship.

Receive our gifts and offerings believing the difference these will come to be.

May they be the blessing to others that they have been for us. **Amen.**

### We Are Sent Forth into the World

Song: TIS 629 When I needed a neighbour were you there <https://youtu.be/ym8yOdCFGpC>

### Blessing/Dismissal

Mother God, bless and keep us.

Merciful God, make your face to shine upon us.

Loving God, be with us now and forever.

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

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### Mother Teresa:

*"I am not sure exactly what heaven will be like, but I know that when we die and it comes time for God to judge us, he will not ask, 'How many good things have you done in your life?' rather he will ask, 'How much love did you put into what you did?'"*