

**Sunday December 11, 2022**

**Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church**

**Welcome & Prayer**

“LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory in the heavens.

2 Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger. 3 When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, 4 what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? 5 You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honour. 6 You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet: 7 all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild, 8 the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. 9 LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!”

Let's pray. Dear Lord Almighty, how majestic is your name in all the earth. This day we wish the whole world would recognise your name, would recognise your power and grace and justice and mercy. We admit that we don't always remember how great you are. We don't always live in line with your holiness.

We don't always rely upon your power. We don't always listen to your Word. So please forgive us. And place your Holy Spirit within us so that today we might worship you with heart, soul mind and body. We might be renewed in our faith. That we might desire to humble ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus each day. Be with us today and especially throughout this service, for we need you today more than ever. And we ask these things in Jesus' name Amen.

**Song – Almighty Maker Almighty Maker (YouTube)**

1. Who but the Lord set the bound'ries of light  
2. Who but the Lord could have dreamed of the plan  
Hung the stars in the night? That would save fallen man?  
Who but the Lord drew the face on the moon  
Who but the Lord washes rebels with blood  
Made the planets to move? Making mercy a flood?  
Who but the Lord tells the clouds  
Who but the Lord could give life through a cross  
When to pour. Thunder to roar? Rescuing us?  
Amazing are Your works  
Amazing are Your ways  
Chorus  
Almighty Maker  
You command heaven and earth  
Bridge  
By the power of Your Word  
All things are from You  
Be praised forever  
All things are through You  
Almighty Maker O God, the great I AM  
All creation sings of You  
All things are for You  
Glory fills all that You do  
All things are to You  
Be praised forever, ever, evermore O God, the great I AM

## **Bible Reading – Acts 27:1-26 (NIV)**

When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment. 2 We boarded a ship from Adramyttium about to sail for ports along the coast of the province of Asia, and we put out to sea. Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was with us.

3 The next day we landed at Sidon; and Julius, in kindness to Paul, allowed him to go to his friends so they might provide for his needs. 4 From there we put out to sea again and passed to the lee of Cyprus because the winds were against us. 5 When we had sailed across the open sea off the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia. 6 There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy and put us on board. 7 We made slow headway for many days and had difficulty arriving off Cnidus. When the wind did not allow us to hold our course, we sailed to the lee of Crete, opposite Salmone. 8 We moved along the coast with difficulty and came to a place called Fair Havens, near the town of Lasea. 9 Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Day of Atonement. So Paul warned them, 10 “Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also.” 11 But the centurion, instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship. 12 Since the harbor was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix & winter there. This was a harbor in Crete, facing both southwest and northwest. 13 When a gentle south wind began to blow, they saw their opportunity; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. 14 Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the Northeaster, swept down from the island. 15 The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along. 16 As we passed to the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure, 17 so the men hoisted it aboard. Then they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Because they were afraid, they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along. 18 We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard. 19 On the third day, they threw the ship’s tackle overboard with their own hands. 20 When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved. 21 After they had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: “Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. 22 But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. 23 Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me 24 and said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.’ 25 So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. 26 Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island.”

## **Announcements**

Focus for December – Christmas. Life is manic at the moment and that is why we need the manger! In the midst of the busyness of life, if we pause for a while, we see God slowly going about his business, bringing about our salvation. Conception. Birth. Growing up. 30 years. Everything happens pretty slowly at first before Jesus begins

to step out of the Nazareth shadows. And if we stop and reflect on that it might help us when our world moves past us at a break neck speed. So stop. Ponder. Wonder. Worship. Maybe the greatest gift of Christmas is the opportunity to step off the tread mill and be reminded of what is truly important. Don't forget to that this year!

### **Christmas Services**

- Sat 24/12 Christmas Eve service – 6pm
- Sun 25/12 Christmas Day service – 8am (Swansea) and 9:30am (Charlestown) Vanuatu. Please keep praying for those going on a short-term mission trip to Vanuatu in January. There are seven of them, Cheryl & Caleb Gillard, Jannah Pittman, Juliette McAlister, Luke Wigney, Rebecca Causley and Stephen Taylor If you would like to sign up for prayer updates or support the cost of materials for our projects, please see either Stephen T or Cheryl G. Gather Round. Many thanks to all those who worked so hard to make last night such a great night.

. This morning is our time to celebrate what we have learned this year at Kids Church and to thank God for all that he given us this year. This means the kids will perform some items in Church before receiving their prizes and having their own celebration. A special thanks to all the teachers who have spent so much time and effort in teaching our kids. And to Suzie who each year does a mammoth task of coordinating our Kids Church programme and teachers.

**Giving.** Would you like to give regularly to the work of the church so that our ministries can be sustained or even grow? If so, the easiest way is by setting up a direct debit from your bank account. You just decide you much you would like to give on a weekly basis and then organise that amount to go to our Church each week. If you would like help to set it up then please speak to Letitia. Otherwise, the Church Bank details are Charlestown Eastlakes Presbyterian BSB 062-829 Account 10194850

**TEAR Fund.** During the Christmas services we will have a retiring offering for the work of TEAR Fund. As a Church we believe that Christmas is a great time to think about those less fortunate than ourselves. TEAR Fund is a practical expression of a Christians love for the poor. Please support it as you are able.

**School Holidays.** NSW School holidays begin later on this week which means that many of our regular activities in the Church will go into recess very soon. Before they do can we take some time to thank the leaders of SPARKLERS, CRECHE, KIDS CHURCH, IMPACT, our HOME GROUPS, MISSION COMMITTEE, PASTORAL CARE COMMITTEE, EVENTS TEAM, WOMEN'S COMMITTEE, COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT and our ELDERS. That is almost 100 people!

**THANK YOU SO MUCH.** We ask the Lord to bless you in the same way that you have blessed us.

**CHUCH CAMP.** 3-5th March 2023. Early bird ends next Sunday 18th December. Discipleship Course: In 2023 we are starting a weekly home group focussed on discipleship. It's designed for Christians of any age who are seeking to go deeper and further as a disciple of Jesus, using material created specifically for this purpose. If you would like to know more, please chat with Stephen Taylor or John and Miranda Harris.

### **Prayer Points for 11th December 2022**

Psalm 34:8 “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him.”

**Pray for Kuwait:** • Pray for God to use His unlimited resources to make Himself known to Muslims. Pray for the salvation of Kuwaitis studying in nations where the Gospel is openly proclaimed. Pray for expatriate believers to be fearless speakers of truth.

**Pray for our government:** Pray they will seek peace and wisdom. Pray they will defend truth and righteousness.

**Pray for Christmas season:** And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people.” Pray that many Australians will meet the Christ of Christmas. Pray that many would believe in Him and find true joy and peace.

### **Bible Reading – Acts 28:11-31**

11 After three months we put out to sea in a ship that had wintered in the island, it was an Alexandrian ship with the figurehead of the twin gods Castor & Pollux. 12 We put in at Syracuse and stayed there three days. 13 From there we set sail and arrived at Rhegium. The next day the south wind came up, and on the following day we reached Puteoli. 14 There we found some brothers and sisters who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. 15 The brothers and sisters there had heard that we were coming, and they travelled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. At the sight of these people Paul thanked God and was encouraged. 16 When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him. 17 Three days later he called together the local Jewish leaders. When they had assembled, Paul said to them: “My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. 18 They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. 19 The Jews objected, so I was compelled to make an appeal to Caesar. I certainly did not intend to bring any charge against my own people. 20 For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.” 21 They replied, “We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of our people who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you. 22 But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect.” 23 They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers.

Which is what he does next. “For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. 31 He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ— with all boldness and without hindrance!” Caesar Nero is in no hurry to see the apostle Paul so Paul makes good use of his time by proclaiming the gospel to all who would come and hear it. To the Jews. To the Gentiles. To the Roman guard.

Listen to how he put it in the book of Philippians 1 12 “Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. 13 As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14 And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the

more to proclaim the gospel without fear.”

At the centre of the mighty Roman empire people are hearing about the gospel of the Lord Jesus. And some are being converted. And then these merchants and soldiers and converts are going throughout the Roman world and will take the message of Jesus with them. No wonder Paul wanted to go to Rome so much. And because Paul was in chains, others filled his spot. They were emboldened to preach, to reason, to debate and to boldly declare the word of God to all and sundry. Because Paul is no longer there, others step into the breach.

And so, we end the book of Acts with the gospel going to the ends of the earth as Jesus had directed. We see that Rome is fully evangelised. We see that Rome has been trained with a missionary zeal. We see that the word of God goes out “with all boldness & without hindrance!” Yes, Paul’s feet are bound but his mouth was open for Jesus. He might be chained but the word of God is unchained. He might be hindered from travelling but God is certainly not hindered at all. For the word of God goes out with all boldness and without hindrance!

### **For now it is Transitioning from Rome**

For really the book of Acts seems to stop in a strange place, doesn’t it? Did Paul get to preach the gospel to Caesar? It doesn’t say. Was he executed or released? It doesn’t say! What happens to the gospel after this?

It doesn’t say! It is a bit like one of those TV shows that ends with the words TO BE CONTINUED. For the story of the spread of the gospel will continue and continues to continue as Paul fades from view and others take his place.

You see Paul is not the real hero of this book, God is. You know, if Luke had ended The Acts of The Apostles with Paul being executed, our focus would be upon the Apostle Paul. But Paul wouldn’t want that. The focus must be upon the gospel! The focus must be upon the purpose of God. The focus must be upon God’s rule and reign.

So, do we know what happens to Paul? We can piece together some clues from his writing. You see in those two years, Paul writes four epistles, the letters to Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon.

Letters that helped the spread of the gospel ever since. You see Paul’s trials has helped shape him. Given him a knowledge base that has been used by God for generations to come. Nothing is wasted when handed over to Him.

Now the book of Acts says that he was imprisoned in Rome for two years. Now if we believe the promise of God in Acts 27, Paul would have testified to Caesar. And it seems that after that he was released for a period of 2-3 years. During this time, he writes the letters to Timothy and Titus. He also must have done some travelling in this time because he leaves Titus in Crete (Titus 1:5), he leaves Trophimus sick in Miletus (2 Tim 4:20) and he organises for Timothy to minister in Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3). He also planned to meet some of his helpers at Nicopolis (Titus 3:12-13) and maybe he even got to travel to Spain as he hoped.

It looks like he was then arrested again. Chained in a prison cell and tradition tells us he was beheaded in Rome a couple of years later. He had fought the good fight. He had finished the race. He had kept the faith.

And he was now to receive the crown of righteousness from Jesus Himself. And Luke could have included all those details but chose not to.

Because the way that he leaves his book is open ended. The gospel is not chained. The Holy Spirit will continue to do his work and so it the Church that will write Acts chapters 29 & beyond. You and I are writing those chapters today. Right here, right now in Lake Macquarie, the Acts of the Apostles, the march of the Church goes on. Now we are not actually writing Scripture, but we are applying the Scriptures to our local environment.

We are the ones who should be showing courage and faith. We are the ones who are men of women of thanks & of prayer. We are still explaining, declaring, convincing, challenging and preaching the gospel.

Despite the opposition, despite the difficulties, despite the problems we face we are called to continue on in the very footsteps of Paul. He has gone but his God continues to march on, ensuing the gospel goes to the ends of the earth.

Paul says "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Phil 4:13) And that is also true of us today. We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. We can take up the baton that Paul is handing us today. We can continue to fight the good fight. We can run the race until the end. We can keep the faith. And we can pass it on others.

But we can also train the next generation. We can witness to a lost generation. We can invest in our family so they can be believers for generations. And we can support the work of mission so that the whole world might know what we know, that Jesus Christ is Lord of all.

It was Spurgeon who after preaching through the book of Acts said "What was begun with great heroism ought to be continue today with ardent zeal, since we are assured that the same Lord is mighty to carry on His heavenly designs."

Or in the words of Winston Churchill "Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is perhaps the end of the beginning." For in the book of Acts, Peter preached the kingdom in Jerusalem, Philip proclaimed Christ in Samaria, Paul announced Jesus around the Roman Empire, but where will you go? Where will we as a Church go? The word is going out without hindrance which means that you and I need to spread it with all boldness.

### **Song – Facing a Task Unfinished Facing A Task Unfinished (YouTube)**

1. Facing a task unfinished 3. We bear the torch that flaming  
That drives us to our knees Fell from the hands of those  
A need that undiminished Who gave their lives proclaiming  
Rebukes our slothful ease That Jesus died and rose

We, who rejoice to know Thee Ours is the same commission  
Renew before Thy throne The same glad message ours  
The solemn pledge we owe Thee Fired by the same ambition  
To go and make Thee known To Thee we yield our powers  
2. Where other Lords beside Thee 4. O Father who sustained them  
Hold their unhindered sway O Spirit who inspired  
Where forces that defied Thee Saviour, whose love constrained them  
Defy Thee still today To toil with zeal untired  
With none to heed their crying From cowardice defend us  
For life and love and light From lethargy awake!  
Unnumbered souls are dying Forth on Thine errands send us  
And pass into the night To labour for Thy sake  
Chorus: We go to all the world  
With kingdom hope unfurled  
No other name has power to save  
But Jesus Christ The Lord

**Benediction.** For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!