

Southside Worship Online

27 September 2020, David Fender

Please go to <https://livestream.com/ggservices/ssuc> to access our worship service.
Families with children are encouraged to use family faith materials Ps Richard Moors has made available.

Gathering with God

We meet in the name of God
whose speech began the story of life
whose words brought form into being
and who ordered creation in harmony and goodness.

We meet in the purpose of Jesus
whose life was the speech of God,
whose words show the shape of his Kingdom
and who draws those who hear into its unfolding story.

We meet in the power of the Spirit
whose breath tamed the primordial chaos
whose tongue shapes the words of change
and who energises the ones who give them voice.

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty
Who was and is and is to come
With all creation we praise ~~you~~^{the} our King of kings
~~You are my everything and I will adore You~~^{He is our} ~~adore him.~~^{we}

Song

Revelation Song

Prayer of Approach & Confession

Most wonderful God, the beauty we see in Jesus is your beauty veiled in human flesh, the love we witness from Bethlehem to Golgotha is your love contracted to a span. If Christ's life is so holy as to fill us with wonder, how much more would your unveiled beauty leave us overwhelmed and trembling? You are more than the eye could bear, more than the mind can ever fathom.

Yet you have so carefully made us that although we cannot fathom you, we can yet love you. Gratefully we bring our lives to you, asking that our worship may arise from love and be shaped by love, and be directed towards that larger loving which is our soul's desire.

Most merciful God, we are not completely useless sinners, devoid of all light and love. To loathe ourselves would be to blaspheme your name as our Loving Creator. Nor are we hopelessly locked within our flawed genes and the vicious circles of world evil. To cynically settle for repeating old mistakes without hope of change, would be to blaspheme your name as our Loving Saviour.

Yet we know we have been seduced by the evil of the world, and to some degree we have added to the frustration and pain of life.

But you have never ceased to love us, never forgotten our names, never ceased to recognise the potential for greatness that lies within each of us, never stopped working for our rescue and for our healing and fulfilment.

Please continue your work of redemption. Forgive our sins, cleanse us from the taint of evil, and deliver us from our individual weaknesses.

Abiding in the love of Jesus, may we withstand evil's insidious pressures, and take delight in small victories. May we be both the recipients of salvation and the gracious agents of it. To your endless glory, through Christ Jesus our Saviour. Amen!

Bible Reading – Philippians 1:21-30

Sermon

Song *King of Kings*

Offering Take a moment to set aside your offering to God's mission and pray a prayer of blessing over it.

Prayers of intercession

Lord of hope and healing, you have heard the cries of our hearts. You know that we do want to serve you, and yet when things get tough, we buckle and cave in. We lack the courage and strength to work for you. You have reminded us that you will be continually with us and we need to place our trust in that fact. Your love will sustain and heal us. Your mercy and grace will give us courage and strength, joy and peace. As we have come before you this day, offering our prayers for those near and dear to us, let us remember that you constantly lift and carry us in your love.

We pray in sorrow and hope for events, situations and people that have come to our notice in this past week.

We thank you for the faithfulness of your church in spreading the good news of Jesus.

We lift before you others in our lives, you know their personal concerns and deepest thoughts.

We pray for ourselves and for support and perseverance when we struggle, and a sustaining sign when we get things right.

We ask these things in Jesus' Name. Amen.

Song *Cornerstone*

Affirmation / Blessing

Go bravely and boldly into this world of confusion and pain.

Love those who are different. Listen deeply, seek understanding. Stand humbly in your beliefs.

Know the power of mercy and grace in your life and use those wonderful gifts to serve God by serving the people.

Go with the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Philippians 2:1-13

Why humility is better than tolerance

When Paul wrote this letter, he was a prisoner, probably in Rome. He is awaiting his trial before Caesar. Earlier when he'd come to Philippi with Silas, to share the good news, they'd been arrested, beaten and imprisoned. And it would appear that since leaving Philippi, that the Philippians themselves have been persecuted for their faith.

Have you ever heard the really old joke, a person goes into the doctor and says "doctor, doctor, it hurts when I do this." So the doctor replies, "well don't do that."

What do you think the doctor would say to Paul and the Philippians if they said, "doctor doctor, they hit and beat us, they persecute and jail us when we talk about Jesus"? logic would say "well don't do that." But this isn't the advice that Paul gives. In chapter 1 verse 27 he writes, "whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel." Rather than stopping it, Paul encourages them to continue. Continue to live lives that are worthy of Jesus, which by implication means, continue to live lives that are not welcomed by the community around you.

But there is a way that they are to do this. And that is found in our reading this morning. Followers of Christ are to be characterised not by "selfish ambition or conceit," but by "humility" (Philippians 2:3).

John Dickson, an Australian Anglican priest, writer and broadcaster, defines humility as "the noble choice to forgo your status, deploy your resources or use your influence for the good of others before yourself." He also puts it more simply "a willingness to hold power in service of others".

Paul points to Jesus as the embodiment of humility and through what is known as the Christ hymn compares the reality of who Jesus is with the reality of how Jesus lived.

- o He was equal to God, but chose human likeness
- o Instead of being highly exalted, he humbled himself
- o Instead of lording it over others, he was obedient
- o His obedience led him to even greater positions.

As we see in the life of Jesus having strong opinion is no hindrance to humility. Humility does not mean we have to be a doormat for others, it doesn't mean that we live with low self-esteem or curb our strengths and achievements.

I actually think that living from a value of humility is one of the strongest, self-affirming, life giving values that we can express in this world. It means that we have a strong awareness of who we are and what we have to offer. It also means that we know who we are not, and what we don't have to offer.

Australia is growing evermore a multicultural and diverse society. Communication and technology are shrinking our world and we are having to learn new ways to live side by side with those who are different. How do we do this? The answer is too often to be found in tolerance. "If only more people would tolerate each other, we'd all get along." What people are saying in this instance is that we have to agree that all viewpoints are equally valid.

What tolerance does is seek to bring about harmony between people by asking them to soften their convictions. But think about it, we can reasonably expect a Broncos supporter to believe that the Melbourne Storm is equally as good. Can we expect a Ford fan to believe that Holden's are just as good? In religion, can we expect a Muslim to believe in the divinity of

Christ, or can we as Christians believe that Jesus was only a human prophet? No, to hold any of these positions is so at odds with our core convictions that we end up losing any sense of our belief or the uniqueness of what we believe.

Jesus never softened the convictions of what he believed. Every encounter he had with sinners, tax collectors, pharisees, Sadducees, fisherman, Romans, Gentiles all involved him presenting a version of his core conviction, "I am the way, the truth and the life." Not, "I am one of many ways or part of the way, or some of the way."

It is not tolerance that we need to practice, but humility. Humility when applied to our convictions does not mean believing things any less; it means treating those who hold contrary beliefs with respect and friendship. It is the type of conviction that doesn't mean we have to believe things less, nor indeed even accept the truth or validity of the things that others believe. I have a friend who will often say, jokingly, "I could agree with you, but then we'd both be wrong." This glib phrase holds so much truth. In it is found the truth that we can flex two mental muscles at the same time. We must be able to use our intellect to think through our beliefs and the others, whilst at the same time also being able to love the other. If we are unable to exercise these 2 mental muscles at the same time we risk falling into 2 different traps. 1 trap is that we only love those with whom we agree, because they share our same values and beliefs. Everyone else becomes our enemy. The alternative trap is that we accept everything. Every alternative thought must be accepted as valid to the point that we accept everything.

But there is a third way where we learn to respect and care even for those with whom we profoundly disagree. We maintain our convictions but choose never to allow them to become justification for thinking ourselves better than those with contrary convictions. It is expressed in the second greatest commandment, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' Mark 12:31. And Jesus' teaching 'But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,' Matthew 5:44. It's a lifestyle that is lived in the parable of the Good Samaritan where the Samaritan is willing to hold his cultural, religious and ethnic differences lightly, so that he might help someone in need.

But all of this is confronting. Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan to break down the idea that our neighbours are only the ones like us. He taught that we should love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, to provide a counterpoint to the idea of loving our friends and hating enemies.

So how do we get there? I want to suggest that three things are needed.

The first is that we are shaped by what we love. As I've shared, Jesus commands us to love others and he commands us to love God. When we see in the other a person of purpose, meaning, value and worth. When we see them as someone who Christ has loved as they are, it becomes much harder for us to hate and demean them.

The second is to listen with the intention of learning. Edward de Bono says: "A good listener listens slowly to what is being said. He does not jump ahead nor does he rush to judge nor does he sit there formulating his own reply. He focuses directly on what is being said. He listens to more than is being said. He extracts the maximum information from what he hears by looking between the words used and wondering why something has been expressed in a particular way. It is active listening because the listener's imagination is full of 'could be' and 'may be' elaborations."

The third is to grow in your understanding of what you believe. G K Chesterton said "an open mind is like an open mouth: its purpose is to bite on something nourishing. Otherwise it becomes like a sewer, accepting everything, rejecting nothing."

Humility does not mean that we put aside our beliefs. It means we grow evermore sure of the truth and beauty of the gospel. 'Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.' Philippians 2:12-13

And growing into our beliefs equips us with the attitude and ability to engage those who are different in ways that are consistent with our beliefs. Amen.