



St Heliers Presbyterian Worship Service prepared by Ian Kilgour

(NB: Hymn lyrics are included for reflection rather than to be sung.)

We affirm our faith

In the Spirit and compassion of Jesus

we are not people of fear:

we are people of courage.

We are not people who protect our own safety:

we are people who protect our neighbours' safety.

We are not people of greed:

we are people of generosity.

We are your people God,

giving and loving,

wherever we are,

whatever it costs

For as long as it takes

wherever you call us.

Hymn

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take
The clouds you so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense
But trust Him for His grace
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face

His purposes will ripen fast
Unfolding every hour
The bud may have a bitter taste
But sweet will be the flower

William Cowper

Scripture Reading: Matthew 6: 25 – 34 (NRSV): Do Not Worry

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink,^[a] or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?^[b] ²⁸ And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ ³² For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed, your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But strive first for the kingdom of God^[c] and his^[d] righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ “So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

Reflection

What a difference a day makes! One day everything was normal – well as normal as life has been since March last year – then overnight we are all in lockdown.

Last week we absorbed the impact of a 'Code Red' warning from the International Panel on Climate Change and then came the unwelcome concerns about the 'Delta Variant' escaping into NZ.

We might well ask, 'Where is God in all this?' You might remember the plight of Job and how he suffered one misfortune, tragedy, or sickness after another. Naturally he asked all the very human questions which we do, only to find there is no immediate or easy answer.

The question is, how do we cope with the incessant bombardment of negative news! Shirley recently brought to my attention this posting on social media

"Sometimes I just want to stop. Talk of covid, protests, looting, brutality. I lose my way. I become convinced that this mew normal is life. But then I met an 87 year old who talks of living through Polio, Vietnam, protests, diphtheria and yet is still enchanted with life.

*He seemed surprised when I said that 2020/21 must be extremely challenging to him. "No", he said slowly looking me straight in the eyes, "I learned a long time ago to **not** see the world through the headlines, I see the world through the people who surround me. I see the world with the realization that we love big. Therefore, I choose to write my own headlines. 'Husband loves wife today', 'Family drops everything to come to Grandma's bedside'. He patted my hand. "Old man makes new friend".*

His words collide with my worries, freeing them from how I had been holding them so tight. They float away. I am left with a renewed spirit of kindness and a reminder that our capacity to love is never ending.

We don't do ourselves any favours by a constant diet of negativity, sensationalism, and disaster. There are more than enough adverse happenings within the circle of our own acquaintances without importing the evil, pain and suffering of all the world! We need to give ourselves a break and focus our attention on who and what is immediately around us and what we can do

locally rather than by being overwhelmed and paralysed by a constant avalanche of bad and threatening news, that we can get addicted to.

Everything in our world has become complicated, even the 'birds and the bees' as a wit recently stated: "Parents have a difficult enough job as it is, but today they now have to explain, not just the birds and the bees, but the bees and the bees, the birds and birds, the birds that used to be bees, the bees that used to be birds, the birds that look like bees, plus the bees that look like birds but still have a stinger!

Perhaps we need to read and re-read the words of Jesus found in Matthew 6:25-34. '*Consider the birds of the air and how the lilies grow*'

A teaching that comes from one of Jesus parables may also help us to put matters beyond our understanding or ability to influence, in context. The parable of the 'wheat and tares' (called 'bastard wheat' in the time of Jesus) is from Matt. 13. Jesus said that as the wheat and tares grow to harvest, the difference becomes more apparent. So 'live with it, don't try to pull out the tares for fear of pulling out the genuine wheat'. We are presently seeing this in our world, 'the good gets better and the bad gets worse' but action and judgement is best left to God.

Like Job's conclusion in chapter 42, we need to say

"I know, LORD, that you are all-powerful;
that you can do everything you want.

³You ask how I dare question your wisdom
when I am so very ignorant.

I talked about things I did not understand,
about marvels too great for me to know.

⁴You told me to listen while you spoke
and to try to answer your questions.

⁵In the past I knew only what others had told me,
but now I have seen you with my own eyes.

The older I get the more I've realized the futility of focussing on the mystery of God beyond my humble mind and this life. Better to be seeking and finding God within this life is what I should be about. God immanent and incarnate. Seems to me that in God's great love for the world, God went to a lot of trouble to come to us in very convincing ways, and wonderfully focussed in the

person of Jesus who became one with us in our humanness and all its anxiety and suffering. May we find God in the utter dailyness and mess of it all. God with us -Immanuel! That's the challenge, and to do so will assuage our fears, give assurance we are not alone and thereby happily leave to God the things that are God's providence and beyond our understanding. We have more than enough to understanding and love and the person of Christ our Lord.

Joy Webb a Salvation Army wrote a song which puts our faith in God in the widest possible context

Ten thousand worlds may pass away
And bring the dawning of a cosmic day;
Age after age, time after time, hold its sway:
All time may pass into eternity,
And we must venture on a life unknown:
Journey alone, each to our own destiny:
In life or death, amidst uncertainty,
Only one thing can still make us strong;
In the doubt, in the fear, in the loneliness.
In the struggle of right against wrong.
Somewhere amidst the confusion,

There will be hope, there will be love, there will be God!

Prayer for others and matters of concern *please add your own and take time to hold each in the circle of your imagination projected love.*

- Our voting for the new Church Council members
- Thanksgiving for each person who has allowed their nomination.
- Patsy Cochrane's retirement and remarkable Chaplaincy Service at St Andrew's Village.
- That the 'team of 5 million' will again cooperate and win the day against the current out-break.
- For parents juggling work and childcare demands.
- For our Community Centre staff and effects their activities.
- For front line workers who are again putting themselves in harm's way for our sake.
- For Government and Health Ministry leaders to make the right calls.
- For the vulnerable women, girls and families fleeing Afghanistan.
- For Peter Chatteris who is unwell and hospitalized in Hamilton.
- For the dreadful plight of the people of Haiti following the earthquake.

Closing Prayer & Benediction

God of love and hope,
we believe you made the world and care for all creation,
but the world feels strange right now.
The news is full of stories about Climate Warming and Coronavirus.
Many are worried and perplexed and wonder how they'll cope.
Others are anxious for their family and friends.
Be with them and help them to find peace.
We pray for medical people and scientists,
who are working to discover the right medicines
and find lasting cures.
Thank you that even in these anxious times, you are with us.
Help us to put our trust in you and keep us safe.

Amen.

The Lord bless us and watch over us;
The Lord make his face to shine upon us and be gracious to us;
The Lord look kindly upon us and give us peace. Amen.