

Sunday May 3, 2020

Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church

Welcome (Steve Mc)

Welcome everyone to our service this morning. Although the COVID-19 pandemic means we can't come together in the same building, it is wonderful to be able to worship our Lord and rejoice that we are all part of God's family, for as it says in Ephesians

You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household.

And the COVID-19 pandemic has also shown us the best of people and the worst of people. We have seen people fighting over toilet paper, people failing to adhere to social distancing requirements, people attending parties, escaping to rural areas, or people escaping quarantine for their own selfish desires. But through it all, we have seen or heard stories of many wonderful selfless acts of kindness, with people doing things that they would not ordinarily do. This includes getting groceries or medical supplies for others, leaving encouraging notes for their neighbours, children writing notes and drawing pictures for those in retirement villages, musicians giving free concerts, and who can forget 99-year old British Captain Tom Moore's efforts to raise money for the NHS.

And as we look at the second half of 1 Peter chapter 1 this morning, we will see that this illustrates how God wants us to live our lives. For God has shown his great love for us, through redeeming our lives through the precious blood of His son. So, we are to turn away from the evil and selfish desires of the world, and instead, we are to show sincere love for our brothers and sisters. And we will find out later this morning, how we can do this. But now, let us pray.

Prayer (Steve Mc)

Dear Lord, Although we cannot physically be together this morning, we rejoice that we are all able to feel your presence everywhere. We rejoice that you are all-seeing and all-knowing, and that your comfort and strength is limitless. We marvel at your might and power, that you are in control, and that you love each and every one of us.

But Lord, we know that we don't always live our lives in a way that pleases you. We know that we can be selfish, that we follow our own desires, and don't always put you first in our lives. For this Lord, we are truly sorry, and ask for your forgiveness. We ask that you turn our hearts from the evil desires of the world and help us to live holy lives with reverent fear. And Lord, we thank you for your love for us, that you have paid the price for our disobedience with the precious blood of Jesus Christ. We thank you that because of Jesus' death and resurrection, that our relationship with you has been restored, and that we have the hope of eternal life with You.

Lord, we pray that you will continue to comfort us through these difficult times and give us the strength to deal with the challenges and obstacles that we encounter. And we pray that our lives will be full of love for others, and that through our actions we will bring You glory. We ask all of this in the name of your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

Song (modern) Chorus of the Saved <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ilpVNCSOH8k>

Song (trad) All creatures of our God <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MUZD0hgtSgE>

Bible Reading – 1 Peter 1:13-2:3 (NIV)

¹³ Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. ¹⁴ As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. ¹⁵ But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”

¹⁷ Since you call on a Father who judges each person’s work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. ¹⁸ For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰ He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. ²¹ Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

²² Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. ²³ For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. ²⁴ For, “All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, ²⁵ but the word of the Lord endures forever.” And this is the word that was preached to you. **2** Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. ² Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, ³ now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Family Matters – Interview with Steve and Sandra Parsons.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F28rQpZWaWE>

This interview goes for 12 minutes so you might like to have a look at it at another time!

Kids Song How cool is that. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yyqW7cGxdpg>

Prayer Points for our Pastoral Prayer.

Heavenly Father, We thank you that we have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, that we now live changed lives in full assurance of having been born again-that we do not continue to live in ignorance but truly know the faith and hope of you and your promises.

We thank you that the impact of illness of Covid 19 in Australia has been relatively low, and that the period of home isolation has been effective at this point of time in reducing severe illness. We pray for wisdom as our country begins to start functioning in a more “usual “manner. We pray for wisdom for our authorities as they strategically manage the balance between public health requirements and healthy functioning society. Please help our population to be wise in their interactions, to be discerning between their personal freedoms and that of our community especially if the spread of Covid 19 begins to increase again in Australia.

We continue to pray for our frontline workers such health professionals, educators, cleaners, supermarket staff. We pray for safety, patience, flexibility, creativity as they do their work. We pray for those who have lost employment through this pandemic that they won’t feel defined by their loss of employment and that they would be able to provide for their basic needs. We pray for those who are fearful and anxious, that they will remember that you are Lord of all. We pray for those amongst us managing strange school/parenting/work situations- for patience, humour, forgiveness and joy.

In particular- we want to bring before you our HSC students that are part of our church family. All these students would feel immense uncertainty, pressure and distraction over their year 12 situation and what that means for the future. We pray that you would calm them, help them to trust in your sovereignty, and remind them of your love for them.

Father we continue to pray for people in our lives that do not know your forgiveness and grace. Help us to be brave and to speak about the hope we have- knowing Jesus as our Lord and saviour. Please help us to be outward focused, to be compassionate and generous towards those in our sphere. That we might shine like stars for you in this world that feels very bleak at the moment and that they might come to examine Jesus's claims for themselves.

We pray for the logistics- pray for financial stability and spiritual unity. We pray that this ministry at this time will bear powerful witness for Jesus and that many will come to a saving knowledge of Jesus.

Please give the church wisdom and compassion in their dealings with their congregation and the local community. We pray for a smooth implementation of the regular church service by live streaming and that people will tune in.

Finally we bring before you the nation of Nigeria. Father we ask to sustain your people in highly volatile Nigeria- which suffers from extremist Islamic involvement in the north. We pray for believers who suffer from physical violence, are denied access to education, and the destruction of their property. Help them to stand under the immense pressure and risk of knowing and following Jesus as their Lord. We pray these things in your precious son Jesus's name - AMEN

Song. Today we are learning a new song by **Citizens and Saints** called "Kids"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GOXjCSEhvmM>

Of if you prefer you might sing along with an older song "Brother let me be your servant"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdmgpMfnjdU>

Sermon. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xqWwtrGWrek>

Or <https://www.facebook.com/Charlestown-Presbyterian-Church-113127747005906>

Family relationships are complex. I am a son. I have a father and a mother who are both still alive. And yet I am also a father to two sons and a daughter. I am a husband to Kaylene yet when I got married the only in depth insights I had about being a husband was looking at how my dad and mum operated. But much of that was not in full view as they are both very private people.

I am a brother to two other brothers and a sister. Yet for most of my life I have lived a long way away from them and so the closeness and intimacy that I had with them for the first part of my life has been impossible to maintain especially when they got their own families and when they become grandparents. And on top of that I have aunts, uncles, nephews & nieces that I share many things in common with.

Family relationships are complex. And yet when I became a Christian I was adopted into a second family. I now have a heavenly father as well as an earthly father. I have more than just three siblings I now have had very close relationships with hundreds of brothers and sisters in the Lord. And there are some people who would see me as a spiritual dad. They were born again under my ministry. And throughout the world there are millions, billions of people that I share a common faith with. It's all very complex.

And that is where Peter heads to next. In chapter 1:13 to 2:3 he talks about this Church family. Christians call upon a Father who judges our works impartially. Christians need to be obedient children. We show

sincere love for our brothers and sisters. And we even are like newborn babies craving pure spiritual milk. We are family. We don't lose our original families but we are adopted into a newer family. And that family will help shape our identity but also will greatly affect our values and the way we live.

1. Father/Child (verses 13-21)

¹³ "Therefore, with minds that are alert & sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming". Therefore. Because we are strangers in this world. Because God has selected you & sent you these trials that you are now currently facing. Therefore you need to get your thinking right. You need to put your mind into gear.

For many of us our minds are in idle, in neutral. We are consuming entertainment on our phones, on our tvs, on our podcasts and we are absorbing whatever is coming into our lives. It is shaping us and our thinking. But we can't allow that to keep happening. We have to kick our minds into gear. We need to let God shape our thinking. And one way to do that is to look forward to the grace that will be ours when Jesus comes again.

You see the world is heading towards a final chapter. Where God's grace will surround us in every direction. Yes we have received a down payment from Jesus and his work on the cross. But one day his grace will fill us completely, fill our world completely, fill all those who are His completely. So in the meantime we look forward to this grace in hope. For there is hope, we were born into a living hope but there is even more hope that we can rest on as we face an uncertain future. As well as looking forward we need to look backward as well.

¹⁴ "As obedient children do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance." Remember where you came from. Before God adopted you as his children, you were ignorant. Your lives were filled with evil. In fact the evil one was more like your father. So look backward. You don't want to go back to where you were. Instead you want to be an obedient child of God. So look backwards, forwards & upwards at your heavenly father.

For He is holy. And if he is your father and you are now his child, you should begin to see the family resemblance. For ¹⁵ "just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." Just as the Israelites were called out of Egypt & set apart to be God's chosen nation, so you and I have been called out of Lake Macquarie and called to live for the Lord fully. Except we don't leave Lake Macquarie. We continue to live in the same place as before. But our minds are alert, they are sober, they are concentrating on what God is going to do, what God has already done and on who God really is.

He is holy and he is our Father. We can call him Dad. That's how committed he is to us. That how accessible he is to us. He's the head of our family. He lives with us in close quarters. He provides and loves and feeds and cares for us all. Don't forget that. But don't forget that he is also our judge. ¹⁷ "Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear".

So we can't take God for granted, there needs to be a reverence, an awe, a fear that doesn't drive us away from him but gives us a deep respect for who he is and what he has done for us that we never want to lose the privilege of being part of his family. So when our faith is weak & the temptations around us are strong we need to remind ourselves that our Father is our Judge and look to him and his Holy Spirit for help so that we might resist such temptations. But when we stumble and fall we need to realise our judge is also our father and so look to him for mercy.

A high school student was on her first date with a guy a couple of years older than her. The young woman was raised in a Christian home where she was raised with strict morals. Her date was not. Throughout the evening, the young man kept hounding her to do things she knew were wrong and contrary to her Christian upbringing. Frustrated, the young man lamented, "What is wrong with you. No one will see you. Who is it going to hurt? His date responded, "I am thinking of my father". The boy asked, "Are you afraid he will hurt you?" "No", responded the woman, "I am afraid I will hurt him".

That's the balance. God is holy, God is our judge, God is our Father & God is our redeemer.

¹⁸"For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors." God redeemed you FROM an empty way of life, according to verse 19, ¹⁹"but WITH the precious blood of Christ." He buys us back BY "a lamb without blemish or defect." ²⁰He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake". And the aim of this redemption is for a specific reason. ²¹"Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, **and so your faith and hope are in God**".

Doesn't that fill you with an attitude of gratitude? Can't you feel thankfulness rising up in your heart? God has redeemed us, he has bought our lives with the precious blood of Jesus which he shed on our behalf on the cross & because of that we don't just draw near to God we draw near to the cross. That's where our Father God showed his great love for us. And that's where our Judge God showed that all sin needs to be punished. And that's where a holy God shows us that he can't turn a blind eye to evil & he does that by punishing his son Jesus and giving grace to his sons and daughters who are his.

So if we remember that we are a child of God. If we look back at what we have been saved from, look forward to what we are saved for and look up at who has saved us that will give us both gratitude and awe, thankfulness and fear. Today in the Church we often only talk of God's love, of God being our father but we need the truth that he is also our Judge. So if we are a child of God, we want the family likeness to rub off on us. So as we draw near to a holy God, we ask that the Holy Spirit will change us and make us more and more holy.

2. Like a son/daughter, and secondly like a sibling

For if we have God as our father, if we have been adopted into a new family, we are not only children, we are part of a wider family of many other brothers and sisters. Many of us want a private faith, let God save me, let God adopt me, let God be my heavenly father. And forget that this is putting me at the centre of the universe, me as the most important member of the family & that is wrong. So Peter now turns to our brothers & sisters in Christ.

²²"Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers (and sisters), love one another deeply, from the heart." God's love for us and the way that God has purified our hearts means that we should now have a love, a strong love, a sincere love for our brothers and sisters in the faith. For the people in our church service. For the people in our Church. For Christians in our area, country and abroad.

We have been saved into a family of faith and because they are our brothers and sisters then we need to love them, deeply, from the heart. Now we can't do that by being consumers of the faith, taking what the church offers us and then doing our own thing. That's not love of others, that's love of self. And that is not the model that God has shown us in his son nor the model that God wants the world to see in his Church.

When the Moravian missionaries went to Greenland, they were unable during the first year to make any impression whatsoever. Then came an awful epidemic of smallpox in which multitudes became sick, and the missionaries went about among them ministering to the natives of Greenland in Christ's name. After that the way was clear. The people said, "You have nursed us in our sickness. You have cared for us in our distress. You have buried our dead. Now tell us of your religion."

Friends, some of you have no idea what some of the people in this Church do for you and for others. I see them in tears, tired, stressed out, unable to walk away because they love you so, so much. They will give up their time, their talents, their money. And over the last month or so where everything has become so much more difficult for them, they are still showing that same love for you, but much of it is hidden.

Where do they get this sort of love from? Where will we get this love from? Peter continues ²³ *"For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable through the living and enduring word of God."* When we are born again the word of God is like a seed planted into our hearts. And you would think that word once planted into the hearts and minds of us Christians would produce a fruit of knowledge, knowledge of God and his ways. But the ultimate fruit of the word of God is love. Love of God and love of our neighbour.

God then places his seed, the word of God into your hearts and because it is indestructible, it is imperishable, it is powerful, it breaks through the soil of your heart and grows through your skin and bone and produces fruit in your life and in others. God's word is what will renew you, cleanse you, mature you and change you. So if God's love is the source of your love then God's word is the tap that allows God's love to flow into you and through you.

So allow the pure word of God to come inside of you. Just as you want the petrol in your car to be pure and not dirty or diluted, so get the pure word of God inside of you. Read it each day as your source of inspiration. Study it each week as you meet together in small groups. Read it regularly as you thoughtfully go through Christian books and come each week determined to learn more from it in our weekly sermon.

Because that is what is going to help you to love the lads or as Peter puts it to have a deep, sincere, from the heart love for your Christian brothers and sisters. I wonder is that why many are lamenting the state of the Church & its lack of love? Is that why many people are cautious of the church because in the past we haven't shown this type of love? Well the answer is not to withdraw but to engage! Not to complain about others but to look at yourself.

²⁴ *For, "All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, ²⁵but the word of the Lord endures forever."* And this is the word that was preached to you". It is the gospel that will last forever not sport on the TV. It is God's word that will never go out of date not that latest series on Netflix. So we need to spend time in the word if ever we are going to love our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are family so love and get all the love you need to do that by going to its source, God & his word

The legendary US football coach Vince Lombardi was once asked what it took to make a winning team. "The difference between mediocrity and greatness," Lombardi said that night, "is the feeling these guys have for each other." The point being that strength comes from commitment to each other. In healthy churches, each Christian learns to care for the others. We take seriously Jesus' command to love another and that enables us to grow as people and as Churches.

And so as the seed of the word of God grows in our hearts it uproots the weeds that are already in there. **2** *“Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind”*. Because the opposite of love is malice and deceit and hypocrisy. It is slander and envy that breaks up families and stops community.

Friends we are brothers and sisters in the Lord & we are fellow children of God. But that is not the end game. That is not the purpose to be saved. But to be transformed. To please our heavenly father, to be committed and loving in our relationships with others. To grow in our faith and that leads us to the last family relationship

3. Like a Newborn Baby (v2-3)

2 *“Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,”* **3** *now that you have tasted that the Lord is good”*. Like newborn babies. Peter is talking to every single believer not just the new in faith. We are all babes in Christ. We all have so much growing to do. None of us are even close to where we will be when God brings us to himself and makes us fit for heaven.

And for us to grow & mature we are going to need feed regularly on the milk of God’s word. For the same word that was the source of our salvation is the source of our sanctification.

A new babe has to be careful what it puts inside of it. It can’t stomach meat. Coke would be a disaster. The best thing is mother’s milk or if that is not possible a formula that provides exactly what a young, forming body needs. Similarly we need to make sure we don’t put inside of us deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander. Those things will eat away at our insides quicker than coca cola! But more importantly they will eat away at the fellowship of the Church as well.

So we crave that milk, we desire strongly the word of God. We go to it again and again. We read it time and time again. We meditate on it, we ponder it, we put it into practise and then we do it all again the next day. We need to be passionate about it. We have tasted how good it is for us. We know that it is the source of all life and love and hope. And we learn it is the source of all our growth as well. So we find the word is milk for babes in Christ and the same word becomes strong meat for the mature in Christ.

Friends we are all babes in Christ. There is so much for us all to learn. There is so much room for growth in my life and yours. I look back at my life and I know that I have come a long way and I look at some of you and I look at Jesus Christ and I realise there is so much more growth that is needed in my spiritual life. So I need to keep sucking, chewing over, pondering, and applying God’s word in my life and so you do.

For each of us are part of two families. A biological one which has shaped who we are and what we are doing right now and a faith family where God the Father has chosen you. God the Son has died for you and God the Holy Spirit is making you holy. And together he is growing a spiritual temple a place where God Himself lives. In our midst.

So don’t get in the way. Don’t get distracted with other things. Love God. Love each other and love the word. And when that happens. There will be growth & transformation. In us. In our Church. And in God’s kingdom. Don’t you want to be a part of that? I do! Well it starts with God. He is providing the model, the word & the means for you today. Drink it in. Begin to grow up. And as you grow in faith and in love then that will affect the rest of your family. Your physical family and your faith family. And that is what Peter is calling us to do today.

Song Modern Live for the Kingdom https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=89_LvReFill

Traditional Standing on the Promises <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QvBlrooUszQ>

Benediction.

As we end our time of worship, hear these words from 1 Peter 1 *“Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.”*² Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,³ now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.” (NIV)