

Email Order of Service 10th May 2020 – Easter 5



Greeting-

The Peace of Christ be with you all.

Call to Worship –

We have every reason not to let our hearts be troubled, not to be afraid of anything in life or death. We are a chosen people, royal priests, God's own people and precious in God's sight. Are we ready to declare the wonderful deeds of the One who called us out of darkness into glorious Light? Let us affirm again: Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Prayer -

God of life, as we enter this new week, we ask for the grace to cherish every single moment as a gift. Speak to us through the little things, the mundane and ordinary tasks we do, so that we may learn again the humility of Jesus. We give you thanks for those who nurtured us, protected us, and helped us grow. We give you thanks for homes that accept us and affirm us as your precious children. We give thanks for all who have 'mothered' us during our lives – mothers and grandmothers, aunts and cousins, friends and adopted family members. Through our worship today, strengthen us as living stones that we may provide a spiritual home where all are welcome, for we ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

HYMN- AHB 14 Now thank we all our God

Scripture Readings-

Psalm 31: 1-5, 19-24; 1 Peter 2: 2-10; John 14: 1-14

Prayer of Confession-

Gracious God, as we come before you this day with our whole selves, we are conscious of those parts we would rather not mention: the smallness of our minds, the hardness of hearts, our tendency to close ourselves off from others. Yet you have made room for us even in our weakness and imperfection, and so we come confessing those parts we would rather not admit to. We confess we have not always believed in your readiness to love, believing instead that there is no room for us or for some 'other' of our choosing within the household of your kingdom. Help us to see in the midst of our blindness, **help us to make room for all.**

We confess there are times when we have closed ourselves off from those who are different. Out of fear and indifference, we have sought those with whom we agree. At times, we have even declared those who are different as wrong, misguided or even bad. Help us to see in the midst of our blindness, **help us to make room for all.**

Words of Assurance-

Jesus said: "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life." Even though we lose the way, Christ calls us back to know his Truth and the offer of new Life. In Christ, through Christ, we are loved and forgiven. **Thanks be to God.**

Sermon – Making room & accepting hospitality

Last week I heard a program on ABC Radio National concerning homeless folk in Sydney being moved into 3 and 4 star hotels in the city because of COVID 19. When a care worker asked a client if he would be interested in moving into a hotel, the man asked, "For one night?" "No, for a month." "A WHOLE month??? YES please!" the delight and surprise of the homeless man was so evident.

Have you ever been homeless? Or had some folks make room to allow you to stay with them so you would not be 'on the streets'? Sometimes I suspect accepting help is as hard as offering help in our society which prizes privacy and self-reliance for adults over community and interdependence. I wonder what effect the compulsory quarantine and bonus homelessness stays in hotels will have on those who experience such temporary accommodation, as well as on those who serve them as part of the hotels' staff.

In 1959, after my father suffered a heart attack, he was off work for 9 months and our family had to leave Port Moresby and stay in Brisbane. Our economic situation meant that our family of 6 had to stay with my two aunts, uncle and cousin from July to December in a small, three bedroomed home. My sister and I slept on the open front verandah with a wooden slat blind separating us from the street and the cold westerly winds. Even as an eight year old, I remember the anxiety of the unknown future and the strange, different school and society in Brisbane. I wonder if that experience of extended hospitality led my parents to be extremely hospitable when we finally moved up to Gracemere. My sister and I normally were the ones to move out to the verandah for most of the guests to stay in our bedroom, but we loved having 'visitors' or family come to stay, much as children today enjoy the 'sleep-over' events at friend's homes.

"Don't be worried – let not your hearts be troubled – don't be afraid! Have faith in God and in me," said Jesus to his disciples in his last teaching session just before he was arrested and then crucified. "Believe in God, believe in me. Trust God for your futures as I am doing... I go to prepare a place for you with my Father whose home is spacious – there is enough room for all." What a comfort for those who are, or feel, homeless and fear for their future! What a comfort for those about to lose their leader and beloved Teacher in the hostile situation of Jerusalem. "There is a place for you. I am going to prepare it and then I'll come back and take you there."

Jesus continues to make room for us. There is a future for us all. God is there and so is Jesus. There is a place – not so much physical, but emotional and spiritual for you to BE. Your 'self' - your internal person, your eternal being – is guaranteed safe in God. "You belong to God's family, you have a role in God's kingdom work, you have a place at God's table. Because you know me, you also know God. You now understand what God is like because I have been in human form revealing God's nature to you," says Jesus.

Will you take up your place? Will you accept God's hospitality? Will you live as part of God's family according to God's ways – commands, expectations that you love one another as I (Jesus) have loved you? Will you make room for others to live with us? Will you accept in humility, that you are not the one in charge, making the rules, or setting the 'standard', but rather the one who does not deserve to be here, yet are accepted by God's grace and Jesus' loving sacrifice?

John 14: 1-14 is one of the favourite passages for Christian funerals and it gives comfort before death, and then again after death to grieving loved ones, but it does not just speak of the afterlife with God. Jesus offers LIFE to us here and now in this world. Lamar Williamson Jr., Professor Emeritus of Biblical Studies at Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education in Richmond, Virginia, USA explained in his commentary *“Preaching the Gospel of John”* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2004 p. 181) that in the Gospel of John there are two Greek words for which we use the word ‘life’ in English. *Psyche* refers to our human physical life we normally want to ‘save’ or ‘protect’ and *zoe* refers to the eternal life God promises – that added dimension of LIFE in all its fullness (John 10:10).

Jesus is the WAY to God because we can know God through knowing Jesus. Because Jesus is the ultimate TRUTH – divine truth incarnate in a human - therefore his teaching about God – his revealing of God’s nature and will, mercy and compassion, love and forgiveness – enables us to be in relationship with God once again through Jesus’ actions and our faith in him. Eternal LIFE – life with God – is lived in and through Jesus as we do as he directs, and accomplish for the Kingdom of God what Jesus began in his earthly ministry among us.

Thus, the evangelists who ask us to make room in our hearts for Jesus, who ask us to hand our lives over to Jesus’ direction, and who urge us to accept the undeserved Grace of God’s loving hospitality in John 14: 1-14 are inviting us to LIFE with and through and in God and Jesus. This is a LIFE beyond fear, a LIFE which brings honour to God, our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. We, too, in response are called to offer God’s hospitality to others – to make room for them in our community and church, just as the early Christian Jews had to make room for the Gentiles.

1 Peter 2: 1-10 rejoices over the early Christians suffering persecution who are living as God’s chosen and special people – a holy nation who know God’s kindness and light. Let us join them this week as we live our faith courageously and lovingly. Amen

HYMN- AHB 206 Thou didst leave thy throne

Offering-

A) Cheques to be made out to ‘St Lucia UCA Parish account’ and posted to 7 Hawken Dr, St Lucia Qld. 4067, please. OR

B) direct deposit to ‘St Lucia Uniting Church’ BSB: 334 040 acct#: 553 842 259 (St George Bank)

Prayer for offering

Gracious God, we thank you for all your care for us shown through the ordinary people in our circles. We join in the spirit of generosity and hospitality as we share our offerings this week that the work of our local church and the wider church around the world may continue. Amen.

Prayer of Intercession

Loving God, we give thanks today for the ways you 'mother' us – giving us life, food, comfort, healing our wounds and sorrows, guiding, disciplining and correcting us. We thank you for believing in us and for your encouragement of our attempts to serve your kingdom. Thank you again for those human mothers and fathers who are your hands and feet, ears and eyes for us.

We pray today for all who are given the responsibility of mothering. Grant them patience and wisdom, strength to cope, and unconditional love for all their children. Where there are difficulties in communication, or unwillingness to co-operate, bring your peace and reconciliation. Where there has been hurt or direct abuse, bring your healing, repentance, restitution and forgiveness. Where there is estrangement in families, open their eyes and minds, their ears and hearts to one another that they may be able to follow your command that we love one another as you have loved us.

We pray for those who long to be parents, but cannot be. Comfort them and redirect their love and energy to care for others in need.

We pray for parents grieving the loss of children, and for children grieving the loss of their mother or grandmother this day. Bring your healing and hope to them through memories of good times together. Give wisdom to all the medical staff caring for the ill among us, especially Rob and Katrina, Julie and Hannah. Save us and protect us, for we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer- Pray the Lord's Prayer.

HYMN-

AHB 165 What a friend we have in Jesus

Benediction-

God's house has many rooms and God is always ready to welcome. As we go from this place, may we make room in our lives for those whom God gives us to love, even the ones we least expect. Go forth to be life and truth. Go forth to point to the Way for family and friends, strangers and neighbours. Go in the love and peace of God; the grace and goodness of the Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Resources used in this service include *Words for Worship* Easter 5 year A 10th May 2020 by MediaCom (subscription of Rev Dr Elizabeth Nolan) and *The Abingdon Worship Annual 2020* edited by Mary Scifres and B.J. Beu, Abingdon Press, Nashville USA (owned by EN); *gathering Lent- Easter Year A 2020*, United Church of Canada (EN subscription); and *Uniting in Worship People's Book* by Uniting Church Press (JBCE) 1988 Melbourne and *The Australian Hymn Book* multiple copies owned by the St Lucia Uniting Church congregation. Copyright license 217268.

George Stuart wrote this hymn that goes to the tune Hanover (AHB 67, TIS 133 or 188)
Remember the one who brought us to birth;
So special, unique, a person of worth.
Our love and our thankfulness we wish to show
For she shared her body to cause us to grow.

This myst'ry of life; this myst'ry extreme
Of mother and child – a bond so supreme.
The love and protection, essential yet free,
When given to young ones breeds courage to be.

Young Mary was proud of her baby boy;
But later his life brought sadness not joy.
This mother, bewildered, when grieving her loss
Remained close to Jesus and cried at his cross.

If motherhood calls and then passes by,
Yet motherly love refuses to die,
When this love is given, great blessing is known
For children are not raised by mothers alone.

Such love is so deep; can conquer what's wrong
For motherly love is patient and strong.
With God as love's mother, God's presence we see
In mothering love and in mothers-to-be.

