

HOON HAY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Welcome to this morning's service, the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, 28th June

To those at home... Come and join us next week!

Morena, Hello Everyone,

Over the last 12 or so weeks our services have been offered online. It was a very sudden transition from meeting together at the end of March and then into isolation and lockdown. Everyone learned how to communicate through technology, even if that consisted of just ringing friends and family. For many others, of course, it also meant using internet-based services, such as Zoom and face-time videoconferencing. Despite some initial problems, I adjusted to filming a message each week, and Shilo (our office administrator) did a sterling job presenting a colourful weekly Order of Service and ensuring the links and downloads worked. We will carry this new learning forward.

However, in what is now a largely post-COVID environment, we have decided to stop the weekly online services after this week. We will keep posting video messages on our YouTube channel and Facebook monthly and on other occasions as required. So, whether you have been following us online for some time, or are today a first-time viewer, I want to thank you for doing so. Even better, if you can, please join us each week 'live' at 10 a.m. each Sunday. You are most welcome and there is always a great morning tea to follow!

Blessings, *Michael*

“The word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”

Hebrews 4:12

OUR APPROACH TO GOD IN PRAYER

Heavenly Father,

You have built your Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone:

Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their teaching, that we may be made a holy temple acceptable to you;

through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.


Song: 'O Praise the Name'



Either sing-along or enjoy a meditation on this song of high praise

**A Psalm of Praise,
Psalm 145:1-13
(NIV)**

- ¹ I will exalt you, my God the King;
I will praise your name for ever and ever.
- ² Every day I will praise you
and extol your name for ever and ever.
- ³ Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise;
his greatness no one can fathom.
- ⁴ One generation commends your works to another;
they tell of your mighty acts.
- ⁵ They speak of the glorious splendour of your majesty—
and I will meditate on your wonderful works.
- ⁶ They tell of the power of your awesome works—
and I will proclaim your great deeds.
- ⁷ They celebrate your abundant goodness
and joyfully sing of your righteousness.
- ⁸ The LORD is gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and rich in love.
- ⁹ The LORD is good to all;
he has compassion on all he has made.
- ¹⁰ All your works praise you, LORD;
your faithful people extol you.
- ¹¹ They tell of the glory of your kingdom
and speak of your might,
- ¹² so that all people may know of your mighty acts
and the glorious splendour of your kingdom.
- ¹³ Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and your dominion endures through all generations.
- The LORD is trustworthy in all he promises
and faithful in all he does.

 **Singing:** 'Praise to the Lord, Almighty'

*A great hymn of faith from a Service to Celebrate the 60th Anniversary of The Coronation
of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Westminster Abbey (Tuesday, 4th June 2013)*

Almighty and most merciful God,

We have erred and strayed from Your ways like lost sheep.

We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts.

We have offended against Your holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done; and there is nothing good in us.


O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders. Spare those, O God, who confess their faults.

Restore those who are penitent; according to Your promises declared unto men in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Grant that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life; to the glory of His name.

Amen

**PRAYER OF
CONFESSION**

Hymn: 'It us well with my soul' 
A lovely acapella version of a favourite hymn.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Scripture Readings
(NIV)

Old Testament
Gospel

1 Chronicles 12: 1-18
Matthew 19: 16-26



PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

Heavenly Father,

We pray for all people, in all parts of this troubled world, and in all kinds of need. Lord, shine your light upon those who live in danger of violence, persecution, oppression, displacement, loss and any form of injustice.

Lord have mercy.

We pray that the hearts of those who visit the evils of prejudice and greed upon others may be turned from darkness and awakened to the true light in the love and compassion of the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, shine your light upon those who live in fear of famine, disease and destitution, and upon those who live without hope, faith or love, that they may know your true love and the joy of your salvation.

Lord have mercy.

Lord, shine your light upon your Church and upon all people of faith that their love may shine in the darkness, uniting in their endeavours for the common good. May we, in the ministries which are our lives, proclaim the Good News as our faith shines forth.

Lord have mercy.


Lord, shine your light upon those who suffer in mind, body or spirit. Give them courage and hope in their troubles and bring them the joy of your redeeming love. We pray also for those who love and care for them. We pray for those who suffer with debilitating mental and emotional illness. We name in our thoughts any known to us who are in special need of our prayers, in a moment of silence ...


Lord have mercy.


Lord, shine your light upon those who mourn. Jesus Christ is the light of the world, a light which no darkness can quench. We pray for those among us and known to us who are grieving the loss of a loved one. They may have died recently or many years ago, but the separation and grief remain. You turn darkness into light: and in your light shall we see light.

Thank you that we have a high priest, your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who mediates and intercedes for us. We know that through him and the Holy Spirit, we can confidently approach your throne of grace with our prayers and petitions,

Amen.


Hymn: In Christ Alone 
A modern classic brought to us by Celtic Worship

Hymn: 'Be still, my soul' 
*This is to the haunting melody of 'Finlandia' by Sibelius
and once again brought to us by acapella*

Message: 'How to read the Bible for all it's worth' 

Time of Quiet

BENEDICTION

Doxology *Performed by Anthem Lights featuring Selah* 

And now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all. **Amen**

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS: 'How to read the Bible for all it's worth

Today we look at how to interpret Scripture. With Bible literacy generally, and even among Christians, being quite low it is imperative to have some tools to study God's Word; and study it we must if we are to grow into mature disciples of Christ. Our focusing Scripture today is Hebrews 4:12 which reminds us that the Bible is not just ancient words, but the *living* Word of God, with power to address every situation in our lives with life-giving truth. To read with true insight, we encounter not only the God of creation, but what human beings are like, and what *we* are like. Scripture discerns the motives of our hearts and minds underlying all behaviour and action.

If recent American data is anything to go by (and I believe it is), Bible literacy is decreasing. Barna Research, for example, cites that in 2019 48% of 2,000 respondents to a survey were disengaged with the Bible; i.e. they interacted with it infrequently or not at all. It had minimal impact on their lives. Also, Bible Centeredness had decreased from 9% in 2018 to 5% in 2019; and Skepticism is Growing: 35% of respondents report never reading the Bible, which is up 10% from 2011. These are very sobering statistics and trends.

Why is the Bible so hard to read? A few 'hard' facts may help explain. The Bible is actually a collection of 66 books, they have around 40 different authors; there are two 2 main divisions. It was written over a period of 1,500 years, in 3 ancient languages, and comes to us over 2,000 years later, in various translations. There's no doubt *understanding* the Bible is a tall ask; let alone seeing how it applies to life in our times and as individuals. What a text to try and grapple with! Serious Bible study and true understanding and application are going to be hard work when we take stock of the complexity of Scripture and how it has come to us.

Nevertheless, we need to persevere because this is God's Word and the Holy Spirit; the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the giver of life, is with us. We also need a few tools – any tradesperson needs tools and to know how to use them (what builder would use a saw to drive a nail?). I suggest three guiding principles:

1. Consider the literary genre
2. Read each passage in its own context
3. Try to determine the author's intention

Taking each in turn; firstly, genre. This is a word that simply means a type of text. We don't read a telephone book like we do a poem; or a recipe like an essay. There are different types of

texts for different purposes. And so it is with Scripture. We have many different genres of text including: history, narrative (e.g. parables), poetry, law, wisdom, epistles (letters) and prophecy, and this helps us approach a passage having some idea what to expect. For example, poetry uses metaphor and simile to paint word pictures, as does prophecy. Good poetry helps us imagine and reflect using word pictures and comparing with things we can relate to, e.g. a meaningful life is *like* a tree planted by the water and bearing fruit in season (a simile).

Sometimes certain sayings can be a real problem, as in Jesus' description of the camel through the eye of the needle (our second reading). The 'Eye of the Needle' was the name of a narrow gateway into Jerusalem. And since camels were heavily loaded with goods and riders, they would need to be un-loaded to pass through. Therefore, the analogy is that a rich man would have to similarly unload his material possessions in order to enter heaven, which would be no easy thing to do! We use similar saying when we say things like 'good as gold' and quote the Tui's (beer) advertisement, 'Yeah, right!' We know what these things mean, but someone in future times would have to try and work them out.

The second principle avoids the bias of reading a single verse. Chronicles, for example, is full of hard-to-read names and could easily pose problems. But, it helps to understand a few things about the life and times.

1st and 2nd Chronicles are history books telling the story of David's line and various other kings, up to the return from exile. They need to be read alongside Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings. In today's reading, David has escaped from Saul and finds himself in a city called Ziklag in a region where the Philistines lived. The ruler of the area was happy to have David, a famous Israelite warrior, defect to his land, but David was only pretending loyalty. He surrounds himself with great fighting men from the tribe of Benjamin. Those names – although virtually unpronounceable to us – have meaning and weave the individuals concerned into the wider story. Note too, in v.18 that the Spirit came upon Amasai (a nephew of David's) and he breaks out into a spontaneous song of joy and support for David. The historical context helps us grasp the bigger picture.

The final principle is to try and determine the author's intention. We can ask several questions, e.g. Who is the writer? What were the times like? What were they wanting to communicate, and who was the original audience or readership? Why was this written? Answers require research but we learn much in the process.

If we ask these questions of our Chronicles text we start to get a bigger picture. Ezra is credited as author. He was a Jewish priest and scribe, so his focus was to record how well or poorly the Israelites maintained proper worship during the various monarchies. These were turbulent times when many of the kings disregarded God's law and drifted into terrible idolatry. In his early days, David was a great king and warrior, and also faithful in worship. The intention was to instruct future generations and encourage them to learn from the past and see how God remains faithful even when his people do not.

There are many more tools to discuss but the challenge this week is to apply these points to your own selected passage of Scripture.

NOTICES

If you are joining us at home, our online services will now be less frequent. We invite you to come and share in our services every Sunday at 10.00 am at 5 Downing Street, Hoon Hay, Christchurch. However, do continue to keep informed and connected by checking our website, and on Facebook. You can also recap earlier messages on our YouTube Channel.

'mainly music' resumes this week. You may know a young family who would like to come and join in, if so, please contact the office for more information.

PASTOR'S REFLECTION

As you will know from previous reflections, I am doing a lot of thinking, reflecting and praying about how we can move ahead in the post-COVID environment. There are plenty of ideas out there, but every church context is unique meaning there can be no set formula, or 'one-size-fits-all' prescription. We can certainly pick up suggestions from sources and there are patterns and trends we can discern from. However, in every case we have to wait, pray, observe, strategise, and then act. Any real growth can only come when the Spirit moves and convicts people, but we can position ourselves in readiness.

Here's one interesting list entitled '10 Things Any Church Can Do to Grow':

1. Prioritise Children
2. Get a Website
3. Be Friendly
4. Pursue Excellence
5. Become Sensitive
6. Act Bigger
7. Stay Biblical
8. Encourage Inviting
9. Stop Fighting
10. Start Praying

Some points may not be self-evident. Number 4 for example, means doing the best we can with what we have. It's not about having vast amounts of money, talent, and resources; but rather, using what we already have of these things. Similarly, Number 6 is not about delusional plans of grandeur, but adopting a mindset that thinks and acts with growth in mind. Number 8 is also about mindset and being intentionally and genuinely inviting to all; and Number 9; a rather blunt reminder to sort any disagreements out before they manifest. Being unified even in differences is a powerful witness and a hallmark of mature discipleship.

How do you think we are going in relation to this list? We are doing some of these things well, in others, a start has been made, while we are not yet 'out of the blocks' in relation to some points. I invite and encourage you to think through this list and reflect on what you think needs to be done. Then, please pray and share your ideas with members of the Parish Council. We need to hear what you are thinking! One thing is for sure: if we keep thinking as we always have, we will end up with the same results and outcomes.

Someone has said 'faith' is spelled R-I-S-K and I think they may be right!

Have a good week – keep in touch and stay safe.

Michael