

Sunday July 4, 2021

Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church

Welcome & Prayer

"If the LORD had not been on our side—² if the LORD had not been on our side when people attacked us,³ they would have swallowed us alive when their anger flared against us;⁴ the flood would have engulfed us the torrent would have swept over us,⁵ the raging waters would have swept us away.⁶ Praise be to the LORD, who has not let us be torn by their teeth.⁷ We have escaped like a bird from the fowler's snare; the snare has been broken, and we have escaped.⁸ Our help is in the name of the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth."

Let us pray. Dear Lord and Father of mankind thank you that we can come to you for help in our time of need. We come this morning to praise you for your power and for your passion, your sovereignty and your sincerity, your faithfulness and your fellowship, your control and your care.

Where else can we go to for help? Who else is able to save us from our sin? From ourselves? From our world? From all that is around us? But you. You alone are worthy of our worship. You alone are the one we want to live for. You alone are the one whom we can trust.

So we turn away from all other distractions and come to you. We place our sins before you and ask for forgiveness. We offer ourselves to you as living sacrifices, wholly & pleasing to you and you alone. May this be our spiritual act of worship this day & may you again become our God, our father and our friend. Amen.

Song – 10,000 reasons

[Matt Redman - 10,000 Reasons \(Bless The Lord\) \(Lyrics And Chords/Live\) - YouTube](#)

Bible Reading – Proverbs 3:1-12 (NIV)

*My son, do not forget my teaching,
but keep my commands in your heart,
² for they will prolong your life many years
and bring you peace and prosperity.
³ Let love and faithfulness never leave you;
bind them around your neck,
write them on the tablet of your heart.
⁴ Then you will win favour and a good name
in the sight of God and man.
⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
⁶ in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.^[a]
⁷ Do not be wise in your own eyes;
fear the LORD and shun evil.
⁸ This will bring health to your body
and nourishment to your bones.
⁹ Honour the LORD with your wealth,
with the first fruits of all your crops;
¹⁰ then your barns will be filled to overflowing,
and your vats will brim over with new wine.*

- ¹¹ *My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline,
and do not resent his rebuke,*
- ¹² *because the LORD disciplines those he loves,
as a father the son he delights in.*

Announcements

Focus for July – Commitment. The Christian life is a series of commitments to Christ, to your Church, to each other and to the lost. Each are important but let's start with the most important, our commitment to Christ. Are you a Christian? Born again? Saved? If you can't say yes with 100% certainty then please speak to someone about this ASAP. A minister, an elder, a respected Christian friend. *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."* (John 3:16)

COVID changes. While the current NSW government restrictions are in place, we will need to go back to the following arrangements.

- Reduced capacity. 56 in Charlestown Church and 25 at Swansea.
- Face masks are mandatory in all indoor spaces
- No singing other than by song leaders
- No morning tea/Supper
- Disinfecting all areas after use.
- QR Codes and a full list of names and contact details for all those who have used our buildings.

As well as that our Kids programme on a Sunday morning will run parallel to the 10:30am church service so that more people can participate in this service. You might have different views to the ones that the Church are expressing but please don't use your freedom to have that view split our Church unity.

Church Buildings. Please keep praying for this project that we will see this as a way to reach people for Christ rather than as a substitute to doing so.

Family of Origin. Anna Moss, the Women's Ministry Co-ordinator will be presenting for us on family systems therapy on August 1 via ZOOM from 3-4:30pm. This time together will be a great way to see how our family of origin affects our thinking and our decision making. More details to come.

School Holidays. The normal activities of the church will be in recess during the NSW public school holidays. This will include Kids Church IMPACT, SPARKLERS and Home Groups. We pray that all those involved in these activities will have a good break and come back refreshed for term 3.

Church Picnic - Sunday 25 July. Please join us for a church picnic at Harold Wesley Knight Park, on Lonus Ave, Whitebridge, near Riawenna Park on Sunday 25 July May from 12:30pm. The picnic provides a great opportunity for fellowship, while also getting to know those who are new to our church. Bring your own lunch and picnic blanket/chairs. Further information, contact Simon Mulready 0404 942 544.

Song – Come behold the wondrous mystery

[Come Behold The Wondrous Mystery - Matt Papa - YouTube](#)

Family Matters - NSW General Assembly

This week the Presbyterian Church meets for its annual assembly. Normally it would be at PLC Croydon but due to COVID situation it will be on ZOOM like last year. This is not as good as a face to face meeting and last year we tried to clear the Assembly of some of the bigger ticket items that would be difficult to deal with via ZOOM but this year we are going to have try and make our decisions as best we can.

The Presbyterian Church is not run by a Bishop or by the local Church. Instead it is a series of courts made up of ministers and elders – Session for the local Church, Presbytery for the region & assembly for the State. Our representatives are Ross, Jon & myself. So what does the Assembly do? 3 things

- It reviews the work of the Committees/Schools/Aged Care facilities over the last 12 months & sets the agenda for the coming 12 months.
- It makes policies that are binding on the NSW Church
- And it is a court of appeal where decisions dealing with problems and disputes in the lower courts can be reviewed by this higher court.

So what on the agenda for this next week?

- **Aged Care.** You might have heard that Queensland Presbyterian Church has gone into receivership about a month ago because of problems with their Aged Care facilities. Cost are increasing. Expectations are growing and funding has remained low and all aged care operators are really struggling. Our aged care facilities have lost money over the last few years and their Board was recently replaced by our Trustees. Two aged care facilities including our local one Westcott has been put on the market for sale.
- **Allowah Children's Hospital.** The Church runs a hospital for severely disabled children. It has never broken even but financially the situation has worsened over the last couple of years. It is costly to run and the care, including the spiritual care of the kids is top notch. We will be looking very closely at this.
- **COVID.** Some Churches have coped pretty well and others have struggled. We will be discussing how we can support those who are doing it tough
- **Ethical Issues.** We as a society are facing many ethical issues and we have a committee that is on the forefront of discussions on many of them. One major paper that has come out recently is on the Black Lives Matter movement. Jo is on that committee
- **Leadership.** There has been a real desire over the last couple of years to ensure that our leadership structures are in line with the Scriptures. So this week we will be talking about whether women can elders and how we encourage Churches to adopt a deacons court.
- **Women's Voices.** There is also a paper talking about how do we better hear women's voices in the courts of the church. As most churches don't ordain women to the eldership then each level of courts needs to find ways to include the wisdom of women on the issues they are facing. I am the chairman of the committee that is thinking these things through.
- **Future ministry.** Parish ministry is proving very challenging for our clergy and a number are dropping out because of stress or burnout or moral failure. We need to raise up more ministers to fill the gaps and to continue to plant more Churches
- **Church Planting.** As new suburbs grow and older ones are transformed we need new Churches and different types of church to reach people for Christ. That means raising up leaders, people, places and new Churches.
- **New Dunesk.** 2 years ago we purchased a property out west as a training facility & meeting place for our ministries beyond the farthest fences. This ministry operating since John Flynn started is vital for those isolated from others and struggling with fire, flood and drought.

Please pray for these things. Please show an interest in the work of the denomination. Please remember our ministry is wider than just us here at Charlestown. Please ask the Lord of the harvest to raise up more workers and that He will grow his kingdom in our midst.

Prayer Points

- **Pray for Maldives** (Population 459,000; Christians 1000). Maldivian Christians must keep their faith completely secret. Authorities have declared the country to be 100% Muslim. Leaving Islam to follow Jesus is not tolerated, and those discovered to be Christian are stripped of their citizenship and risk being arrested, harassed or ostracised from the community. Christians risk being reported or even imprisoned if discovered by community leaders or authorities. Expatriate Christians, most of whom work in the tourist sector and come from India and Sri Lanka, are also closely watched. Meeting together with other Christians is nearly impossible. Pray for the Lord to provide

opportunities for believers to gather safely and grow in faith together. Pray God will use the Bible to powerfully strengthen, encourage and nurture the lives of believers. Pray the Lord will be transforming the hearts of government officials, especially President Solih

- **Pray for Parsons with CMS in Japan.** Continue to pray for the leadership of the Church and wisdom in how to deal with the recent spike in COVID cases. Pray for Joshua (Steven and Sandra's son) who hopes to leave for Australia in August and start uni in Sydney.
- Pray that NSW (and NT) can control their **growing COVID clusters**. Pray for the mental health of those who suffer in lockdowns.
- Pray for the **Building Working Group** as they plan what needs to be done and in what order to help us think through our options concerning our Charlestown's buildings.
- Pray that all Churches will rediscover their **commitment and trust in the Bible** as the word of God. That it will be read, preached, obeyed and relied upon in Churches throughout our world.

Bible Reading – Romans 8:28-39 (NIV)

²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who^[i] have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written:

*“For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”*

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Sermon – Doing what's right for you (Dave W)

I came across this quote from American author Nicholas Sparkes and was in the movie the Notebook. It has obviously had an impact because the quote was sprawled over hundreds of different motivational posters. You can't live your life for other people. You've got to do what's right for you even if it hurts some people you love. It captures a deeply held belief in our society that I am the person who knows what's best for me and that I have an almost sacred obligation to do what's right for me even if it means hurting other people. But let's just pause and think about this for a minute. We would all acknowledge that 4 year olds cannot be left to make decisions about what is best for them. If they did then all they would eat is Coco Pops and drink fizzy drinks all day until they died of malnutrition. Do 8 year olds know what is right for them? Do any of us think for a moment that the life decisions of a 12 year old don't need a certain guidance at the very least and probably restraining more often than not. But when we become

adults why is it that so many of us think that now we know what is right for us? I don't know about you but when I think back to my 18-year-old self the words wise and understanding do not immediately spring to mind. In short what makes us think that we are in any sense qualified to decide what is right for us? And if we are not qualified to decide what is right for us then who is?

Proverbs chapter 3 provides a much-needed antidote to the poisonous thinking that I am the best person to decide what's right for me. When most people think of the book of proverbs, they usually think of a collection of short pithy sayings that describe what it is to live a wise life. Some of you may even have a favorite proverb. My two favorites are a bit self-serving but I have always liked Proverbs 27:14

If anyone blesses their neighbor loudly in the morning it will be taken as a curse

Which proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that the bible disapproves of morning people.

And over the years I have come to appreciate more and more Proverbs 16:31

Gray hair is a crown of splendor, it is attained in the way of righteousness.

But it's the first 9 chapters that provides the background or general principals behind these pithy sayings. It's a bit like how a mechanic needs to know the general principles of how a car works before they can learn all the specific things that can go wrong and how to fix them.

It's thought that the book of Proverbs was initially used as kind of a training manual for the intellectual and social elites among young men who were going on to be the leaders of Israel. Evidence for this is found in the fact that while proverbs often talks about the poor they are not addressed to the poor. There are no examples along the lines of to the poor among you I give you this piece of wisdom. Rather the advice that is given is how the poor should be treated by those studying proverbs who presumably were quite wealthy. That Proverbs was originally a book for young ruling class males also goes some way to explain why there is very little advice to women but lots of advice about women.

Why am I giving this background? Well if ever there was group of people more in need to be told that they are not as smart, clever or wise as they think they are it is young ruling class males. For a modern-day equivalent think private school boy from wealthy family studying law or political science. But just because a book of the bible was written with a specific group of people in mind, doesn't mean that it isn't applicable to other groups of people. Paul's letters for example were written to specific churches and addressed specific issues that faced those churches but we still rightly see them as having teaching that applies to everyone.

So what is God saying to us from Proverbs chapter 3? And what can we learn about how to decide what is right for us? One thing you will immediately notice about Proverbs chapter 3 is that it describes a lot of positive outcomes of following its pieces of advice.

Verse 2 for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity.

Verse 4 you will win favour and a good name in the sight of God and man

Verse 6 he will make your paths straight

Verse 8 this will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones

Verse 10 then your barns will be filled to overflowing and your vats will brim over with new wine

I'll come back to verse 12 later which deserves some further explanation.

One of the reasons I may be tempted into thinking that I am the best person to decide what's right for me is that firstly I can't be completely sure that someone else has my best interests at heart and secondly no human can know me so completely that they know what my best interests are. Finally even if they did have my best interests at heart and were able to know what my best interests are they can't possibly have the power to carry out or ensure that my best interests come to pass. In short no human being can be

loving enough, can be knowing enough or can be powerful enough to be trusted to hand over to them decisions about what is right for me.

But God the God who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all **is loving enough**
 God who according to Luke 12:7 has numbered the hairs on our head **is knowing enough**
 And God who in all things works for the good of those who love him who have been called according to his purpose **is powerful enough** to hand over completely decisions about what is right for me.
 Proverbs 3 1-12 is about trusting in a God who is loving, knowing and powerful and who wants what is best for us. This trust needs to permeate through all areas of our lives – our hearts, our minds, our possessions and our attitudes to suffering.

Firstly our hearts. We show our trust in God by immersing ourselves in his promises and his word. By constantly reminding ourselves of his love and faithfulness. Verse 1 keep my commands in your heart. Verse 3 let love and faithfulness never leave you, bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Obviously reflecting constantly on the love that God showed us in sending Jesus to live and die for is the foundation of this but there are so many other examples in the bible where God shows us his amazing love and faithfulness to his people. The freeing of Israel from Egypt, the deliverance of Israel by the judges, the promises to king David, the return of Israel from exile. All these and so many more show again and again God's grace, love and unmerited favour to his people throughout the ages. This is foundational to the other areas of our lives where we are to trust God. It is only when we are convinced that God really does love us that we can extend that trust to our minds, our possessions and our attitudes to suffering.

Verse 5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Remind yourself again and again that God loves you and wants what is right for you. Remind yourself of his promises and then
 Lean not on your own understanding

This moves me to my next point that we are to put our trust in God with our minds. It is inevitable that there will come times where obeying God will not seem the right thing to do. In times like these we have to have to trust that God knows better than us. In the movie Cars Lightning McQueen is challenged to a race around a dirt track. As he tries to turn left he skids off the track and crashes. His older and wiser mentor Doc teaches him that if he wants to turn left he needs to turn his wheels to the right so he can drift around to the left. He needed to turn right to turn left. I am sure many of you in your work can think of other examples where you have to ask people to trust you that what you are telling them while it seems to be the opposite of what they would think is actually the correct advice. How much more should we trust in God that he just might be a bit smarter than us and that his way is better than our way.

In verse 7 it goes on to say do not be wise in your own eyes. Why is this a good thing? Let me ask you this and be honest. When you have a disagreement with another person do you start with the assumption that you are right and they are wrong? What's more do you also assume that not only are you right and they are wrong but also that they are just a little bit stupid? Remember how earlier I said that Proverbs was written especially for an audience of young ruling class males. Young men who had probably been told their whole life how clever and capable they were. Young men who felt that if they didn't know it then it probably wasn't worth knowing. When we have the humility to accept that we are not as wise as we think we will achieve something that is profoundly important for our wellbeing. We will become teachable. It is only when we are determined not to be wise in our own eyes that we can genuinely learn from our mistakes. That we can take criticism without it crushing us. When we are not wise in our own eyes but fear God and shun evil we are told that this will bring health to our bodies and nourishment to our bones.

The commentary I read made the point that health to our bodies and nourishment to our bones is not saying that we will never be sick. Body and bones refer to our whole selves. Health in the bible is a wholistic word to be whole is to be in the right with God at all levels of our being.

The next way we are to demonstrate our trust in God is with our possessions or our wealth. Notice how it describes the first fruits of your crops. Offering the first fruits was an act of trust in God for an agricultural society such as Israel. Rather than wait until the all the harvest had been brought in and then working out how much to give back to God, Israel was told to offer their first fruits. By offering the first fruits they were offering up the beginning of their harvest rather than the end of their harvest. They had no way of knowing that the rest of their harvest would be as productive, whether the rest of their harvest would be damaged or destroyed. By offering their first fruits they were showing that they trusted God to meet their needs with the harvest to come. How often do we offer the first fruits of what we have to God? Do we commit to giving before we know how much we are going to earn in a year or after? Do we really trust God with our wealth and possessions? It's interesting to have a look at the consequences of this sort of trust.

Then your barns will be filled to overflowing and your vats will brim over with new wine. At first glance this looks like some sort of marketing trick used by a tele evangelist. Give away your riches to the church and then God will make you richer. But Matthew Henry comments he does not say thy bags but thy barns, not thy wardrobe replenished but thy presses. God shall bless thee with an increase of that which is for use not for show or ornament, for spending and laying out not for hoarding and laying up. They that do good with what they have shall have more to do good with. In other words when we trust God with our wealth by being generous with what we have, God will provide for us so we can be generous again and again. God is a generous father and he wants us his children to be generous as well.

The final way we demonstrate our trust in God is in our attitude to suffering. I've already mentioned that there is a pattern to Proverbs chapter 3. There is a command and then there is an outcome of following this command.

Verse 1 keep my commands in your heart. Verse 2 outcome long life peace and prosperity

Verse 3 let love and faithfulness never leave you. Verse 4 outcome winning favour and a good name in the sight of God and man.

Command Verse 5 trust in the Lord with all your heart Verse 6 outcome and he will make your paths straight.

Command Verse 7 do not be wise in your own eyes. Verse 8 outcome this will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones

Command Verse 9 Honour the Lord with your wealth Verse 10 outcome barns filled to overflowing and vats brimming over with new wine.

And I don't think we should be embarrassed by this. God is our creator and has made the universe and us in a certain way. God's laws are like an instruction manual on how to make a human flourish. When I put petrol in my car instead of diesel or coffee then my car flourishes. When I put toast in my toaster and a DVD in my DVD player and not the other way around then my toaster and my DVD player both flourish as they are being used in the way their designer made them. But if it was always that straight forward that follow God's command and you will 100% of the time without fail receive a obvious and tangible positive outcome then it would be easy to trust God but then again God would be reduced to being a cosmic slot machine. Do this and then this will happen. But life isn't that simple. As we find out in the book of Job life isn't just a case of do good things and good will happen, do bad things and bad things will happen. And so we come to verses 11 and 12

My son do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent his rebuke. That's the command but look at the outcome. Because the Lord disciplines those he loves as a father disciplines the son he delights in. The outcome isn't as unambiguously positive is it? There are a lot of things that could be said about this but this morning I would like to suggest that what I think is right for me is actually not always right for me.

Think of it this way. A three year old may learn to trust his parents because he can see that they want what is best for him. They feed him, clothe him, make sure he has a bed to sleep in and toys to play with. But sometimes they will say things like no you can't have a 4th bowl of icecream. No you can't play in the traffic and yes you do have to take that medicine that tastes really horrible. The three year old may be tempted to think that his parents love him only when good stuff, as defined by a three year old brain, happens to him. But parents want more for their children than they just be happy on their own terms. And God as a loving father wants more for us than to be happy on our own terms.

CS Lewis put it this way

"I'm not sure God wants us to be happy. I think he wants us to love, and be loved. But we are like children, thinking our toys will make us happy and the whole world is our nursery. Something must drive us out of that nursery and into the lives of others, and that something is suffering."

In our Romans reading it says that in all things God works for the good of those who love him. But what is the good. Is it health, wealth, fun times, loving relationships? These are good but they are not the good, the ultimate good. That is found in verse 29 the ultimate good is to be conformed to the image of his son Jesus. Doing what's right for you, doing what's right for me means trusting that God is both wiser and more loving than I can comprehend. That he wants right for me at a far deeper level than I can even imagine. Because the Lord disciplines those he loves as a father the son he delights in. Discipline is more than just punishment for wrongdoing. Discipline is linked with the word disciple, and it is to do with teaching, correction and training. But to see suffering as discipline and something that can bring about the ultimate good requires something more than just trust in God. It requires a radical rethink of our world view, seeing things through God's eyes rather than our own. In short it requires what the rest of Proverbs 3 describes as wisdom and that, God willing, will be the topic of my next sermon.

Let me close in prayer. Father God thank you that you have shown us that you love us enough to do what is right for us by sending your Son Jesus to die for us on the cross. Thankyou that you have shown that you are powerful enough to do what is right for us by raising Jesus to life. Help us to trust in your love, power and wisdom in all aspects of our lives, our hearts our minds, our possession and our attitudes to suffering. Forgive us for the times when we lean on our own understanding are wise in our own eyes. Help us to see that the ultimate good is to be conformed to the image of your son Jesus & its in his name we pray Amen.

Song – Be Thou my vision [Be Thou my Vision - lyrics - Celtic Worship - YouTube](#)

Song – Cling to Christ [Cling to Christ \[Official Lyric Video\] - YouTube](#)

Benediction

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Morning Tea

Our morning tea is a vital way that we give and receive fellowship during a time like this. We don't want to be just consumers of Church, we want to be a part of the family of God. So why not give one or two people a call. Who might your ring now?