



Order of service
Date: Sunday July 19th, 2020
Pentecost 7A

We acknowledge that we are worshipping on the traditional lands of the Boon Wurrung people, of the Kulin nation, and pay our respects to elders past and present.

DON'T FORGET YOU CAN LOG INTO THE CHURCH WEBSITE AND SEE MUCH OF THIS BY VIDEO ON THE FRONT PAGE!!!!

INTROIT – O God you search me.

O God you search me and you know me,
All my thoughts lie open to your gaze.
When I walk or lie down you are before me:
Ever the maker and keeper of my days.

You know my resting and my rising.
You discern my purpose from afar,
And with love everlasting you besiege me:
In every moment of life and death, you are.

Before a word is on my tongue, Lord,
You know its meaning all the way through,
You are with me beyond my understanding:
God of my present, past and future, too.

Although your spirit is upon me,
Still I search for shelter from your light.
There is nowhere on earth I can escape you:
Even the darkness is radiant in your light.

For you created me and shaped me,
Gave me life within my mother's womb.
For the wonder of who I am I praise you:
Safe in your hands, all creation is made new.

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: God invites us to gather.

All: We worship the Holy One who is present in all.

One: God invites us to come as we are
for the sake of who we may yet be.

**All: We worship the Holy One who calls us
to new ways of being and doing.**

One: God invites us to journey in awe and in trust.

**All: We worship the Holy One in our midst
who blesses and commissions us for the good of all.**

One: Come, let us worship God.

Sing – TIS 569

1

Guide me, O thou great Redeemer,
pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
hold me with thy powerful hand;
bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
feed me now and evermore,
feed me now and evermore.

2

Open now the crystal fountain
whence the living waters flow:
let the fiery, cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through:
strong deliverer, strong deliverer,
be thou still my strength and shield,
be thou still my strength and shield.

3

When I tread the verge of Jordan
bid my anxious fears subside;
death of death, and hell's destruction,
land me safe on Canaan's side:
songs of praises, songs of praises
I will ever give to thee,
I will ever give to thee.

WELCOME

May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God
and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with you all!

And also with you!

NEW SONG - You were in this place

1. At the dawn of the ages
You pulled land from the sea
With your Word You invented
All we know, all we see
Creek and desert and forest,
Red and grey Kangaroo

You were in this place
But we never knew.

Opening prayer

Searching God,
you who are always seeking us,
following behind us when we flee,
catch our hearts today
and draw us into your waiting presence
where we can learn how to wait as you wait:
eagerly, hopefully, joyfully,
for our holiness to grow. Amen.

Prayer of confession

In our good times and in our bad times, in our ups and in our downs:

All: We confess you are with us, God.

You are in our moments of transformation, inviting us to new life.

When we are running away, when we are searching for a home:

We confess you are with us, God.

You guide us to new possibilities. When we are feeling proud and self-satisfied,
when we are wracked with guilt or shame:

All: We confess you are with us, God.

You steady us on new ways. When we are wrestling, when we are striving:

All: We confess you are with us, God.

You accompany us into new faithfulness to your presence and call.

All: Amen, and Amen!

Words of affirmation

No matter where we go, God is with us for good!

Here again the Good News:

Your sins are forgiven.

ALL: Thanks be to God! Amen.

EARLY WORD – In this place!

Welcome the kids and parents.

This morning I need you to learn a response. Here it is: “And God was there, too!”

Now you say it – And God was there too.

Ok now I would like you to think of a place where you have been this week...hmmm,
ok, maybe not such a good idea (unless of course you have managed to go
somewhere.) Let’s rethink this.

Ok, instead, name out loud the suburb you live in, and go.

Well done. Ok this time, yell the suburb again, then we will say together, “And God
was there too.”

Ready, go...And God was there too.

Phew, I think that might have worked.

Ok let's go again, this time say the name of the street you live in with, And God was there too. Ready, go...And God was there too.

That was great. Ok one more time. This time say the number of your house and say "our house" then the response. Here we go, now.....And God was there too. That was excellent.

Today one of the readings is from Genesis telling us a story of Jacob, remember him from last week cheating his brother out of his birthright. Well his brother got pretty angry and was out to get Jacob, so Jacob ran away into the wilderness. And he believed he was all alone, that God didn't come out there. But he fell asleep the first night, using a big stone as a pillow, I know, ouch, and had a dream about God being there, and the next day realised that was true, so he felt pretty good after that. I wonder if any children might like a task to do this coming week. You could do it by yourself or with other family members. If you have at home or can find around your yard or nearby, some stones, grab a bunch and place them in a container. Here is the challenge: place them in or around your home, *somewhere you they feel you felt God close. As you place it say "God is in this place."*

Today I would like to finish with a prayer written by a young person from a school in America.

Prayer to Find God in All Things

Under a leaf, in a snowflake

In a blade of grass, in a raindrop

All parts of nature

In your parents' loving embrace

In the phone call from your grandparents

All family relationships

In working and sharing with others

In helping the unfortunate

All volunteering jobs

Where are you able to find God?

Lord, help me to find you in all ways and walks of life.

Amen.

We are going to sing again.

If you have version of the order of service with the song embedded in it, you can play it now. Other wise there is a link below on the webpage for the song "Wherever I go." Enjoy singing. I will see you all next week. Bye.

SING: Wherever I go

Refrain:

Wherever I go, whatever I do,

whoever I am, I'm going with you.

No matter the time, no matter the place,

*however I move, you walk at my pace.
On every day of every year
the weather may change,
but you're still here.*

1. Jesus you're the light for the journey,
You're the destination and the road.
You provide the signs along the highway,
You're the best companion I know.

Refrain

2. We could be delighted or dejected,
At the beach or standing in the rain;
Jesus, you will never ever leave us,
We can trust your blood and your pain.

Refrain

Bridge:

Take all your fear,
Make us brave, make us strong;
Earth is our home,
This is where we belong.

1. Jesus you're the light for the journey,
You're the destination and the road.
You provide the signs along the highway,
You're the best companion I know.

Refrain:

*Wherever I go, whatever I do,
whoever I am, I'm going with you.
No matter the time, no matter the place,
however I move, you walk at my pace.
On every day of every year
the weather may change,
but you're still here.*

SHARING OUR STORIES – Love that disrupts

READINGS:

Genesis 28:10-19a

¹⁰Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. ¹¹He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. ¹²And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ¹³And the Lord stood beside him and said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; ¹⁴and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. ¹⁵Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

¹⁶Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!" ¹⁷And he was afraid, and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." ¹⁸So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. ¹⁹He called that place Bethel; but the name of the city was Luz at the first.

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

²⁴He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. ²⁷And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?'

²⁸He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' ²⁹But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

³⁶Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." ³⁷He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, ³⁹and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, ⁴²and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

PREACHING – Presence

I apologise in advance to anyone who isn't into, well, this, but I couldn't resist. Here is a clip. [\(You can find this on the web page\)](#)

Ok, ok, so Jacob's experience of God in the desert wasn't quite like this, certainly not as silly, although it did leave him similarly awestruck. Not only awestruck, but the recipient of a valuable lesson.

God is in this place and he never knew. The further away from home as it were that he got, he did not expect God to be present. In Israel's faith, distance from the usual place of God's presence could be devastating. Jacob wasn't really much into the whole God thing in the first place, but even he was anxious about this venture into such a lonely place.

Before I go on, perhaps I need to set the scene here. In one article about this story of Jacob I found this:

In Genesis 28 we read about Jacob's experience as a fugitive. Following his mother's advice, he flees the wrath of his brother, Esau. Alone, Jacob travels in unfamiliar territory, spending a night in the open air along the route. Unlike his brother, Jacob is not accustomed to the outdoors. Was he anxious when he lay down to sleep? Was he aware of possible dangers like robbers or wild animals? Did he have a weapon for protection? The scenario may resonate with refugees and displaced people who have travelled over unfamiliar, and often physically difficult and dangerous, land.

In fact I heard a not dis-similar story back in 1992 at Focus on Youth at Wesley UCA in Melbourne...remember Focus on Youth?

Anyway the speaker was a young African man who had fled his country across wilderness and plains and recounted part of his story where he was chased by a lion and climbed a tree to try and wait out the lion.

He had to sleep in the tree and eventually the lion left. The young man, a refugee on the run, similarly described a feeling of God's closeness.

Now, I don't want to diminish the experience of refugees at all, least of all this young man from Africa, but I have to say, I don't feel quite as sentimental about Jacob as this article seems to. Frankly he was quite the scoundrel.

So far in the story, he has swindled birthrights with his older brother Esau for a bowl of soup, and tricked his father Isaac into giving him the blessing of the firstborn. As a result, his family, at the very least his brother, doesn't like him much and in the part of the story that we don't get to see in our reading, tempers flare at the old homestead.

As one might imagine, neither Jacob's brother, nor his father are very pleased with him, (finding out you've been played is never easy to accept). But Mum, (Thank God for Mums!) Rebeka, through this whole episode, has never lost her cool.

Although it is interesting to note that some rabbis have suggested about this story that Isaac might actually have known all along what was going on but played dumb.

Anyway according to the story Rebeka turns the head of her husband in another direction and convinces him that since the birthright blessing he gave to Jacob can't be undone, the best course of action he can take is to secure the family line... and that means getting Jacob a wife. And, by the way, not one of those dreaded Hittite trash girls like his brother Esau brought home! Jacob will have a Canaanite- a woman from the Promised Land! And what better place to find a wife for the heir of the family fortune than at Rebeka's former homestead, now run by her brother Laban. (Why not keep things in the family?)

So, in response to his wife's "suggestion," Isaac meets with Jacob and gives his cheating heir one final blessing; and he did it not bitterly or with resentment- what's done is done. (So, was he playing dumb?)

Isaac then bestows the blessing in the act of a patriarch. He has realized perhaps that all of this is bigger than his feelings; bigger than his dreams for his family; bigger than his agenda. And Jacob, for the first time, receives a sincere blessing and with it, a charge.

And in that moment, the promise is handed down to another generation. God's blessing on this people remains intact.

So with the blessing of his parents, Jacob sets out to his Uncle's house to find a wife.

As night falls however, Jacob finds himself in the middle of the desert without shelter. And he takes some stones, places them around his head, lays down to sleep, and has a dream.

On his awakening, he realises he has been gifted with three insights.

His first insight was, God was not where Jacob expected God to be.

The second insight was that he had to grapple with a promise that was deeply concerned with 'a land' but was not confined by that land.

Which got me to thinking.

In my first formal placement at Cobram Uniting Church, the issue came up about doing major changes to the church buildings, to better reflect a church in the end stages of the 20th century, and to make it a more practical and accessible place for everyone.

During a congregation meeting to discuss this, I asked this question – If tomorrow these church buildings were burnt to the ground, would you rebuild exactly what you have now?

Their unanimous answer was- of course not. We would make it different.

But given that it didn't burn down, why would we need to do that?

The rebuild never happened in my time...and hasn't since.

Which leads me into my next thought.

Is God's presence with us and promise for us confined by land? In other words, does God's presence and promise depend on us being on particular land? In a particular building?

Let me break this down.

For example, when folk who are part of this faith community have to leave to go into aged care facilities, would we expect that God would no longer be present with them because they are no longer in this place?

No of course we would not expect that.

Would we expect that God's promises would no longer refer to them because they are no longer in this place?

No of course not.

Or what about when any of us are not here on any given week, does God give us a Sunday off from God's presence? Of course not.

So an interesting question to consider, especially in the current world situation, if certain circumstances prevailed and we could all no longer worship at Beaumaris Uniting Church, would that mean God was no longer present with this community of faith or that God's promises no longer referred to us?

No of course not.

But, I no full well, that we might be asking those questions in this unexpected time.

Questions like where is God in all this? Or even why did God let this happen?

They are bigger questions beyond my scope this morning, but they are symptomatic of how we are feeling.

And if it was to occur (and I am not suggesting in any way that it will happen) that we could not return, you would feel deeply sad about leaving that place, you might feel angry, you might feel a little lost or confused, you might feel, well whatever it is you feel.

But the truth this story about Jacob conveys to us is that God will still be present with us.

Not just wishy - washy present, but awesomely present.

And every promise God has given you in the past will still hold good.

What I am doing is giving you something very important to consider should the issue of leaving Beaumaris Uniting Church arise in your lifetimes. And for many, even in my time here, that is exactly what has happened.

No, certainly not as a whole community of faith, but bits at a time, dispersing the community to different "places".

God's presence and promise is not confined by land, by space, by walls, by time or even attitudes.

The third insight Jacob receives is that despite his very dodgy behaviour, God still desired him to receive the promised blessing.

In short God was still concerned for him, even in this desolate place, even though he had been a very naughty boy.

Jacob had really written God off as he found himself in the desert at nightfall, and he had expected that God had written him off.

Jacob recognized God's presence, but he did not worship. He built no altar, made no offering, no sacrifice. He received the message, recognized the messenger, made a vow to God to make this God his God if God would make good on the promise (verses 20-22, not in this week's text).

He marked the occasion however by marking a big rock. Then he moved on.

Often, when we talk about God in worship or evangelism, our underlying assumption is that people should make an all or nothing surrender of themselves to God, right here, right now. If they really encountered God, that's what they'd do, we might say. Or sometimes we even frame the message that if we want to encounter God, "really, really" meet God, the only way that can happen is if we unconditionally surrender first...in this place within these walls.

That's not what this story describes, is it? The encounter with God was undeniable to Jacob. But he made no act of surrender, emotional or otherwise, before or after this. At best, it could be said he made a bargain. If this god made good on his promises, Jacob would for his part as well. God did not reject this "non-commitment." It was a start, a first step.

And it was enough.

The good news in this story isn't *Jacob's* commitment. It's *God's*. God was committed even to a trickster like Jacob. Before Jacob took any steps toward God, God took a step toward him. And God did keep the promise.

What are we supposed to learn about supporting one another in our discipleship and ministries from this odd account of a man who didn't worship, even when God showed up and made lavish promises?

Perhaps part of what we are to learn is a challenge to some of our assumptions about the nature and effectiveness of our ministries and the people among whom we offer them.

Do we expect that because we have followed our calling in ministry, that those among whom we offer our ministry are only truly responding to it if they show up in worship with us?

Or at least communicate their response to what we're doing using some sort of God language?

Do we think either we or God may not be effectively "reaching them" or we're doing something wrong if they don't show these signs?

A question: Does God in this story seem to expect Jacob to have any other response than he actually did? Does God seem in the least disappointed or view it as a problem that Jacob didn't offer any form of worship at all?

No. God just shows up, and offers what God has to offer. And then keeps following through.

God will be faithful to Jacob, no matter what.

This has profound implications for how what we do as church. We are called to be in ministry just as God was. Show up. Make an offer. Leave room for whatever response may come, even if it's hardly any response at all.

Then, be good to our word.

The parable from Matthew chimes in now and appears to be making a statement that goes against this.

Let God deal with the alleged weediness of others! Deal inclusively. This does not mean avoiding challenge and confrontation, but it does mean: never ceasing to have compassion, never writing people off.

Be good to our word.

This was the aspect of God that Jacob discovered so unexpectedly in the desert. We see it in Matthew's approach throughout the gospel, which can be very confronting for some. Even the advice on discipline in 18:15-18 is surrounded by the plea that the straying sheep not be abandoned (18:12-14) and that sins be forgiven 77 times (18:21-22).

For very practical reasons we also acknowledge we cannot really know all that is going on in another human being. We have no right to act as if we do.

As my boys regularly say very confidently, "You're not me so you don't know"

Clearly the interpretation of the parable, after the mustard seed parable etc., was added on for particular reasons, mostly to motivate hearers, but for our purposes it is making an important point about ultimate accountability to God, so long as it doesn't allow us to lose sight of the important point of the original parable – don't weed! Never uproot people in your mind or attitude by treating them as no longer of any worth!

We live in a culture, and I mean this generally including the church in all its forms, where we are expected to claim and show results for our work in terms of concrete changes *others* have made, what we learn in this story about how God works with us, and thus how we may be expected to function as Christ's disciples in ministry, may feel a bit counterintuitive. Everything else in our culture (or is the whole world now?) is schooling us, forming us, to say we're succeeding when we can prove we're effective, that we can say we caused something to change, and the bigger the change the better.

But this story seeks to school us as Jesus schooled his own disciples to announce and embody God's kingdom the best they can, and be faithful to their word, just as God is faithful to God's word.

God's grace is like this. It most often moves us one step at a time. And at any given time, whatever the one step is, it's enough.

Let's keep this in mind as we stumble through this pandemic into a future that seems closed to us. The future might simply be considered as another wilderness into which we have to find our way and discover, yet again, that God is present there. Wherever we are, in time or space, God is there.

Amen.

Sing – The Sun Went Down on Jacob's Grief (To TIS 585)

1 The sun went down on Jacob's grief
and night found him alone;
his guilt and fear had no relief,
his pillow was a stone:
but God in darkness came, and kept
his word of grace supreme,
to give new courage while he slept,
new wisdom in a dream.

2 For Jacob in his sleep was shown
God's messengers on high
the angels moving up and down
a stairway to the sky;
he heard the voice he scarcely knew
of One whom none can see:
'I will protect and be with you,
and you must trust in me.'

3 Our fathers' God grants us to share
the way that Jacob went;
the upward path is now made clear
in Christ, our one ascent:
our eyes and heart and soul and mind
awake to see his face,
as in the desert tracks we find
the Lord is in this place.

4 God's love is our security,
the past has been forgiven,
and every resting-place can be
the very gate of heaven:
our Saviour's promise makes us strong
to face the barren ways;

our bitterness is turned to song,
our sorrow into praise.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE – read by Suzy Toovey

Loving God, in your mercy, hear our prayers. And all these prayers we bring in the name of the Risen Christ who taught us to pray saying:

***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 forever. Amen.***

Sing – You were in this place.

1. At the dawn of the ages
You pulled land from the sea
With your Word You invented
All we know, all we see
Creek and desert and forest,
Red and grey Kangaroo
You were in this place
But we never knew.

2. Do we take after Jacob -
Blind to what lies at hand,
Needing dreams to inform us
God is here in this land?
See him suffering and dying,
Bread and wine tell the news
You were in this place
But we never knew.

3. Paintings seen on the rock face
Footprints left in the sand.
Campfire next to the river,
Songs that rise from the land
Signs that seem so elusive,
Shadows just out of view.

You were in this place
But we never knew.

4. Jesus, open our senses
Help us to see you today
In the person beside us,
As we work, as we play.
While we love you and serve you
May it never be true:
You were in this place
But we never knew.

BLESSING –

We have come to this place of worship,
but we do not stay here.
Like Jacob, the journey continues.
Like Jacob, holy presence accompanies.
Like Jacob, God calls us into new life.
(Hold up a small rock)
Wherever you are, God is present. Go in peace.
In the name of Christ. Amen.

Recessional – TIS 531

1. Sent forth by God's blessing, our true faith confessing,
The people of God from His dwelling take leave.
The supper is ended: may now be extended
The fruits of this service in all who believe.
The seed of His teaching, our hungry souls reaching,
Shall blossom in action for all humankind.
His grace shall incite us,
His love shall unite us
To work for God's kingdom, his purpose to find.

2. With praise and thanksgiving to God ever living,
The tasks of our everyday life we will face.
Our faith ever sharing, in love ever caring,
Embracing as neighbours all those of each race.
One feast that has fed us,
one light that has led us;
Unite us as one in his life that we share.
Then may all the living with praise and thanksgiving
Give honour to Christ and his name that we bear.