

**Welcome**

**Prelude**

### **Acknowledgement of First Peoples**

We acknowledge the traditional caretakers of this land upon which we meet as the keepers of ancient knowledge and whose cultures and customs continue to nurture this land today.

We acknowledge their deep spiritual connections to this land and we thank them for the care they have shown over it for thousands of years. We also pay respect to Elders – past, present and future.

### **Gathering and Centring**

For those of you unable to connect via our website on the internet. I invite you to choose three hymns or songs to play at the designated places in the service.

Before we begin this time of worship together. I invite you to set up your own worship space. Decorate it with a candle or a cross, or a symbol that in some way reflects generosity.

If you have a candle, I invite you to light your candle at the time set aside during worship to light the worship candle.

Before you begin, take a moment quiet yourself and to be aware of God's presence. You may want to spend some time in silence, or you might want to take some deep breaths and let go of any anxiety or concerns that you may have, and hand them over to God. Then when you are ready begin your time of worship.

### **The Peace**

When we greet one another with peace it expresses our desire for tolerance and kindness and signifies our hope for the future. For it is when we wish peace that we feel one of the strongest and natural senses of compassion towards one another.

I invite you to take this opportunity to share a sign of peace with those who may be with you at this time. If you are participating in this time of worship by yourself, then I invite you to name those who are dear and near to you or who are on your mind and say, "Peace be with you".

Peace be with you.

### **Lighting the Worship candle**

The candle we light, reminds us that God is fully and completely with us now and always. As we gaze upon the light of the candle may we be reminded that we are to be imitators of God and live in love as Christ lives in us.

**Song**

TIS 655 O let the Son of God enfold

At this point during the service, I invite you to play one of the songs that you have chosen. Once again listen to the words carefully, let them wash over you, uplift you and minister to you.

## **Opening Prayer**

Ever present God, you are  
A God of justice, generosity and unfailing love,  
who stands by the promises you make to your people,  
generation after generation?  
There is no other like you.

We gather together:  
To give you thanks,  
To proclaim your greatness,  
To sing your praise,  
To seek your face,  
And to celebrate your faithful presence with us.

We pray that your Spirit will guide and inspire us.  
Open our mouths to sing and speak your praise,  
Open our ears to hear your Word,  
Open our eyes to see you at work amongst us,  
Open our hearts to receive your love.  
So that we may do all we can to share it with those around us. Amen.

## **The readings**

### *Introduction*

*Take some time to reflect upon these readings. What words or passages catch your attention? What do you imagine the surroundings looked like where these readings take place? How does that impact the way you hear them or how they speak to you? Perhaps you might want to write your thoughts or feelings down, or draw something that reflects your thoughts and feelings, maybe there is a hymn or song that you are reminded of, if so, sing it or listen to it. Then when you are ready, continue on in this time of worship.*

### **Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45**

*The Psalm begins by instructing the hearer to be thankful and to give praise to God. Those who seek God have great reason to rejoice. Seek and praise God. This is a proper approach to worship regardless of the circumstances in which one might find themselves. But the Psalmist was not offering a general invitation here. Rather, the praise and thanksgiving are in response to the works that God has done. Remember the wonderful works he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he uttered, O offspring of his servant Abraham, children of Jacob, his chosen ones.*

105:1 O give thanks to the LORD, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples. 105:2 Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wonderful works. 105:3 Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice. 105:4 Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually. 105:5 Remember the wonderful

works he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he uttered, 105:6 O offspring of his servant Abraham, children of Jacob, his chosen ones. 105:37 Then he brought Israel out with silver and gold, and there was no one among their tribes who stumbled. 105:38 Egypt was glad when they departed, for dread of them had fallen upon it. 105:39 He spread a cloud for a covering, and fire to give light by night. 105:40 They asked, and he brought quails, and gave them food from heaven in abundance. 105:41 He opened the rock, and water gushed out; it flowed through the desert like a river. 105:42 For he remembered his holy promise, and Abraham, his servant. 105:43 So he brought his people out with joy, his chosen ones with singing. 105:44 He gave them the lands of the nations, and they took possession of the wealth of the peoples, 105:45 that they might keep his statutes and observe his laws. Praise the LORD!

### **Jonah 3:10-4:11**

*In a brief poem, Nahum tells of God's wrathful destruction of Nineveh. Nahum provides an oracle that is nothing but utter desolation for Nineveh. From the very beginning of Nahum we read, "The Lord is slow to anger but great in power, and the Lord will by no means clear the guilty" (Nahum 1:3).*

*This is what Jonah was expecting! Jonah was desiring a God who takes vengeance and rages (Nahum 1:1-2). But that is not what Jonah gets...*

*Instead, God sees the repentance of Nineveh and has a change of mind. God spares Nineveh.*

*Our reading from Jonah reminds the children of Israel that God can show compassion, and generosity to those God chooses. We see this played out in our Gospel passage as well.*

3:10 When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it. 4:1 But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. 4:2 He prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. 4:3 And now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." 4:4 And the LORD said, "Is it right for you to be angry?" 4:5 Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city. 4:6 The LORD God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush. 4:7 But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. 4:8 When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, "It is better for me to die than to live." 4:9 But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?" And he said, "Yes, angry enough to die." 4:10 Then the LORD said, "You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labour and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. 4:11 And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?"

## **Matthew 20:1-16**

*The parable of the vineyard follows Jesus' teaching on the story of a rich young man and Jesus' response to Peter's statement "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"*

*In the parable the owner of a vineyard hires day labourers at various times throughout the day. But the owner pays everyone a full day's wage. He goes out of his way to make sure that everyone knows that all are paid the same in spite of the different number of hours worked. Jesus ends this parable with, "The first will be last, and the last will be first." Highlighting that in God's Kingdom everyone is equal.*

20:1 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. 20:2 After agreeing with the labourers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. 20:3 When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; 20:4 and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. 20:5 When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. 20:6 And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?' 20:7 They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.' 20:8 When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the labourers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.' 20:9 When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. 20:10 Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. 20:11 And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, 20:12 saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' 20:13 But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? 20:14 Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. 20:15 Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' 20:16 So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

### **Reflection: The generous landowner**

This parable about the kingdom of heaven messes us up. The first will be last and the last will be first. Where does that ever happen?

It starts with a landowner who goes out to find people to work in his vineyard. I wonder, in your mind's eye what the potential workers who are gathered together look like.

As the story progresses, and workers are selected to work in various fields or vineyards, who is left behind? What do they look like? Are they young, are they old, are they muscular or weak? Do they have tools with them ready for a hard day's work? Do they look happy, worried, stressed or anxious?

Now take it a step further, as you visualise this parable and particularly the workers, that are left behind? How do you think they are feeling? What do you believe is the reason for them being there in the first place? OK the easy answer is they are looking for work, but why do you think they are looking for work? Do you visualise these workers as being

married or single, do they have a family and if so, does their family include their wife and children or are there others? Maybe their parents are living with them, or perhaps their brothers and sisters or other relatives are living with them?

What about the home they live in, what does it look like? Is it large or small, is there plenty of food in the kitchen or is the kitchen bare? With all those images in your mind and as you take note of how this parable progresses, how does your thinking impact the way you see the workers and hear this parable?

A landowner goes down to the street corner where a group of men are hanging out in hope of finding some work. He asks a few of them to work in his vineyard. They're thankful to be selected, even though it will be backbreaking work, and he agrees to pay them whatever the going daily rate is. OK, fine. Makes sense.

For whatever reason he goes out about three hours later and hires some more. He doesn't give many details about what he will pay them. There's no contract or anything, but he does say he'll pay them "whatever's right." Again, they're happy to be selected, and so off they go.

This goes on, and on, all day, until it's almost quitting time, when the landowner goes out one more time and finds a few men who haven't managed to get any work. They're still standing there, faces looking long perhaps with the realisation that they'll be going home without any food that night. The landowner asks them why they're not working, and they respond: "because no one has hired us." It's as if they say, "No one wants us. We feel unimportant, we feel unvalued, we feel worthless." But then the landowner does an amazing thing as the day is drawing to an end, he asks them to go and work in his vineyard too.

What are thoughts on this parable now? I don't know about you, but I am getting the feeling that the landowner is more concerned about the workers than anything else.

Before you know it, the working day has come to an end. The landowner gets his manager to pay everyone in a most unexpected way. Those who came into the vineyard just before sundown are paid first and get a full day's pay. Then, as the manager progresses from paying those who went to work in the field last to those who started first along the line, everyone gets the same amount.

If he had paid the workers, the other way around then we might not have heard the grumbling coming from those who had spent an entire day in the vineyard. But when they realise that everyone else was paid the same amount as them, even those who had only worked for an hour. They get upset because they think that they should be paid more than everyone else. But the landowner says to them more or less, what's your problem "didn't you agree to work for the usual day's pay." Isn't that what I have paid you? Take what is yours and go, because I can do what I want with my money or are you envious because I am generous. Then Jesus concludes his parable with "So the last shall be first, and the first will be last."

I think this parable challenges us to stop and consider what kind of people are in need of "whatever is right." Who needs compassion and generosity the most? How might a society that seeks "a fair go" for all, stop denigrating, shaming and neglecting the precise kinds of people to whom God most desires to express unusual generosity?

By dealing generously with a group of people that no other manager in town considered worth the trouble of hiring, the landowner has made a clear declaration about their value, and worth. What about us who do we value, and who are we being called to be generous towards?

You don't have to read much of the Bible before you notice that God's preference is to show uncommon compassion to those who don't have it so good, and who have been denied a dignified place in the world.

Who are the people today that spend the whole day waiting to be hired but don't find success? In Jesus' time, these would be the weak, infirm, and disabled. Maybe the elderly, too, or anyone with a bad reputation. Yet through this parable I think we hear that God is full of compassion and grace, and that God's generosity and grace is for all, even though others may feel differently. I think that is pretty much the point of our reading from Jonah as well.

Jesus started this parable by saying "the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard." In this parable because of the generosity of the landowner every worker is treated the same. If that is what the kingdom of heaven is like, then surely as followers of Jesus Christ, our responsibility is to proclaim and embody that as best as we can.

As we take stock of what we do and say, and our personal interactions and relationships within the Church community and in our daily lives. What message are we sending to those around us? In what way are we taking the same approach and showing the same generosity as the landowner in this parable, to those who are so often unseen, neglected and left behind today?

### **Points to Ponder:**

In this parable the landowner (generally seen as God) chooses and calls workers despite their weakness. In what way does this challenge the way we are treat others?

If we are honest, we respond with sympathy for the workers who worked in the heat of the day. Why do you think we naturally respond this way?

What should our motive be as we "work" in Gods vineyard?

**Song**      **TIS 168**      For the Fruit of All Creation

At this point during the service, I invite you to play one of the songs that you have chosen. Once again listen to the words carefully, let them wash over you, uplift you and minister to you.

### **Offering and prayer**

Loving God we have a variety of reasons  
for offering these gifts to you,  
but whatever the reason,  
whatever might be our purpose,

we ask that you will  
accept these gifts  
as a token of our abiding love:  
and use them to bring peace, justice  
and comfort to all the world, **Amen.**

**Prayers of the People**     *(by Irene Lund Weston Creek Uniting Church)*

O Lord our God  
You hear our prayers before we speak and answer before we know our need.  
Although we cannot pray as we ought may your Spirit pray in us drawing us to you and  
towards our neighbours. May you hear our spoken prayers and those offered in the silence  
of our hearts.

We pray for your Church throughout the world and in particular we pray for our own  
congregations. Help us to be united in one body by the one Spirit being bound together in  
love and obedience to you.

We pray that amid the fear and chaos of a hurting world we will be strengthened in our  
faith and that we will be constantly reminded that You are with us to provide peace and  
comfort. We praise you for the good things being done in Your name through acts of  
kindness as communities show love and compassion to one another. Help us to remain  
aware of the vulnerable people in our society, caring for them and sharing Your love.

O God of infinite mercy we pray for those countries where the health systems can't keep  
up and meet the needs of the gravely ill. Grant us compassion, that the well equipped may  
come to the aid of the ill-equipped, and that in sharing our resources lives would be saved,  
and we would all be protected.

We pray for wisdom and endurance for our leaders and government officials in Australia.  
We pray that they would have the capacity to listen well to all kinds of advice and be able  
to weigh up what they hear as they come to decisions that affect us all. As they carry the  
care and concern for this land, may they know deep wisdom, work out of calm and not  
anxiety, and work together to make good joint decisions. We pray they may seek you and  
find you in their care for the nation.

We pray for the doctors and nurses and other health workers who are on the frontline  
delivering medical care at this time as well as those affected by the coronavirus either  
personally or as a carer. Be with them, give them rest, comfort and strength.

We pray for those who are lonely and isolated, particularly those who suffer from anxiety  
and mental health disorders We ask that they will receive peace and a word of comfort to  
know that they are not alone and You care for them in their struggle.

O Lord our God, you are in every place, and no space or distance can ever part us from  
you; take into your holy keeping those from whom we are now separated; and grant that  
both they and we, by drawing nearer to you, may be drawn nearer to one another, in Jesus  
Christ our Lord. *Book of Common Order, 1940, Church of Scotland*

O loving God, to turn away from you is to fall, to turn towards you is to rise, and to stand  
before you is to abide for ever. Grant us, dear God, in all our duties your help; in all our

uncertainties your guidance; in all our dangers your protection; and in all our sorrows your peace.

*St Augustine, 354-430*

Through Jesus Christ our Lord.. **Amen**

**Song**            TIS 681 Lord let me see

At this point during the service, I invite you to play one of the songs that you have chosen. Once again listen to the words carefully, let them wash over you, uplift you and minister to you.

### **Blessing**

May you go  
as workers in God's upside-down kingdom,  
where the last are first and the first are last,  
where needs are met in miraculous ways,  
and there is grace enough for all!

And may the blessing of God,  
the love of Jesus Christ,  
and the presence of the Holy Spirit  
surround you and sustain now and always. **Amen.**