

Order of Service
Wesley Methodist Church – 75 Taranaki Street

8 October 2017 – Pentecost 18

Leader: Philip Garside
Organist: Colin Scarf. Guitar: Heather Garside

Welcome, Safety Briefing & Introduction

Call to Worship

We are called:

Called to gather in this holy place

We are called:

Called as people of God

We are called:

Called to a time of rest from our labours and troubles

We are called:

Called to rejoice in word and song

We are called:

Called to have our hearts uplifted by your Holy Spirit

We are called:

Called to worship you, O God. Amen.

Lighting the candles

[Ask congregation member to light the candles]

As we light these candles:

Kindle a flame within our hearts, O God
and let your *light* shine through

Kindle a flame within our hearts, O God
and let your *justice* shine through

Kindle a flame within our hearts, O God
and let your *hope* shine through

Kindle a flame within our hearts, O God
and let your *peace* shine through

Kindle a flame within our hearts, O God
and let your *love* shine through. Amen.

Hymn: Jesu, lover of my soul. Hymns & Psalms 528(1). Words: Charles Wesley. Tune: Aberystwyth

Prayer of Thanksgiving

(Explain: This is a very old prayer found with many other manuscripts in Nag Hammadi, Egypt in 1945. The manuscripts were sealed in big pottery jars and hidden in caves to keep them safe. The prayer was originally written in Coptic and dates from the first or second century. It would have been used before a shared communion meal in some early Christian communities. Note that both male and female aspects of God are mentioned.)

We give thanks to you,
every life and heart stretches toward you,
O name untroubled,
honoured with the name of God,
praised with the name of Father.

**To everyone and everything
comes the kindness of the Father,
and love
and desire.**

And if there is a sweet and simple teaching,
it gifts us mind, word, and knowledge:
mind, that we may understand you;
word, that we may interpret you;
knowledge, that we may know you.

**We rejoice and are enlightened by your knowledge.
We rejoice that you have taught us about yourself.**

We rejoice that in the body
you have made us divine through your knowledge.

**The thanksgiving of the human who reaches you
is this alone:
that we know you.**

We have known you,
O light of mind.
O light of life,
we have known you.

**O womb of all that grows,
we have known you.**

O womb pregnant with the nature of the Father,
we have known you.

**O never-ending endurance of the Father who gives birth,
so we worship your goodness.**

One wish we ask:
we wish to be protected in knowledge.

**One protection we desire:
that we not stumble in this life.**

[Amen]

Hal Taussig
*A New New Testament: A Bible for the Twenty-first Century
Combining Traditional and Newly Discovered Texts.*
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Kindle Edition.

1-2 God's glory is **on tour** in the skies,
God-craft on exhibit across the horizon.
Madame Day holds classes every morning,
Professor Night lectures each evening.

3-4 Their words aren't heard,
their voices aren't recorded,
But their silence fills the earth:
unspoken truth is spoken everywhere.

4-5 God makes a huge dome
for the sun— a superdome!
The morning sun's a new husband
leaping from his honeymoon bed,
The daybreaking sun an athlete
racing to the tape.

6 That's how God's Word vaults across the skies
from sunrise to sunset,
Melting ice, scorching deserts,
warming hearts to faith.

7-9 The revelation of GOD is whole
and pulls our lives together.
The **signposts** of GOD are clear
and **point out the right road**.
The **life-maps** of GOD are right,
showing the way to joy.
The **directions** of GOD are plain
and easy on the eyes.
GOD'S reputation is twenty-four-carat gold,
with a lifetime guarantee.
The decisions of GOD are accurate
down to the nth degree.

10 God's Word is better than a diamond,
better than a diamond set between emeralds.
You'll like it better than strawberries in spring,
better than red, ripe strawberries.

11-14 There's more: God's Word **warns us of danger**
and **directs us to hidden treasure**.
Otherwise how will we **find our way**?
Or know when we play the fool?
Clean the slate, God, so we can **start the day fresh!**
Keep me from stupid sins,
from **thinking I can take over your work**;
Then I can start this day sun-washed,
scrubbed clean of the grime of sin.
These are the words in my mouth;
these are what I chew on and pray.
Accept them when I place them
on the morning altar,
O God, my Altar-Rock,
God, Priest-of-My-Altar.

Introducing the Theme / Time with Children

Hymn: O God, each day you bless us

Words: Carolyn Winfrey Gillette (2004). Tune: Ellacombe Hymns & Psalms 208

Sermon: Take the long view, do what we can, it is enough

I have called this sermon: **Take the long view, do what we can, it is enough. Take the long view, do what we can, it is enough.**

Let's Pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts, be acceptable to you. O God. Amen.

The lectionary readings for this Sunday include the Ten Commandments in Exodus chapter 20 and the Parable of the Wicked Tenants from Matthew chapter 21. They are powerful scripture messages, but I've been drawn this week to another of the lectionary readings – Psalm 19. My first thought was to sing Rosemary Russell's song paraphrasing that psalm, as a congregational hymn – the Singing Group have performed it a few times [hum a line or two]. But it is very syncopated and not easy to teach quickly in a service. So I came back to the Psalm as it appears in the Bible and needed to make a decision as to which translation to use. The New Revised Standard Version translation is a sound scholarly text, but Psalm 19 in that translation is a bit stilted and doesn't flow. The Good News translation is more lively and the language easy to understand, but that still wasn't what I was looking for either.

How about Eugene Petersen's *The Message Bible* version? Bingo! That is the translation of the text that was read to you this morning and is in your order of service. Petersen is an American pastor who wanted to create a translation that tells the Bible as story, with up-to-date, contemporary language.

So Psalm 19 is one strand of our reflections.

Hal Taussig, an American pastor and Bible scholar, and a member of the Jesus Seminar and Westar Institute, is leading a seminar at St Andrews on the Terrace on the first weekend in November. In 2013 he edited a book titled **A New New Testament**, which will be a focus for the seminar. What does that book involve?

The New Testament we have in our Bibles comprises 27 separate books, that by about the 400s had been generally accepted as the most important and appropriate sacred writings for the Christian church. However, these 27 books were only a small selection from at least 200 other sacred texts written in the first 3 centuries after Jesus, that various faith communities around the Mediterranean thought were important.

The stories about how the books of the New Testament were chosen are fascinating. Some started out being considered proper or orthodox, but when theological thinking moved on, came to be thought of as heterodox or heretical and therefore didn't make the final canon of 27 books. The point I want to make is that there were many sacred texts circulating among the early Christian groups and choices were made to select some and not others.

Hal Taussig asked a question? What if we took some of the early Christian texts and published them alongside the books in our New Testament to create A **New** New Testament. Taussig got together 20 people to work on the project - Christian scholars and clergy, clergy from other faiths and lay people. That group then selected 10 of these other sacred texts and decided where to interleave them with the books in our Bible. While, in part this was an academic exercise, one of the aims was to see what new meanings and messages we might take from the books in our New Testament if they were placed side-by-side with other early texts, written at the same time.

The Prayer of Thanksgiving that we shared earlier was one of these alternative early texts.

That's another element to reflect on.

I subscribe to an email newsletter by Maren Tirabassi, another American pastor, who shares prayers and other liturgy by her and other contributors to her **Gifts In Open Hands** blog.

The prayer which I'm going to read to you in a moment was shared by Maren last week. It was written in 1979 by Bishop Ken Untener of Saginaw.

The first verse really startled me! I took the theme of this sermon from it.

Here is the prayer:

Prayer

It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.
The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision.
We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.
Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.
No prayer fully expresses our faith.
No confession brings perfection.
No pastoral visit brings wholeness.
No program accomplishes the Church's mission.
No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about.

We plant the seeds that one day will grow.
We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.
We lay foundations that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities.
We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realising that.

This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way,
an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.
We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.
We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.
We are prophets of a future not our own.

Bishop Ken Untener of Saginaw (1979)

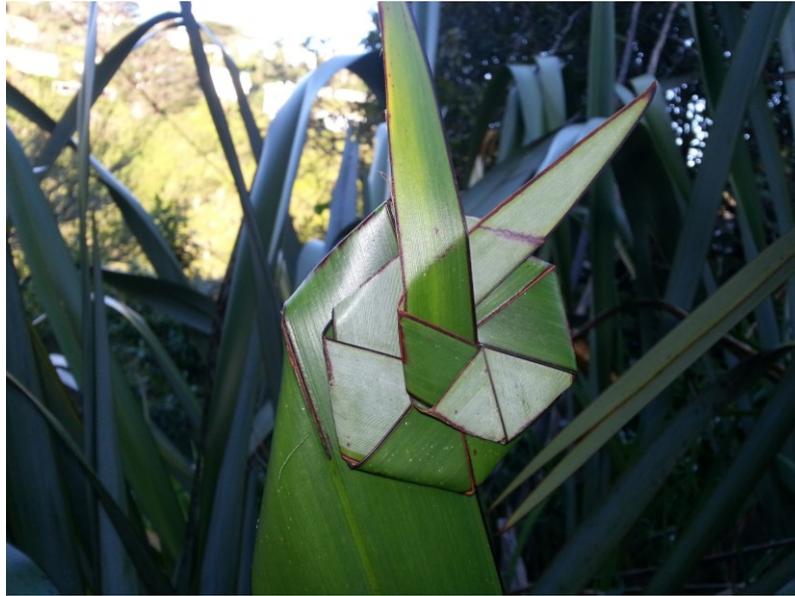
That's another element to reflect on.

I have also been listening to podcasts and watching YouTube videos of Richard Rohr speaking. He is a Jesuit Catholic priest with a focus on contemplative faith. He emphasises that a person's faith shouldn't stand still, that we are on a life-long journey. He encourages people to go deeper.

At the end of our reflection, I will lead you in a short exercise in quiet meditation that he used in one of his talks.

Another strand

For the last element, I want to share with you a lovely surprise that I had a few weeks ago, walking down the footpath from the road at the end of our street to our front gate. Years ago I planted some flax bushes on the road reserve. One day I saw this [show slide of flax flower]. It's also on the front cover of the order of service. Someone, maybe a neighbour, maybe someone just walking by, wove the ends of three flax leaves into flowers - a random act of beauty.



Let's see if we can draw the strands together.

Go back to Psalm 19 in your orders of service.

I want to pick out some phrases:

God's glory is **on tour** in the skies,
[A journey metaphor]

warming hearts to faith.

[John Wesley's conversion experience, that we remember in some of our modern communion liturgy]

The **signposts** of GOD are clear
and **point out the right road**.

[God gives us a direction]

The **life-maps** of GOD are right,
showing the way to joy.

[We are freed to live whole, joyful lives]

The **directions** of GOD are plain
Otherwise how will we **find our way**?

[Follow God, we won't stumble]

Clean the slate, God, so we can **start the day fresh!**

[Forgive ourselves and others, start again]

Keep me from stupid sins,
from **thinking I can take over your work**;

[Wow, that sound just like Bishop Ken's prayer!]

This translation of the Psalm has movement, joy, energy! Can you catch the Psalmist's sense of excitement?

The playful exercise we did with the children was intended to show that while we can plan and be prudent, we can't control or predict everything that will happen in our lives. There is an element of chance, of luck. I can think of one chance meeting when I was 20 that took my life in a whole new direction...

The ancient Prayer of Thanksgiving we shared, has a sense of closeness to God, of liveliness. It was the Taussig group's first choice to be included in **A New New Testament**, from among all the ancient texts they looked at.

To our ears, the idea in the prayer that God is a Father who gives birth sounds strange. What this imagery does is fold into our ideas about God the older wisdom tradition. Wisdom in ancient times was sometimes called Sophia, and was always feminine.

It's a powerful prayer. Take the order of service home with you and read the prayer aloud again during this week.

The woven flax flower reminds us to keep our eyes open. To be in the moment. To be aware of everything around and in us, right now!

We have a practical problem to solve. If our faith in God, our desire to follow Jesus teachings and examples, are to be what give direction to our lives, how can we know what that means for us as individuals, as families, as a faith community. How can we be sure what is right for us? How can we discern our path?

Richard Rohr suggests that we need to make time to be still, to stop our busyness and to listen to what God says to our hearts.

In a moment I'm going to ask you to close your eyes and sit quietly. There will be three short sentences with about 15 seconds between them. I'll then say just one word and we will be still for a minute - 60 seconds.

Would you please now close your eyes:

Be still and know that I am God

Be still and know

Be still

Be

Thank you.

I end with this thought. Keep working on your faith journey. Look for new books, new songs, new meanings, new people to travel with, new inspiration, new ideas, new hope. Keep taking that next step, whether you are 18 years old, or 32, or 50, or 72...

God is calling and will guide us, if we open our hearts and minds and hands, and engage with that deep mystery and love.

Amen.

Song: Bless the Lord, my soul (Taize community)

Bless the Lord, my soul
And bless God's holy name
Bless the Lord, my soul
Who leads me into life

(Repeat several times)

Community Time

Sharing the Peace

Let's greet one another saying, "God's peace be with you."

Notices

Sharing Joys and Sorrows

Intercessory Prayer

Gracious God,
we pray for all your creation,
and especially for our world.
We pray for our homelands
and our spiritual homes.

Refine our thoughts, strengthen our wills
Guide us in your Way.

We ask for your blessings on our country Aotearoa New Zealand,
that there may be good governance,
and that people may experience fairness, justice and peace.
We also pray for our leaders,
that they may have wisdom and vision.

Refine our thoughts, strengthen our wills
Guide us in your Way.

We pray for people of goodwill, of all faiths.
We pray for people who have no purpose
or sense of direction in their lives.
We pray for those who have no sense of being loved.

Refine our thoughts, strengthen our wills
Guide us in your Way.

We pray for people we know who are sick, or unemployed or grieving.
We pray also for our parish, for our families and our congregations.
We pray that you will give us the gifts of stability, wisdom, discernment and unity.
We pray for our children,
that they will do well in their education and careers,
and have satisfying, rewarding work to do.

Refine our thoughts, strengthen our wills
Guide us in your Way.

Compassionate God,
help us to share your love with everyone we meet,
to be the voice for the voiceless,
to bring hope where there is despair
and to listen to others with respect.

We pray for the work of Wesley Community Action
and the other Methodist Missions in this country,
for Downtown Community Ministry
and for Christian World Service.

**Refine our thoughts, strengthen our wills
Guide us in your Way.**

**Loving God,
please continue to exercise the power of light and love within us.
Amen**

10am Worship Team – 2 June 2015

Lord's Prayer

**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.
Do not bring us to the time of trial
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.**

Offering

Blessing of Offering (said together)

**Loving God,
bless these gifts we bring
that your Light might shine more brightly
your Life be lived more abundantly
your Love be shared more faithfully
in Jesus' name. Amen**

Hymn: Tell my People I Love Them Alleluia Aotearoa 132

Blessing

Deep peace of the running wave to you.
Deep peace of the flowing air to you.
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.
Deep peace of the shining stars to you.
Deep peace of the gentle night to you.
Moon and stars pour their healing light on you.
Deep peace of Christ,
of Christ the light of the world to you.
Deep peace of Christ to you.
Amen.