



HOPPERSCROSSING UNITING CHURCH

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

**Worship at Home
26th July 2020**

8th Sunday after Pentecost



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

We Gather

Seek ye first the kingdom of God <https://youtu.be/S1Y8Naj3RFk>

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.

Friends, come with confidence before our God.

For nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Can hunger?

No!

Can hardship?

No!

Can people who are against us?

No!

Can COVID 19?

No!

Can death?

No!

Can anything in all creation?

No!

Then let us worship this most amazing God.

This Kingdom <https://youtu.be/FlNBsbSCnWk>

Ancient of Days <https://youtu.be/cJUfAw21qAM>

PSALM 105:1-11, 45b

O give thanks to the Lord

¹O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples.

²Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wonderful works.

³Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.

⁴Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually.

⁵Remember the wonderful works he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he uttered,

⁶O offspring of his servant Abraham, children of Jacob, his chosen ones.

⁷He is the Lord our God; his judgments are in all the earth.

⁸He is mindful of his covenant forever, of the word that he commanded, for a

thousand generations,

⁹the covenant that he made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac,

¹⁰which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant,

¹¹saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan as your portion for an inheritance."

⁴⁵ Praise the Lord!

PRAYER OF ADORATION AND INVOCATION

Loving God we thank you that we can gather together in your name with other sisters and brothers from near and far to worship you. The Psalmist writes "let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice". We rejoice in you. We rejoice in the freedoms we enjoy in Australia to worship without fear, or persecution and so may we not take these freedoms for granted. Jesus was so focused on the kingdom of God even teaching his friends to pray 'your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven'. Loving Spirit of God in this time of worship speak your word to us and may our hearts be inspired, be comforted, be provoked and challenged to go forth into our families, schools, workplaces, communities and beyond with the good news of the kingdom. Praise the Lord! Amen.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

As we enter into our time of Confession let us listen to St Pauls words to the Christians in Rome.

ROMANS 8:26-39

All things work together for good for those who love God

²⁶Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. ²⁸We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

²⁹For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. ³⁰And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

³¹What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³²He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³Who will bring any charge against

God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. ³⁵Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." ³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

.....*We pause for quiet reflection*.....

The lesson from Matthew's gospel says that size doesn't matter in God's eyes. The mustard seed, a small seed, eventually will outgrow itself and become a large tree. There are some lessons here we can learn about the grace of God. The first is that it doesn't matter whether you are small or big, whether you are young or old, God loves you! The second, is that there is nothing too small or too big that you have done that will ever keep God from loving you. Loving Lord, in confidence we come and receive of the grace you freely give to all who seek you with all their hearts. We give thanks in Jesus name. Amen

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

St Paul writes ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

ROMANS 8:38-39

Let the hearts of those who seek the Lord
rejoice for in Jesus Christ we are known,
accepted, loved and forgiven

Thanks be to God!

10,000 Reasons https://youtu.be/DXDGE_IRI0E

THE PASSING OF THE PEACE

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

THE FIRST WORD

From little things big things grow

GENESIS 29:15-28

How Jacob married Rachel and Leah.

¹⁵Then Laban said to Jacob, “Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?” ¹⁶Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. ¹⁷Leah’s eyes were lovely, and Rachel was graceful and beautiful. ¹⁸Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, “I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.” ¹⁹Laban said, “It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me.” ²⁰So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her. ²¹Then Jacob said to Laban, “Give me my wife that I may go into her, for my time is completed.” ²²So Laban gathered together all the people of the place, and made a feast. ²³But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her. ²⁴(Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her maid.) ²⁵When morning came, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, “What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?” ²⁶Laban said, “This is not done in our country—giving the younger before the firstborn. ²⁷Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years.” ²⁸Jacob did so, and completed her week; then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife.

We Listen

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

MATTHEW 13:31- 33, 44-52

Parables of the kingdom of heaven

³¹He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; ³²it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.” ³³He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”

⁴⁴“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that

field. ⁴⁵“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; ⁴⁶on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. ⁴⁷“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; ⁴⁸when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. ⁴⁹So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁵¹“Have you understood all this?” They answered, “Yes.” ⁵²And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”

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

HOMILY

Title: *The Kingdom of Heaven.*

“The kingdom of heaven is like” ...

MATTHEW 13:31,33, 44, 45, 47, 52

Friends, did you notice ‘the kingdom of heaven’ is mentioned six times in today’s reading from Matthew? What is this kingdom? Jesus never says what it is, exactly. We might translate the phrase as the government of God or the reign of God or just ‘God’ for that matter. Jesus sometimes calls it eternal life or abundant life, too. Jesus never says exactly what it is, but in today’s reading from Matthew’s gospel he tells several parables to illustrate what the kingdom of heaven is like.

As well, the Lord’s Prayer, the prayer Jesus taught his disciples contains the line ‘*your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*’.

Jesus taught the kingdom of heaven through prayer and parables and it echoes a deep ‘cry of the heart’ or passion in him. Now let us look at three lessons we can learn from Jesus passion or ‘cry of the heart’ for the kingdom of heaven and you might like to see how they resonate with your own. So, these three:

- a profound yearning,
- a powerful motivation

- a passion of commitment

1. Profound yearning.

Jesus' 'cry of the heart' expresses a profound yearning, that is, an intense longing for something.

Have you ever had an intense longing for something?

What about an intense longing for someone?

In the text from Genesis our friend Jacob, the swindler and deceiver arrives at his uncle Laban's home to seek refuge from his brother Esau who is out to kill him. To cut a long story short, Jacob falls in love with Laban's daughter Rachael and promises to work seven years for her hand in marriage. On the wedding night, Jacob doesn't realise that the woman he is sleeping with is not Rachel, the woman whom he was promised by Laban, it's her sister Leah. It appears Laban, just like Jacob is himself a swindler and deceiver also. Jacob gets done by, or swindled and may be that it is realising the experience of having been himself swindled that he is prepared to work another seven years to finally get Rachael's hand in marriage.

What does Jacobs story have to do with today's topic of the kingdom of Heaven I hear you ask: I believe it is this: If you really love something so bad, if you have an intense longing for it you have to realise there will be times of testing when things don't go to plan. It is easy to give up when things don't go to plan. As the story in Genesis tells us Jacob didn't give up. Jesus didn't give up on proclaiming the kingdom even when it meant crucifixion on the cross.

As people of the kingdom in 2020 and beyond, in our own quiet way we are faithfully sowing the seeds of the kingdom of heaven through our deeds of loving and caring for others, however with COVID 19 and the shut downs the tighter restrictions on people movements the frustrations with social distancing and isolation it may become tempting to give up when things get tough. Well friends we are in good company. Jacob didn't give up. Jesus didn't give up. And God certainly hasn't given up either.

Jacob yearned for Rachel. Jesus yearned for the kingdom of heaven.

How about you and I. What are we yearning and longing for?

2. Powerful motivation

This 'cry of the heart' expresses a powerful motivation expressed through the power of a vision. A story to illustrate.

Once upon a time, two brothers who lived on adjoining farms fell into conflict. It was the first serious rift in their 40 years of working together. It began with a small misunderstanding, and grew into a major difference, and finally exploded into an exchange of bitter words followed by weeks of silence. One morning, there was a knock at the older brother's door. He opened it to find a man with a carpenter's toolbox. "I'm looking for a few days' work," he said. "Perhaps you would have a few small jobs here and there that I could help with?"

"Yes," said the older brother. "I do have a job for you. Look across the creek at that farm. That's my younger brother! Last week, there was a meadow between us, but he took his tracker and bulldozer and dug a small river between us. Well I'm going to do him one better. See that pile of old timber? I want you to build an 8 meter high fence between us. Then I won't need to see his place or his face anymore." The carpenter said, "Show me the nails and the tools, and I promise I'll do a good job for you."

The older brother had to go to town, so he left for the day. At sunset, when he returned, his eyes opened wide, and his jaw dropped. There was no fence there at all. The carpenter had built a bridge that stretched from one side of the river to the other, with handrails and all! And his younger brother, was coming toward them, with his hand out-stretched. "You're quite the guy," he said, "after all I've said and done." The two brothers met in the middle, and shook each other's hand. They turned to see the carpenter leaving. "No, wait! Stay a few days. I've a lot of other projects for you," said the older brother. "I'd love to," the carpenter said, "but I have many more bridges to build."

The brothers, driven by conflict and revenge only had a small vision of isolation, total separation from the other. The carpenter had a better more powerful vision for the two brothers, a vision of reconciliation, inspiring hope and new possibilities for the future.

There was another carpenter. This one came from Galilee his name is Jesus. The vision of renewal and hope for humanity were the seeds of the incarnation- of God becoming human in the person of Jesus Christ. Another name for Jesus is the Word

In the beginning of John's gospel we read: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us.* [John 1:1,14]

And again in John 3:17 we read: *Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.* [John 3:17]

God in Jesus Christ is the ultimate bridge builder-that is creating the bridge of reconciliation between the creation and the creator and thereby giving hope and new possibilities despite the current and future realities. The story of reconciliation is inextricably linked to the kingdom of heaven and was what deeply and powerfully motivated Jesus.

3. The passion of commitment.

The third lesson of Jesus' 'cry of the heart' is the passion of commitment.

Now, many of you are familiar with Jesus' Passion or the Passion of Jesus. It tells the story of his agony, arrest, trial, suffering and crucifixion. The story is told usually during the church season of Lent leading into Easter. Now, you do not have to wait for Lent and Easter to come around before you read the story of the Passion of Jesus. I want to encourage you to read the story every so often as a reminder of the passion and commitment Jesus had towards his mission of proclaiming the kingdom of heaven.

As well as the text in John 3:17 I read earlier another one in 1 John 4 reads:

God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. [1 John 4: 8b-10]

One of the symbols you see each Sunday when we worship is this wooden cross which we have standing on the table. In some denominations the cross has the figure of a suffering Jesus on it. The cross which you see here today each time we gather for worship, such as we are doing today, is described as an 'empty cross' which simply means there is no figure of Jesus on there. It is meant to convey that because of the resurrection Jesus is no longer suffering on the cross for he is now with God the Father. Importantly, Jesus is no longer here on earth in the physical sense, however, he is present with us in Spirit. Is he just a passive presence looking over us to see we are doing things correctly? No! In the Spirit, Jesus continues to work and advocate, sustaining, strengthening, encouraging, empowering his Church, that is you and me, as we continue his kingdom building work here on earth.

My friends, however you would approach the cross, whether you see the cross with the suffering Jesus on it or the empty cross, one thing that cannot be denied is that Jesus was passionate about his commitment to the kingdom of heaven - even to the point of death.

Conclusion

Friends, I am not suggesting that Jesus' example is one to aspire to. It is humanly impossible. Even his disciples discovered this. However, he taught them, and he teaches us the importance of believing in and living up to your convictions. To believe in those things you hold dear and valuable, those things even all the money and treasure on earth cannot buy. Things such as community, compassion, reconciliation, generosity, peace, gentleness, kindness, hospitality, sharing, caring are just some examples. Jesus demonstrates the kingdom of heaven, its' values, are worth living for. Doing so will impact and make a difference in our lives, the lives of others, our communities and in the world.

Jesus' cry of the heart' his longing for the kingdom of heaven -may it inspire within us a

- profound yearning,
- a powerful motivation and the
- passion of commitment.

Amen.

Let us pray. Loving Lord, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Bless the work we are doing in your name to extend your kingdom here on earth. Thank you for encouraging sustaining, strengthening and empowering us to do so. Amen.

We Respond

Our God https://youtu.be/O5d_gm9zrnY

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

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, today we gather in your name, though most of us not in the indoor spaces that have come to symbolize gathering spaces for those seeking community, truth, justice, and faith. Many of us struggle to feel the sacred or even simple connection through a computer screen. And yet, here we are, gathering and struggling and trying to find holiness.

May your kingdom come your will be done,

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, you proclaim your truth in every age by many voices: Direct those who speak where many listen and write what many read, that they may do their part in making the heart of this people wise, its mind sound, and its will righteous. O Lord, we pray for the countries where COVID-19 cases are increasing, notably the United States, India, Mexico, South Africa, Colombia, Argentina, Iraq, Indonesia, and Oman and in other nations including our nation Australia.

May your kingdom come your will be done

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord Jesus, when you came among us, you proclaimed the kingdom of God in villages, towns, and lonely places. Have mercy upon all who live and work in rural areas. May their far-flung health care providers receive the training and resources they need to save lives.

May your kingdom come your will be done

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God, behold and visit the cities of the earth. Renew the ties of mutual regard which form our civic life. Send us honest and able leaders. Enable us to eliminate hatred and violence so that men and women from different cultures and with differing talents may find with one another the fulfillment of their humanity.

May your kingdom come your will be done

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God our Father, whose Son had nowhere to lay his head: Grant that those who live alone may not be lonely in their solitude, but that, following in Jesus' steps, they may find fulfillment in loving you. Even though so many of us around the world right now are never alone, we feel lonely. We miss communing, and we also miss conversations with others. We have sacrificed anniversaries and graduations and weddings and birthdays and birth plans in order to keep our communities safe. May your kingdom come your will be done Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our religious leaders and essential workers. We pray for health care workers and death care industry personnel. We pray for the unemployed. We pray for scientists as they seek to find a cure to COVID 19 Virus. And finally, we pray for ourselves. As we self-isolate, mourn, or rejoice or celebrate, Lord, you know our lives and we place them in your safe and secure hands knowing that our names are engraved upon your palms. (Isaiah 49:16) May your kingdom come your will be done Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

And we pray the prayer Jesus taught saying.....

THE LORDS 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:

Bank Transfer

BSB: 013-915
Account Number: 354 439 707
Account Name: Hoppers Crossing
Uniting Church
Reference: 'Your SURNAME'

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www.HoppersUniting.church/offering

Please take your weekly offering or a symbol of your offering in your cupped hands as we dedicate it and ourselves, giving thanks for all God's blessings and mercy.

Let us pray:

Gracious and loving God, you have blessed us with the treasures of your kingdom and we offer our response through these gifts of money and the service of our lives - may they be used to sow the seeds of your kingdom values of love, justice and peace. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

King of Kings <https://youtu.be/Of5lcFWiEpg>

We are Sent

BENEDICTION

Friends, as Gods people
we go in the power of the Spirit
to sow seeds of love and joy,
hope and justice, peace and reconciliation
in our families, our schools, our workplaces,
our churches, and our communities.

Wherever the Spirit leads us, we will give it a go!

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

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**

This is the Air I Breathe <https://youtu.be/tzOz9oZVrtA>

The service is ended.

Acknowledgments

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