



Order of service
Date: Sunday August 23rd, 2020
Pentecost 12A

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

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

INTROIT – The blessing of life forevermore (Richard Bruxvoort Colligan)

1. Lavish hospitality,
blessings crossing borders
Stranger, friend, and family
claiming one another

*The blessing of life forevermore
The blessing of life forevermore
The blessing of life forevermore
The blessing of life forevermore*

2. When we live in harmony,
walk the planet as friends
All of us in unity,
celebrating difference

*The blessing of life forevermore
The blessing of life forevermore
The blessing of life forevermore
The blessing of life forevermore*

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Hidden in the quiet of our morning there is a blessing for us today.

All: Sheltered amidst the reeds of a busy world there is new life awaiting our care and attention.

One: Floating above the currents of trial and tribulation, a peaceful possibility approaches.

All: Swaddled in the love and compassion of God's grace, a new beginning is preserved.

One: People of God, the embracing and affirming arms of God are reaching toward us with joy.

All: For we are God's children, holy and beloved.

One: Come, let us welcome God's embrace as we begin a new journey.

All: Let us worship with the confidence of God's abiding presence and rescuing love.

One: Let us worship God.

Sing – TIS 107, Sing praise and thanksgiving

1

Sing praise and thanksgiving, let all creatures living
now worship their maker with gladness and song;
all glory and honour we come to him bringing:

O praise to the Almighty, sing praise to our God!

2

Our lives of his making he brings to their waking;
in darkness he held us in his gracious care,
now into the light we are called from our sleeping:

O praise to the Almighty, sing praise to our God!

3

Lord, frame our desiring to do your requiring,
that unto your glory be all that we do;
and where we have faltered, give strength and give healing:

O praise to the Almighty, sing praise to our God!

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!

Learning Song – Ordinary Miracles

1. Thank you, Jesus,
For ordinary miracles,
Thanks for seasons and birds in a line.
We keep wanting escape to another place
- you say this place is just fine.
2. Thank you, Jesus,
For average humanity,
Thanks for making the people I know.
When we're tired of our humble reality
Come and drop in, say hello.

Refrain

*Some say you're up in the sky, in a cloud, but
You put your feet on the ground.*

*Help us to love what we are,
Being human – colour, action, sound!*

3. Thank you, Jesus,
You startle the centuries,
Stepping into our bloody affairs.
Your solution to so much calamity –
Up on the hill in the air.

Refrain.

4. Thank you, Jesus,
That life is a mystery;
Any moment's adrenalin time.
Lead us into the way to prosperity –
You are the treasure we find.

Opening prayer

Mothering God, midwife of all our experiences and dreams, we thank you for the ways you have brought us into new life over and over again. We praise you for your protection of us when the threats of life ensue. We honour you for the cunning and ingenuity with which you have crafted our opportunities to grow and thrive. In humble devotion, we remember your rescuing intervention when the way has been difficult, and the light has grown dim. Gathered as your people, wonderful and diverse, we join as one body in worship – remembering your saving Spirit and embodying your creative purpose. Make yourself known to us as we worship, we pray. Amen.

Prayer of confession

Creator of All, like the Egyptians who had power, yet feared those who were oppressed by it, we confess that there are times when we do not recognize the power and privilege you have given us.

Loving Parent, there have been times when our people have been ruthless and oppressive in our treatment of other peoples, based on race, culture, class, or background.

We confess that we have not always been creative in seeing a way out of what seems like “no way.”

We confess that we have not always been willing to risk going against the powers of our world to enable life to thrive.

We confess that there have been times when we have imagined ourselves to be small and without agency.

And we confess that we have allowed the sins of others to define the world in which we live.

All: Forgive us and remind us of the ways of those who respond with hope, creativity, and cunning, rather than despair and listless resolution when the world seems constructed with malice. Show us the hidden blessings floating through the rivers of our fatigue and despair. Embolden us to resist the

oppression that may be commanded or expected. Forgive us our sins, we pray. Amen.

Words of affirmation

May we always remember: God is the midwife of our lives.

God does not abandon us, even when we abandon each other.

God is our sister and rescuer. God is with us, forgiving, embracing, loving, renewing.

In this, let us be assured:

Your sins are forgiven.

ALL: Thanks be to God!

EARLY WORD – Origins

(Exodus 1:8 – 2:10 – Scott will read a version of this passage during the early word)

Some Brave Women and a Baby - Based on Exodus 1:1—2:10

If there are any children present, ask how they are going.

I trust that again this week has been ok for children and parents as another week of stage four remote learning takes place in your homes.

Today I want to talk about origin stories.

These are stories that tell us how someone's life began, or how a particular part of their life began.

For example, as you can see, I am wearing a Captain America tee shirt. Captain America is my favourite superhero. You may have heard of him, and his friends The Avengers in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. All of the superheroes in these films have an origin story, which is the story about how they became the superhero they are.

Today we are going to hear a bible origin story, about one of the bible superheroes. His name is Moses. You may have heard of him.

I just happen to have this action figure of Moses. Pretty cool hey.

I also have this one of Jesus. They like to have super adventures together.

I am going to read you a version of the origin story of Moses called "Some brave women and a baby".

The sons of Jacob settled in the land of Egypt and had children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Generation after generation, the family grew. They came to be known as Hebrews. As long as the story of Joseph was told, the Hebrews were welcome and respected.

But after many years, a new pharaoh rose to power in Egypt. He did not remember Joseph. When he looked at the Hebrews, he did not see people like the Egyptians. He saw foreigners. Strangers. Outsiders. And he was afraid.

"We have to do something about these people," he said. "What if there is a war and they all leave our country and join our enemies?"

So Pharaoh made the Hebrew people slaves. He forced them to make bricks and to work in the quarries cutting stones for his building projects. But even that was not enough.

"There are too many of these people," said Pharaoh. "And they have so many children there are more of them all the time."

So Pharaoh called for the midwives, women who helped the Hebrew women when they were having babies. Their names were Shiphrah and Puah.

“When you go to help a Hebrew woman give birth,” he said, “and the baby is a boy, kill it in secret. Don’t let anyone see what you are doing or the Hebrews will be angry and rise up against me.”

When they were alone, Shiphrah and Puah wondered what to do.

“Pharaoh is the most powerful man in Egypt,” said Shiphrah. “Whatever he commands must be done. If we say no, he will kill us. But how can we do this evil thing?”

“Then we will not say no,” replied Puah. “We will tell Pharaoh that Hebrew women give birth so quickly and easily that by the time we arrive the babies are already born.”

This plan worked – but only for a while. Eventually, Pharaoh gave the order to his soldiers. Unlike the midwives, the soldiers obeyed the command.

Fear and grief took hold of the Hebrew people.

Among them was a young woman called Jochebed. She was pregnant. Every day she prayed that her child would be a girl, like her older daughter, Miriam. But when the baby was born, it was little boy. Jochebed held her son close and wept over him. How could she keep him safe from Pharaoh? Sooner or later, the soldiers would hear him crying.

One day her daughter Miriam said, “I wish we could build him an ark, like Noah did for the animals. Then he would be safe.” Jochebed looked at her daughter in amazement.

“Quickly,” she said. “Go down to the river and gather some reeds. We will build our own ark.”

Miriam and Jochebed wove a basket out of papyrus reeds and made it watertight. Then they put the baby inside. It was hard for them to let him go. But it was his only chance for a new life.

The little ark with the baby inside floated away down the Nile. Miriam followed it. After a while, it got caught in some bulrushes. Miriam wondered if she should sneak out and push it free. But at that moment, she heard voices. A group of women had come down to the river to bathe.

“What is that basket caught in the bulrushes?” asked one of them. “Go get it for me!” Miriam froze. What would the woman do when she saw what was in the basket? “It’s a baby!” cried the woman. “It must be one of the Hebrew babies. Someone has set it afloat on the river to hide it from my father.”

Her father? Miriam peered through the reeds. Had her brother fallen into the hands of Pharaoh’s daughter? What a disaster!

But then the princess said, “What a beautiful child. He must be kept safe. I will keep him. My father will not dare touch him if I say he is mine.”

Miriam’s thoughts whirled in her head. She had an idea, but it was risky. She stood up.

“Your highness,” she called. “You will need a woman who is able to feed the baby. I know someone who could help you.”

The princess looked at Miriam. She looked thoughtful.

“I’m sure you do,” she said. “Perhaps you could give her a message for me. Tell her that the baby is safe. If she will nurse him, I will pay her well.”

Overjoyed, Miriam turned to leave.

“One more thing,” added the princess. “Tell her she has a very brave and clever daughter.”

Then the princess and the other women walked away, back to the palace. Filled with wonder, Miriam ran to tell her mother the good news.

So, there you have it, the origin story of Moses, which included some very brave women who quietly went about making good things happen, which allowed Moses to live and grow into the great leader he was.

I have a task for you to do this week, if you feel you can manage it. I invite you to write your own origin story, about how you have come to be the person you are. You can write it in any style you like. You might make it fictional, like you are a superhero and how you came to be. Or you might make it no-fiction, a kind of biography. This might mean you might have to do some research by asking your parents or grandparents the story around how you came to be, what your parents were doing, where they lived, where you were born, what you were like as a baby and little child, that sort of thing. If you are able to do it, I would love it if you sent me a copy of it to me. See how you go.

I have a song for you now. We have done this before. It is called “I am amazing.” That’s all for today. Bye for now.

SING: I am amazing

1. I am amazing
I am filled with power
And God loves me
Like crazy

2. You are amazing
You are filled with power
And God loves you
Like crazy

3. We are amazing
We are filled with power
And God loves us
Like crazy

4. God is amazing
God is filled with power
And we love God
Like crazy

5. I am amazing
I am filled with power
And God loves me
Like crazy
Like crazy

ALL: I am amazing

SHARING OUR STORIES – From fear to forgiveness

READINGS:

Romans 12:1-8 – Nick Toovey

1I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. 3For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. 4For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, 5so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. 6We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; 7ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; 8the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Matthew 16:13-20 – Suzy Toovey

¹³Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” ¹⁴And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” ¹⁵He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” ¹⁶Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. ¹⁹I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” ²⁰Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

PREACHING – Cunning, compassion and courage

Ok you’ve seen the t-shirt, you’ve heard the early word, now it’s time for this...

Batman, the very funny, quirky, not at all serious tv series began 54 years ago. Which means some of you may have watched it in your younger years or maybe with children.

I have fond memories of this version of Batman. It was frankly hilarious.

And in this clip, we see The Joker character played by the famous Caesar Romero and playing it very over the top comedically.

But over the years, Batman and The Joker have evolved, developed. The Batman origin stories, apart from being repeated every ten years or so, have dug deeper into the character of the Batman.

The same thing has happened for the villains, especially The Joker.

You may recall Australian actor Heath Ledger's turn at The Joker. Sadly he passed away far too young, but he did win the academy award posthumously for best actor for his portrayal of The Joker in in the 2008 Batman film.

But, up until last year, there have been no real attempts at origin stories of the super villains. Last year The Joker was released, and actor Joaquin Phoenix won the 2020 academy award for best actor.

In my experience, people love origin stories. Even of villains.

The bible is full of them. We have been exploring them over the past several months from the Old Testament in Genesis and now Exodus.

And of course, we celebrate every year arguably the world's most well-known origin story, the birth of Jesus at Christmas.

So today, we come to the origin story of Moses, which we heard a version of during the early word.

This story, we must understand, is not only about Moses, but might be considered the origin story of Israel, as Rev Prof Howard Wallace writes:

Some commentators claim that Exodus is in some sense the true first book of the Bible, in that it gives the story of Israel being constituted and chosen as God's people. Through their experience of oppression and slavery and their deliverance through the Exodus event, their character as a unified people is forged. It is only then with this new awareness of their own identity as a chosen and liberated people that they were able to look back and reflect that the God known in the Exodus had been the same God who created all that is.

But for our purposes, let's look at it as Moses' beginnings.

And as in all great origin stories, there are the cast of supporting characters, without whom the hero or protagonist, would not find their way.

And one such character is the villain. Here is Egypt personified in the person of Pharaoh.

Again, I want to quote Prof John Holbert, whom I mentioned last week. He writes this rather provocative opening to his comments on the Exodus passage:

Once again we enter the greatest story in Judaism, the Exodus from Egypt. Immediately, there is the ever-present danger of looking under every rock, digging in the sand, and dredging the Nile for a scrap or two of some sort of historical proof of these legends. People, please give this up now and forever! We are not, I repeat not, reading anything like history here. This is narrative theology, the crucial truth about a people wrapped up in a delightful and unforgettable story. And because some Hebrew author told and wrote it, it is couched in hilarity and barbed with less than subtle attacks on those who are not Hebrews—namely the Egyptians who are nothing less than oppressors of the chosen ones, and at the same time nothing less than fools. How else should one characterize one's enemies when they seem so unbeatable, so impossible to survive?

Two things are happening in the opening section of this story.

Firstly, the author is making fun of this new Pharaoh, when he is referred to as “the new king.”

Why is this even of concern?

Because in that world, kings were common, everyone had a king. But there was only one son of the sun god Ra, and he was to be called “Pharaoh.”

So the author is belittling the Pharaoh right at the beginning of this story, and would have caused more than a few chuckles by Israelite readers.

The second thing going on here is that this “new king” didn’t know any of the history of Joseph and his influence in Egypt. He only saw Israelites increasing in number and increasing in threat in his eyes.

Whether they would actually be any kind of threat against the great Egyptian armies is questionable, but the fact that the Pharaoh believed this says more about him.

So he increased their work load and when this didn’t work, came up with a really sneaky and evil plan to have the male children of the Israelite slaves taken at birth and killed.

This is nasty stuff. And it is driven by fear. Nothing new here.

Into this it is the women who confound that fear with cunning, compassion and courage.

Through their actions, they subvert the plans of Pharaoh and Pharaoh is a bit thick and doesn’t see through any of this. Powerful he may be, but not very cluey.

Moses’ mother, his sister Miriam, the midwives Shiprah and Puah, Pharaoh’s daughter, all acted in direct defiance of his orders, and refused to let fear and hatred rule the day, and in so doing not only saved Moses, but many other children too.

And the stage was set for Moses, the adopted son of Pharaoh’s daughter, to still be raised by his mother, learn the truth of who he is, and at the same time be raised within the household of the dim-witted Pharaoh as a prince of Egypt.

What a story.

For another supporting character we move to Matthews gospel and today’s passage.

The hero of course is Jesus, and his disciples are ordinary men from a variety of ordinary places and occupations. Peter is arguably the most well-known of the disciples, but we need to remember that he was a fisher man, as were others of the disciples. They didn’t entirely give up that work, no doubt as it gave them food or finances to support the group.

In today’s passage Jesus is bestowing on Peter a great honour, namely that of the Rock on which the church will be built.

I imagine after this when the disciples are chatting among themselves, Thomas perhaps says to Peter, “Pete, what was all that about?” Peter replies, “Really, I am not sure.”

Peter’s brother Andrew chimes in with, “Maybe he was giving you a new nick name. You know, Petros, stone, rock. Peter, The Rock.”

Peter counters, “The Rock seems a little pretentious if you ask me. Not a name that would ever catch on or make anyone famous.”

Well, as you can there is quite a bit of imagery going on here, but the basis of it is that Jesus understands the need for people on the ground to be involved in his work in order that they may continue it after he eventually leaves.

And to Peter he pre-empts the mantle of leadership that Peter will eventually have to wear. I suspect that had Peter fully grasped what Jesus was getting at in this episode, he would have run a mile.

This brash, loyal, naïve, ordinary fisherman was paramount in the continuance of Jesus’ story. His compassion and courage, along with his fellow disciples, in their everyday walking with Jesus, propelled the message into the future to reach more ordinary people like us.

And ordinary people like us need to understand the implications of this.

Paul put it like this:

³For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, ⁵so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. ⁶We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ⁷ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; ⁸the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

It is kind of an instruction manual for the ordinary folk who support the work of the superheroes, the ones in the front line, the inspiring ones.

Rev Prof Bill Loader puts it really well when he writes:

When we are free from the obsession with establishing our own importance we can then see ourselves for who we are. That includes identifying our gifts and abilities and understanding where they and we fit in. So Paul returns to the image of the congregation as a body in which all members belong together like different body parts (12:4-5). He had expounded it in detail in 1 Corinthians 12. Here he uses it again, citing a different range of gifts and abilities. I am sure Paul would be highly amused to see how some people have tried to make his illustrations in 12:6-8 into a rigid set of categories designed to label "spiritual gifts"! Paul is asking for a maturity that goes beyond such counting and classification and includes all that we bring and offer to God and to each other (to use the sacrifice image again).

Saved from ourselves, we can get on with the job, both as individuals and as a church. We do not have to be super people. Maturity is about knowing who we are, what our abilities are, and how to use them for the good.

It is not about making a name for ourselves. Nor is it somehow about needing to make ourselves more than what we are or doing more than we are able to do, as though we refuse to accept our limitations (in ability, time and space). Believing in love is the key to all of this. Letting it sink in is at the core of the spiritual journey.

Today's readings invite us to ponder our unique vocations as they reflect our relationship with God. They challenge us to make changes and chart new pathways of fidelity to God.

Vocation means change.

We must choose to embrace certain things and let go others. Our vocations, our callings, invite us to realize that our gifts shape and are shaped by the communities of which we are a part, including the body of Christ. In living out our gifts, we share in God's vision of healing the world. Our gifts are meant for inclusion. God's presence in our lives goes beyond parochialism, imperialism, and superiority to embrace God's good earth and its people in service and companionship. There is no superiority or set apartness in the body of Christ; in our diversity we are one in spirit. Everyone's gift is intended to be cherished and nurtured. (Bruce Epperley)

A problem with much of our world today, is that many are not satisfied with this point of view. People are putting so much energy into becoming the superhero, they fail to see the importance of what the ordinary folk do, and that they may be called to be part of that crowd of ordinary folk.

To put it into a current context, namely this Covid-19 time. For every Premier, for every Prime Minister, for every Chief Medical Officer, for every expert virologist, epidemiologist and any other ologist, there are a thousand doctors and nurses geared up assessing and treating patients with the virus, wishing them well when they leave hospital, conveying the saddest news to families when they don't, or the hospital reception staff who have to ask questions and check temperatures and vet everyone who comes into the hospital, or the cleaners who empty the bins and mop the floors and clean the bathrooms and wipe all the surfaces or the testers who take details and swab noses and throats or the masked ones in high vis vests at intersections who continually spray and wipe the crossing buttons...we see them all. We don't know their names, or where they live or who they love or who loves them. But they are there – day in day out doing this work.

But so many push and pull to be influencers, have a million followers, get their face on tv, become a YouTube sensation, that they lose sight of the power and importance of the small, every day and ordinary.

God's people need to be mindful of this and gently offer an alternative to this growing mindset.

Moses was the main man; Jesus was the main man. But in both instances God's intervention into circumstances comes not in dramatic, sweeping events, but in small ones, the birth of a baby, the compassion, cunning and bravery of a group of women, the rise and fall of a fisherman and his friends.

Mahatma Gandhi was quoted as saying - "Whatever you do will be insignificant, but it is very important that you do it." Because this is how things happen.

No effort, however meagre, is too small for God to work through. (Wallace)

May it be so. Amen.

Sing – Ordinary Miracles

1. Thank you, Jesus,
For ordinary miracles,
Thanks for seasons and birds in a line.
We keep wanting escape to another place
- you say this place is just fine.

2. Thank you, Jesus,
For average humanity,
Thanks for making the people I know.
When we're tired of our humble reality
Come and drop in, say hello.

Refrain

*Some say you're up in the sky, in a cloud, but
You put your feet on the ground.
Help us to love what we are,*

Being human – colour, action, sound!

3.Thank you, Jesus,
You startle the centuries,
Stepping into our bloody affairs.
Your solution to so much calamity –
Up on the hill in the air.

Refrain.

4.Thank you, Jesus,
That life is a mystery;
Any moment's adrenalin time.
Lead us into the way to prosperity –
You are the treasure we find.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE – read by Wendy Hinde

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 – TIS 468, we are your people

1

We are your people;
Spirit of grace,
you dare to make us
to all our neighbours,
Christ's living voice, hands and face.

2

Joined in community,
treasured and fed,
may we discover

gifts in each other,
willing to lead and be led

3
Rich in diversity,
help us to live
closer than neighbours,
open to strangers,
able to clash and forgive.

4
Glad of tradition,
help us to see
in all life's changing,
where you are leading,
where our best efforts should be.

5
Give, as we venture
justice and care
(peaceful, resisting,
waiting or risking)
wisdom to know when and where.

6
Christ, as we serve you
in different ways,
may all we're doing
show that you're living,
meeting your love with our praise.

BLESSING

People of God go now with courage! Use your cunning and creativity to forge a way in this world. Allow compassion to flow, as God's compassion flows over you. Go in peace. To love and serve the Lord.

In the name of Christ. Amen.

Recessional – TIS 779, may the feet of God

May the feet of God walk with you,
and his hand hold you tight.

May the eye of God rest on you,
and his ear hear your cry.

May the smile of God be for you,
and his breath give you life.

May the Child of God grow in you,
and his love bring you home.