



HOPPERSCROSSING UNITING CHURCH

*Loving God, neighbour and self
with heart, mind, soul and strength.*

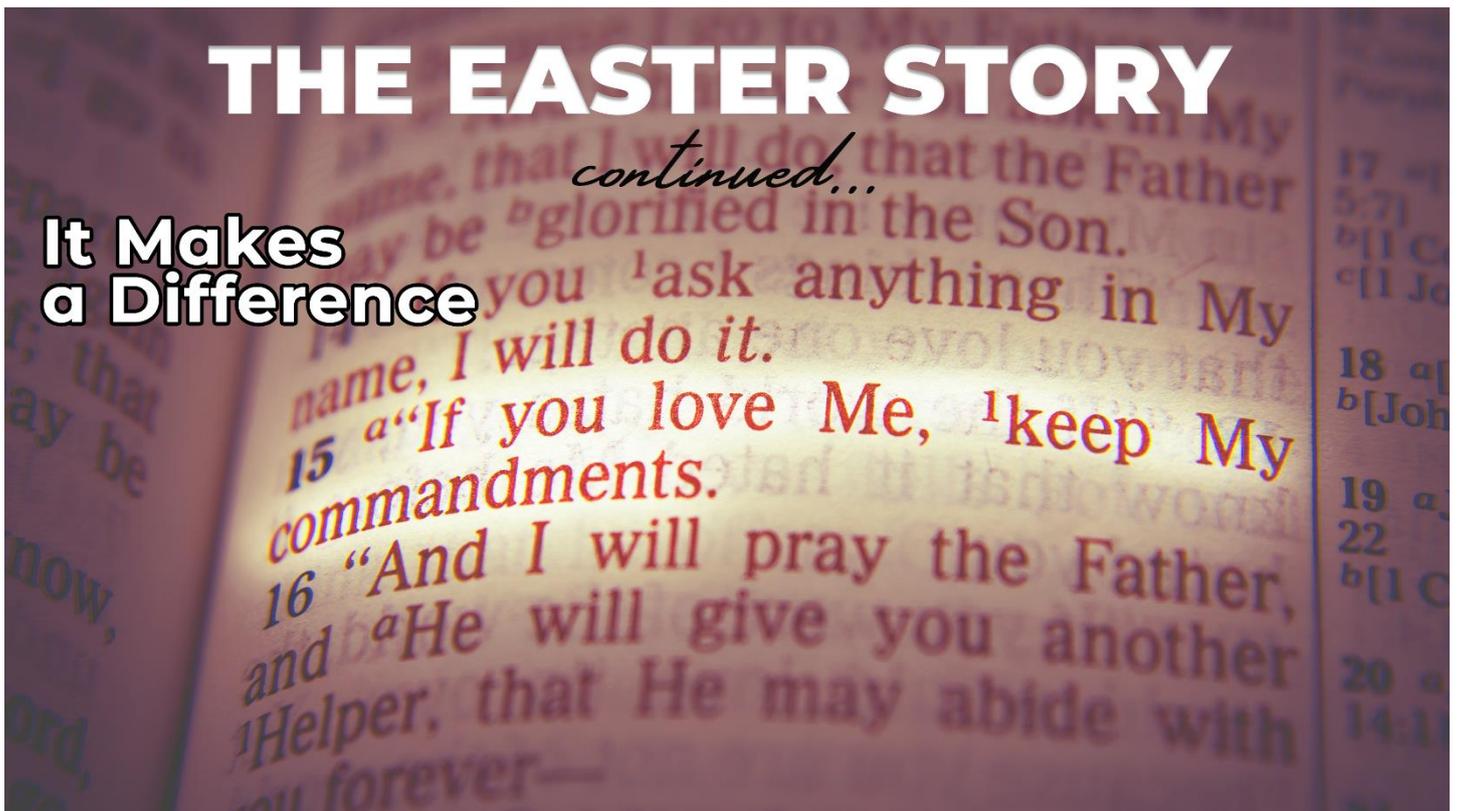
**Worship at Home
17th May 2020**

6th Sunday of Easter

THE EASTER STORY

continued...

**It Makes
a Difference**



A candle, symbolising Christ's presence, is lit.

We Gather

CALL TO WORSHIP

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ
the love of God and the fellowship
of the Holy Spirit be with you

And also with you.

PSALM 66:8-20

⁸Bless our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard,

⁹**who has kept us among the living and has not let our feet slip.**

¹⁰For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried.

¹¹**You brought us into the net; you laid burdens on our backs;**

¹²you let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water,
yet you have brought us out to a spacious place.

¹³**I will come into your house with burnt offerings; I will pay you my vows,**

¹⁴those that my lips uttered and my mouth promised when I was in trouble.

¹⁵**I will offer to you burnt offerings of fatlings, with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams; I will make an offering of bulls and goats. Selah**

¹⁶Come and hear, all you who fear God,
and I will tell what he has done for me.

¹⁷**I cried aloud to him, and he was extolled with my tongue.**

¹⁸If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.

¹⁹**But truly God has listened; he has given heed to the words of my prayer.**

²⁰Blessed be God because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his
steadfast love from me.

Let us worship God.

Hosanna <https://youtu.be/NoM0AT8fBvs>

A New Commandment <https://youtu.be/jT0ygUgPvP0?t=3>

ACTS 17:22-31

²²Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, "Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. ²³For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, ²⁵nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. ²⁶From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where

they would live, ²⁷so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸For ‘In him, we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we too are his offspring.’ ²⁹Since we are God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. ³⁰While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance; now, he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this, he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

PRAYER OF APPROACH AND INVOCATION

Loving Lord, you are not an unknown God by those who have gathered this morning. In Jesus Christ, we have seen God in him; we live and move and have our being. Luke has written:

²⁶From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, ²⁷so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us.

ACTS 17:26-27

We have tasted and known of your love and redemption in Jesus your Son, our Lord, and for this and more we are truly grateful.

Holy Spirit of God, move amongst us as we worship. Awaken us to yourself so that we would love you more and make you known. Amen.

Friends, Luke has written:

³⁰While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance; now, he commands all people everywhere to repent.

ACTS 17:30

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Let us bring our confessions before the God who loves us. Together, let us pray:

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**Loving God, Lord of the Church,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word and deed:
we have not loved you with all our heart
or served you with all our strength;
we have been blind to the vision of a renewed world
and deaf to your call to costly discipleship;
we have been indifferent to the suffering of others
and unwilling to forgive one another.**

In your mercy, Lord, pardon and restore us,
that together in the ministry of Christ,
we may serve you with joy all the days of our life. Amen.

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God.

1 PETER 3:18

The good news, therefore, is this: in Jesus Christ

We are loved
We are forgiven.
Thanks be to God!

Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone) <https://youtu.be/YrwkCOUOll>

PASSING OF THE PEACE

The peace of the Lord be with you **and also with you.**

We Listen

Your word, O Lord, is a lamp to my feet **a light to our path.**

1 PETER 3:13-22

¹³Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? ¹⁴But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, ¹⁵but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; ¹⁶yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil.

¹⁸For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, ²⁰who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water.

²¹And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²²who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

JOHN 14:15-21

15“If you love me, you will **keep my commandments**. **16**And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. **17**This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

18“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. **19**In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. **20**On that day, you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.

21**They who have my commandments** and keep them **are those who love me**, and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

Lord, may your word live in us **and bear much fruit to your glory.**

THE HOMILY

The text for today's address is taken from John 14:15, 21. Verse 15, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” and verse 21, “They who have My commandments and keep them, are those who love Me.”

The title is “It Makes a Difference”.

In the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.

Can you think of important last words that people have said?

A lawyer was trying to console a weeping widow. Her husband had passed away without leaving a will.

“Did the deceased have any last words?” asked the lawyer.

“You mean right before he died?” sobbed the widow.

“Yes,” replied the lawyer, “that might be helpful if it is not too painful for you to recall.”

“Well,” she began, “as I remember it, he said; ‘Don't try to scare me! You couldn't hit the big side of the barn with that gun.’”

Last words are important. First words are important as well.

The gospel text that is set down for today is from the gospel of John 14:15-21.

The first and last words of the text spoken by Jesus are similar;

“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”

JOHN 14:15 NRSV

And

“They who have My commandments and keep them are those who love Me;”

JOHN 14:21 NRSV

It is important to note these verses 15 and 21 are in the context of Jesus' betrayal by one of his own, his impending trial before Pilate, and then his execution on the cross. The text forms a larger part of what is known as Jesus' Farewell Discourse or Jesus' Farewell Story. In a sense, they could be described as Jesus' last words.

Interestingly, Jesus doesn't tell his disciples to resist the Roman occupiers or to seek revenge on his behalf. No. Instead, Jesus says to his disciples *"If you love Me, keep My commandments."*

JOHN 14:15 NRSV

The Message Bible translation of the same text translates it the following way: *"If you love Me, show it by doing what I've told you."*

JOHN 14:15 MSG

Now, Jesus narrowed the commandments into two easy to follow ones: 'to love God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind' and, 'to love your neighbour as yourself'.

So, what difference does it make when we keep Jesus' commandments?

With all kinds of trouble and conflict everywhere, including in the church, Jesus' commandment to love is easy to say and yet so hard to do. However, despite this, it makes a difference, and it does so three ways: It makes a difference to:

1. God,
2. others, and
3. ourselves.

First, it makes a difference to God.

The following words supposedly are attributed to mystic writer Teresa of Avila, a 16th-century nun, author, theologian and reformer wrote:

"Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands; yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes; you are his body.
Christ has no body now on earth, but yours."

Friends, Jesus said, "If you love Me; you will keep My commandments". It makes a difference to God.

Second, it makes a difference to others.

There has been much debate around racism in sport. One recent and famous case I'm sure we Victorians recall was fuelled by much media attention on the constant booing of AFL and Sydney Swans football star Adam Goodes whenever he set foot on the playing field. Goodes is an indigenous Australian and is an outspoken advocate against racism in sport. He was Australian of The Year in 2014. Interestingly, it was not any devious activity on his part that propelled him into the national media spotlight; rather, it was race.

There was an interesting article written by The Age journalist Jake Nials titled "*Why some fans are challenged by Goodes*".¹ Nials suggests that fans are challenged by Goodes because he is a '*challenger*' rather than a '*bargainer*'. These two descriptions underpin the theory by African-American writer Shelby Steele who describes black Americans as wearing two types of masks in order to survive the horror of institutionalised racism.

The first mask is one of "*bargainers*". These adopt a "go along to get along" stance through never expressing how they really feel in public. They work hard to ensure that white America is comfortable around them. Steele names Barak Obama and Oprah Winfrey as bargainers.

The second mask is one of "*challengers*", whom Steele describes as those that are viewed as "questioning and confronting immoral authority, forcing change, and empowering others to do the same." They work hard to ensure that blacks are comfortable in expressing their opposition to institutionalised racism, regardless of whether they step on people's toes or not.²

Jesus was a challenger. What is evident through his life and ministry was his audacity in challenging the status quo, the institutions and powers that were the vehicles of oppression and kept people on the margins of society. Jesus was the voice for the voiceless, which meant he stood on many toes.

- Parents were bringing their children to Jesus to bless, when he saw the indignation of the disciples' actions because they didn't want these children bothering him, Jesus sternly told them off and said to them "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs." **MARK 10:13-16**
- There was the Samaritan woman marginalised by others because of her gender, race and life choices. Jesus tells her, she is entitled to freely receive the water and bread of life he gives. **JOHN 4:1-30**
- He stood up for the woman caught in adultery telling her tormentors who were about to stone her to death "he who has no sin, cast the first stone" and then said to the woman, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on, do not sin again." **JOHN 8:1-11**

So, what does all of this have to do with us? Well, it means the question and the challenge to us is this – Are we *bargainers* or *challengers*?

Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”
It makes a difference to others.

Third, it makes a difference to you.

A fascinating study on the principle of loving others was conducted by the late Bernard Rimland³ called the Institute for Child Behaviour Research in San Diego, California. His findings revealed that “the happiest people are those who help others.” Each person involved in the study was asked to list ten people they best knew and to label them as happy or not happy. Then they were to go through the list again and label each one as selfish or unselfish.

In categorising the results, Rimland found that all of the people labelled happy were also labelled unselfish. Happiness and unselfishness go together. Happiness will come through by loving, serving and being selfless. In other words, friends, if we want to be happy, then the secret is to start working to make others happy.

Rimland echoed the truth of Jesus’ words “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

MATTHEW 7:12 & LUKE 6:31

So, remember my friends, Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.” Why?

Because it makes a difference to God,
it makes a difference to others, and
it will make a difference in you. Amen.

¹ The Age 05.22.14 Sport p42.

² <http://ugotnerve.wordpress.com/2008/07/05/black-bargainers-black-challengers-and-racism-by-shelby-steele/>

³ Rimland, Bernard. The Altruism Paradox. Psychological Reports 51, 1982: p. 521

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, You said to your disciples, “and I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him because he abides with you, and he will be in you.”

We thank you for these words of comfort and hope. We give thanks for the gift and work of the Holy Spirit who journeys with us, encouraging and empowering us to fulfil Jesus’ commandments to love God and to love our neighbour, doing so makes all the difference. For these and more, we truly are grateful. Amen.

We Respond

Teach Me to Dance <https://youtu.be/aDyFgNX4es8>

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Take a moment to pray for one or more of the following:

- countries and nations of the world
- those who are sick and in need
- the Church and our congregation

After each prayer, a response may be said such as:

Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

And in the languages of the nations, we pray as Jesus taught...

THE 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.**

Save us in the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.

OFFERING

You are invited to contribute financially to support the ministry and mission of the Hoppers Crossing congregation using the following details:

<u>Bank Transfer</u>	<u>Credit Card</u>
BSB: 013-915	www.HoppersUniting.church/offering
Account Number: 354 439 707	
Account Name: Hoppers Crossing Uniting Church	
Reference: 'Your SURNAME'	

Trust and Obey <https://youtu.be/KB4KcleYiWM>

We are Sent

BENEDICTION

We will rejoice that God has not left us orphaned,
but makes us one with everyone around us.

We will remind everyone that, despite everything,
God loves us.

So, go from this place,
speaking of what God has done,
singing of what God is doing,
imagining what God will do.

And the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
be with you now and always.

We go in peace to love and to serve the Lord.

In the name of Christ. Amen.

Yet Not I, But Through Christ In Me <https://youtu.be/zundjUFazfg>

The service is ended.

Acknowledgments

This liturgy was constructed with material from the following sources:

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