



Church in a Bag

February 2022

Dubbo Uniting Church
64-66 Church Street
Dubbo NSW 2830
p: 6885 4200

e: dubbouca@bigpond.com
w: dubbo.uca.org.au

Be humbly assertive
compassionately **tough**
prayerfully active
and if others should scorn your faith
go on your way **rejoicing**
that you **share** the fortune of Jesus.

Bruce Prewer

Contents

Sunday 6 February	page 3
Sunday 13 February	page 7
Sunday 20 February	page 11
Sunday 27 February	page 16



Sunday 6 February

Gathering

Matthew 23, verse 27 says “Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings”. This metaphor is one of calling and protection. God has gone to extraordinary lengths to call us to himself. I haven’t been attacked by a hen with chicks, but I have been attacked by clucky hens and I am surprised by the serious way they protect their eggs. At the hint of danger chicks run to the warning cluck of the mother hen and nestle under her wings.

Jesus knows the dangers Christians face in the world, and he calls us to follow him so that he can protect and equip us. Let us come to him today responding to his loving call with thanks and praise.

Preparation

In our Communion Liturgy we say, “It is right to give our thanks and praise”. In this week’s Psalm (138), David says in verses 1 to 5:

“Thank you!

*Everything in me says Thank you!
Angels listen as I sing my thanks.*



I kneel in worship facing your holy temple and say it again: Thank you!

*Thank you for your love
thank you for your faithfulness.
Most holy is your name, most holy
is your Word.*

*The moment I called out
you stepped in; you made my life
large with strength.*

When they hear what you have to say, God, all earth’s kings will say thank you. They’ll sing of what you’ve done: How great the glory of God! And here’s why: God, high above, sees far below; no matter the distance, he knows everything about us.”

Reading

Luke 5:1-11

“Calling of the First Disciples”

Reflection

Jesus is practical. Luke tells us that as the crowd pressed around Jesus, he looked for a method to

be able to talk and be heard. As the crowd were anxious to hear him Jesus got into a boat to address them all. The boat just happened to belong to Simon. After speaking to the crowd, he said to Simon “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch”. Note the way Simon calls Jesus “Master”. Is this because Simon recognises Jesus is special? Simon then goes on to say

“... we’ve been fishing hard all night and haven’t caught even a minnow. But if you say so, I’ll let out the nets”. Simon didn’t say it’s

a waste of time, or that’s ridiculous, or it won’t work, or we are too tired and need breakfast. Although they had already tried, they went again to the same fishing area, with the same boat, same nets but different timing. Being amazed at the size of the catch, they had to call on the other disciples to bring another boat and the enormous haul nearly sunk both boats.



Back on the shore Simon and the other disciples realised the significance of the event and were in awe and overwhelmed. Simon Peter fell on his knees before Jesus and said “I am a sinner. I cannot handle this holiness”. Jesus replied “Fear not. From now on you will be fishing for men and women” and the response was to leave their fishing gear on the beach and follow Jesus.

If only we could all be as obedient to Jesus’ call. Do we sometimes think it’s a waste of time, it won’t work, or I’ve already tried that? These all seem like practical reasons to not keep trying.

God equips the called, he doesn’t call the equipped!

Prayer

Great God of wonders. We thank you for your loving patience. You have been calling us since the time of Adam and Eve. Help us to see what is important in life; to see more from your perspective rather than the selfish world view that surrounds us.

May we, like Simon, say “Master, because you say so” and respond by doing what you ask of us, remembering that you added “Do not be afraid”. Help us to be apprentices like the disciples.

These things we ask in and through the name of our Lord Jesus.

Amen

Asong to sing or read

Jesus calls us o’er the tumult (TIS 589)

Jesus calls us o’er the tumult
of our life’s wild, restless sea
day by day his voice invites me
saying “Christian, follow me!”

As the first disciples heard it
by the Galilean lake
turned from home and toil and
kindred
leaving all for his dear sake.

Jesus calls us from the worship
of the vain world’s golden store
from each idol that would keep us
saying “Christian, love me more.”

In our joys and in our sorrows
days of toil and hours of ease
still he calls, in cares and pleasures
“Christian, love me more than
these.”

Jesus calls us! In your mercy
Savior, help us hear your call
give our hearts to your obedience
serve and love you best of all.

Music and lyrics in the Public Domain.

ABlessing

Remember that the God of
wonders goes ahead, and his spirit
is with us as we serve. Love and
peace be with you.

Amen

*Thanks to David Pattinson
for preparing today’s reflection
and prayers.*



Sunday 13 February

A Gathering

Dear Lord and Father, as we gather with you at this time of reflection, we acknowledge that being with you is our safe harbour. We ask that you strengthen us, restore us, and inspire us with your love. Fill us with peace on our journey with you. We welcome your love and grace of your spirit at all times.

Amen

Preparation

What are known as the Beatitudes probably would come in fourth in the “framed scripture hangings on the wall category” - just behind the Ten Commandments, Psalm 23 and the Lord’s Prayer. But in terms of what the Beatitudes require in obedience, few of us come close to truly living them out. Our notion of success appears to be turned upside down.

But consider this, for at first consideration they did turn everything *upside down*. But, with a second reading we could understand that they turn everything *right side up*. The first time they seem impossible. The second time nothing else is



possible. The beatitudes are not a chart for Christian duty. They are a charter for Christian liberty - the freedom to be God’s word in action.

First Reading

1 Corinthians 15:12-20

“But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead”

Reflection

A little boy and his father were driving down a country road on a beautiful spring afternoon. Suddenly out of nowhere a bee flew in the car window. Since the little boy was deathly allergic to bee stings, he became petrified. The father quickly reached out, grabbed the bee, squeezed it in his hand, and then released it. As soon as he let it go, the young son became frantic once again as it buzzed by the little boy.

His father saw his panic-stricken face. Once again, the father reached out his hand, but this time he pointed to his hand. There still

stuck in his skin was the stinger of the bee. "Do you see this?" he said. "You don't need to be afraid anymore. I've taken the sting for you."

And this is the message of Easter. We do not need to be afraid of death anymore. Christ faced death for us. And by His victory, we are saved from sin. Christ has taken the sting! First Corinthians 15:22 says: *"For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive"*.

Christ has taken the stinger for us. He has risen! Fear is gone. New life is ours.

From an Illustration by James S Hewett

Second Reading

Luke 6:17-26

"Looking at his disciples, he said...."

Reflection

- Blessed are *you* who are poor...
- Blessed are *you* who hunger now...
- Blessed are *you* who weep now...

- Blessed are *you* when people hate you, exclude you and defame you".

Here are the elements of sacrificial living in the steps of Christ. To follow in Christ means that we sacrifice what wealth we have for others. We remove basic food from our overstuffed pantries to give to the community kitchens and church food parcels for the hungry. We reorganise our time to attend and stand with the bereaved, the dis-spirited, the marginalised, and the rejected. We give mercy and restrict our judgements. We seek to resolve differences, not create divisions through fear or intolerance.



Consider this: *Jesus died penniless.* Roman soldiers cast lots to divide among themselves Jesus' only possessions - the clothes on his back. He looked at his disciples

and said, “Blessed are you who are poor”.

Jesus died hungry. There is no record that Jesus had anything to eat on the day of his death. What we call The Last Supper on Thursday evening may very well have been Jesus’ last meal. He died on the cross Friday at sunset with an empty stomach. Looking at his disciples he said, “Blessed are you who hunger now”.

Jesus died weeping. After his last supper Jesus headed for the Garden and there in that Olive Grove we call Gethsemane he prayed and he wept. He told his disciples you are blessed when you weep.

Jesus died being hated. Caiaphas, the greatest religious authority in Israel, called him a blasphemer. The crowds wanted a murderer freed before they would see Jesus pardoned. And his disciples deserted him.

Perhaps, “Blessed are the poor” really covers it all: the financially poor; the spiritually poor; the unloved poor; the abused poor; the bereaved poor; the excluded

poor; the judged poor; the scared poor.

The Beatitudes remind us that to be with God and his kingdom, we are required to achieve a kind of compassion that stands in awe of what the poor (in all forms of human damage) must carry, rather than judge how they carry it.

Perhaps there is a new Beatitude: “Blessed are those who care, for theirs is the Kingdom of God”.

A song to sing or read

Beauty for Brokenness (TIS 690)

Beauty for brokenness
Hope for despair
Lord in the suffering
this is our prayer
Bread for the children
Justice, joy, peace
Sunrise to sunset
Your Kingdom increase.

Shelter for fragile lives
Cures for their ills
Work for the craftsmen
Trade for their skills
Land for the dispossessed
Rights for the weak
Voices to plead the cause
of those who can’t speak.

Refrain

God of the poor
Friend of the weak
Give us compassion we pray
Melt our cold hearts
Let tears fall like rain
Come, change our love
from a spark to a flame.

Refuge from cruel wars
Havens from fear
Cities for sanctuary
Freedoms to share
Peace to the killing-fields
Scorched earth to green
Christ for the bitterness
His cross for the pain **(Refrain)**

Rest for the ravaged earth
Oceans and streams
Plundered and poisoned
Our future, our dreams
Lord, end our madness
Carelessness, greed
Make us content with
the things that we need **(Refrain)**

Lighten our darkness
Breathe on this flame
Until your justice burns
brightly again
Until the nations
learn of your ways
Seek your salvation
and bring you their praise **(Refrain)**

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Closing Prayer


God, call us to love and serve
others and strengthen us to deny
self-interest and small
mindedness.

Open our hearts and minds to the
blessings from you in service to
others and steadfastly redirect us
when we pursue our own way and
seek to prosper only ourselves.

Good and gracious God, you are
always ready to hear us when we
come to you in prayer. We give
you thanks for our many blessings
and offer our resolve to act in
accordance with what you have
taught us.

Open our eyes to your care for us.
Help us always to be grateful.
Increase our faith in your
unconditional care, and our desire
to strengthen our relationship
with you. We pray in the name of
Jesus Christ, our intercessor and
Lord.

Amen



*Thanks to Dan Eaton
for preparing today's reflection
and prayers.*

Sunday 20 February

A Gathering

Mighty God, everything you do reveals your glory and majesty. Open our eyes to see what you are doing in our lives. Let us marvel at your good gifts and your wise provision.

Your acts are amazing Lord. We cannot comprehend the number of blessings you pour out on us from day to day. As we gather in thoughts with you now, we pray that you would fill our hearts, our minds, and our souls. Transform us Lord and make us more like you. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen

Preparation

God is committed to drawing disparate people into a community founded on his values. From Jesus in Luke's Gospel and Paul in 1 Corinthians we are urged to focus upon ourselves as active spiritual bodies for the work of the Lord. Jesus speaks to us to step past our human weaknesses replacing that fear with hope; that hate with love; that revenge with forgiveness.



Paul reminds us that God did not provide us with a human body that's meant only for decay. Our human body is a vessel towards lasting Spiritual life. There is absolute purpose to our presence here on earth to give ourselves fully for the work of the Lord.

First Reading

1 Corinthians 15:35-54

Reflection

How Are You?

A common greeting of these days is, "How are you?". My usual reply is, "Fine, and how are you?". I frequently give this reply to my friends. They'd be dismayed and bored if I tried to tell them the truth, because this physical vehicle which I call my body is getting worn and sore and a bit wobbly and while my friends silently recognize it and make mental note, "He is having us on there", few would ever call me out on my little lie.

This rapidly aging pre-50's model is getting into bad condition. The steering gear is so worn and wobbly that I must grip tightly to the steering wheel to keep it from running off the road. The headlights are getting dimmer by the year - it seems that they shine only about a half or a third as much as they used to. The horn is a mere squawk. I only get about a tenth of the speed that it gave a few years ago, and as for climbing hills or even gentler slopes, the less said the better. It is going to have to be junked one of these days. But the real person who lives inside this jalopy is a different story. God is much more real, and his truth shines more brightly.

The companionship of Christ is more constant through his Holy Spirit, and he holds out a hope for a new model, after this jalopy is junked.

This, I think, is what Paul had in mind when he spoke of the reward that God, the righteous Judge, would give him on that day. He also spoke of this to the Philippians about his own body which was in a hazardous state: "I rejoice, and I intend to rejoice. I hope all of you will rejoice with

me". Paul labelled his new model spiritual and eternal, as compared with our present model, physical and decaying.

This then is the lively hope that I can have. I know I do not deserve a new model, and if God, the righteous Judge, determines that I should not have it, then that is all right, too. In any case, Righteous Judge is his middle name, sandwiched between his first and last names, both of which are LOVE. So, I am fine, thank you. How are you?

**Adapted from a message
by Dr Joseph Leroy Dodds**



A song to sing or read

You Make Beautiful Things

All this pain
I wonder if I'll ever find my way
I wonder if my life will really
change, at all.
All this earth
Could all that is lost ever be
found?
Could a garden come out from this
ground, at all?

Refrain

You make beautiful things
You make beautiful things out of
the dust
You make beautiful things
You make beautiful things out of
us.

All around
Hope is springing up from this old
ground
Out of chaos life is being found in
you.

Refrain x 2

You make me new
You are making me new
You make me new
You are making me new.

Refrain x 2

You make me new
You are making me new.
You make me new
You are making me new.

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Second Reading

Luke 6:27-38

Reflection

Verses 37-38: Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

Many years ago, a senior executive of a major manufacturing company made a wrong decision that cost the company more than \$5 million. The company was run by a well, plain talking, no nonsense Chairman, known to be forthright in handling poor decisions made by those who worked for him.



It was well known that the executives of the company were finding various ingenious ways of avoiding the Chairman, lest his wrath descend on their heads.

On this occasion, the company's Chief Executive Officer (CEO), a partner in the company, was scheduled to see the Chairman that day. He kept the appointment, even though he was prepared to listen to a long harangue against the man who made the error in judgment.

When the CEO entered the office the powerful head of the manufacturing empire was bent over his desk busily writing with a pencil on a pad of paper. The CEO stood silently, not wishing to interrupt. After a few minutes the Chairman looked up.

"Oh, it's you, Chief," he said calmly. "I suppose you've heard about our loss?" The CEO said that he had.

"I've been thinking it over" the Chairman said, "and before I ask the man in to discuss the matter, I've been making some notes." The CEO leaned over the desk cautiously to see what had been written. What he read was this:

Across the top of the page was written, *Points in favour of Mr X*. There followed a long list of the man's virtues, including a brief description of how he had helped the company make the right decision on three separate occasions that had earned many times the cost of his recent error. That CEO never forgot that

accounting lesson. A lesson that is reflected in today's passage.

What if, instead of taking out our anger on someone, we force ourselves to sit down and thoughtfully compile a list of that person's



*Thanks to Dan Eaton
for preparing today's reflection
and prayers.*

good points - before we confront them? How often, I wonder, would we then see the matter in its true perspective and keep our temper under control. There may be no telling how many times this habit would have prevented you or me from committing one of the costliest mistakes we can make. Such as losing our temper, responding with hatred, or rejection or revenge. Now let us go and do likewise.

Closing Prayer

Faithful Father, we begin each day by giving you thanks. Your love endures forever. It never fails. Though there are many ways in which we have failed, we have not exceeded the supply of your mercy and grace.

We thank you for revealing yourself to us through your word. As we have reflected on your teachings today, we pray that we would hear your voice. We ask that your Holy Spirit would be at work, opening our ears to hear and our hearts to receive your word.

May we be transformed into your likeness. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen**



27 February

Gathering

*Removing the veil –
or taking off the blinkers*



We come together as the People of the Word: the Word that is Christ Jesus. In the story for today we reflect on how Jesus set about removing

the veil that was ritually used to cover, conceal, and hide God from the sight of ordinary people. We also reflect on the challenge to us to remove our own veils: the ones that prevent us from understanding what the readings today are about.

Preparation

Remember that for the Jewish people of Jesus' time, the Lord Yahweh belonged to them alone – theirs was not a God for all. In the transfiguration of Jesus, in the reflection on that event by Paul, we not only see the stripping away of the coverings, the hiding away of God in the holy of holies, we also see a transfiguration of God.

Also remember that at the moment of Jesus' death, the great veil in the Temple that closed off



the Holy of Holies to humankind was torn in two! Symbolically, God was freed to be with all people in all worlds.

Readings

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2
Luke 9:28-36, (37-43a)

Reflection

Moses went up onto a mountain to meet God and came back down not only with the tablets of stone but also with his face so transfigured with light that when he met the people, he had to cover his face, lest they be afraid.

When Jesus went up the mountain with three of his disciples he went to pray. The same things happened to Jesus, but he did not draw a veil over it.

Initially when the Disciples proposed to build houses for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, they were suddenly lost in a fog, and they were frightened. When the fog cleared Jesus stood alone. There was no more talk of houses.

No more talk of shutting Jesus away from the world. And then, back down on the plain, Jesus set about continuing his healing ministry.

Paul makes it clear that we all need to remove the veils that prevent our

understanding and accepting the essential truths of the Jesus story – that in Jesus a new covenant was replacing the old. It's not that Paul rejected the Law and the Old Covenant but that he saw them fulfilled in Jesus.

Paul is making the claim that the old covenant, the old “good news,” cannot be properly understood and accepted until the veil is removed. Then we ourselves with faces unveiled will finally know the glory of God. Of course, at this point the veil is both a reference again to the Moses story and a metaphor for hearts and minds that are set free by the Holy Spirit.



At the same time the essential claim for Christ is an essential claim. It is particular and quite uncompromising. While Paul does

not reject the Old Testament and the old covenant, he does argue for a particular reading of it: one that is possible only in the Spirit,

who brings freedom from blindness, and veiled minds. These are not simple matters for us to come to grips with, but these issues ought to inform us as we engage with this text carefully and prayerfully.

Again, remember that at the moment of Jesus' death, the great veil in the Temple that closed off the Holy of Holies to humankind was torn in two. Symbolically, God – the wild God, untamed, loving, challenging - was freed to be with all people in all worlds so that we too could free ourselves from our veils.

Asong to sing or read

Lord, let me see (TiS 681)

Lord, let me see
see more and more
See the beauty of a person
not the colour of the skin
See the faces of the homeless
with no one to take them in
See discouragement because she'll
never win
See the face of our Lord in the
pain.
Lord, let me see.

Lord, let me hear
hear more and more
Hear the sound of great rejoicing
hear a person barely sigh
Hear the ring of truth and
hollowness of those who live a lie
Hear the wail of starving people
who will die
Hear the voice of our Lord in the
cry.
Lord, let me hear.

Lord, let me care
care more and more
Care for those who feel the
loneliness, for those who have no
say



Care for friends who have no job and
find it hard to face the day
Care for those with whom we sing
and work and pray
And in care, Jesus Christ will be
found.
Lord, let me care.

Lord, let me learn
learn more and more
Learn that what I know is just a
speck of what there is to know
Learn from listening to my
neighbour when I'd rather speak
and go
Learn that as we live in faith and
trust we grow
Learn to see, hear, and care, with
our Lord.
Lord, let me learn.

Lord, let me love
love more and more
Love the loveless and the fragile,
help them be what they can be
Love the way that I would like
them to be looking after me
For to know you is to love them
and be free
And in love Jesus Christ will be
found.
Lord, let me love.

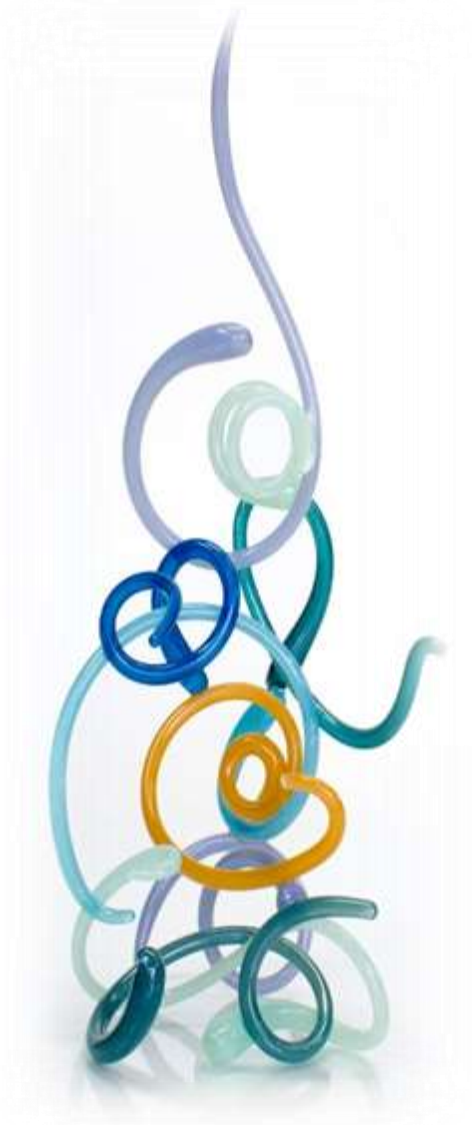
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Closing Prayer

Let us go to the mountain
to the place where the land
meets the sky.
Where the earth
touches the heavens.
To the place of meetings
to the place of mists
to the places of voices and
conversations
to the place of listening.
We open our eyes and we see
Jesus, not casting us off
but leading us down
leading us out
to ministry, to people.

Your love endures forever.
We open our ears
and we hear your voice
'This is my beloved Son
listen to him!'
and we give you thanks.
Bill Loader, adapted

*Thanks to Shirley Colless
for preparing today's reflection
and prayers.*





Dubbo Uniting Church
64-66 Church Street
Dubbo NSW 2830
p: 6885 4200
e: dubbouca@bigpond.com
w: dubbo.uca.org.au