

Sunday, 11 July 2021

Announcements

Good morning church family, another week in lockdown. As you know lockdown has been extended for another week which means we're in lockdown at least until this Friday, 16 so that's why we have another church service online.

So I wanted to make some announcements this morning.

Firstly, we'll keep you up to date about church for next week. It all depends on whether the lockdown is extended or not. If we are meeting in person, Graham Flick has kindly said that he will preach as Rachel and I are on leave this coming week. If the lockdown is extended past Sunday then I've put together a short devotional.

Secondly, as a minister of religion, I can visit you if you require a pastoral visit. I want to let you know that is available to you if you need it. Please just let me know. I'll be sure to wear my mask and keep socially distant. If you need a phone call and a prayer, just let me know, please. Reading an article on the ABC website, there's been some acknowledgement from authorities that pandemic fatigue has hit Sydney. So if you need someone to talk to, please do call us.

Thirdly, we have our trivia night on Friday, 23 July starting at 6:30pm. It's \$15 per person. But it all depends on whether lockdown is extended. But we'll make sure to keep you updated about developments.

Sharing

I'm going to give it to Rachel to share with us.

Hello friends,

Rachel here. I wonder how many of us have been watching or reading the news? I certainly have and I can expect Justin to give me the daily news update if I ask him. He's a much better reader than I am. And this week I've been reflecting and I wonder how many of us experience worry or sadness because of the news? How many of us feel like the news will determine the way we live? How much of the news we hear or read is actually true? Can we even trust it?

I've been challenged this week to direct my eyes and my ears to the truth. To direct my time reading what is true. Reminding myself of God's truth. So I've written down 3 true things that God tells us as His children,

Truth 1: I am faithful

2 Thessalonians 3:3 The Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one.

Truth 2: I am always with you

Deuteronomy 1:6 "Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you"

Truth 3: I am your hiding place

Psalms 91:4 "He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart"

So this week when we feel sad, worried or discouraged, let's pause and take a moment to redirect our minds and our hearts to what is true and continue to trust Him each and every day.

Devotional

Today, I thought I would continue our conversation we had last week and talk about our relationship with God. This last week, I came across an article on the ABC website that talked about how we are becoming really fatigued with the pandemic. And so it can feel like we are alone at times. Even when we might have family in our house, it can feel like we are alone. So today, I wanted to talk about prayer. And

prayer is really important because it's us talking to the living and true God. I love that hymn, What a Friend, that last verse,

Are we weak and heavy-laden,

Cumbered with a load of care?

Precious Savior, still our refuge—

Take it to the Lord in prayer;

Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?

Take it to the Lord in prayer;

In His arms He'll take and shield thee,

Thou wilt find a solace there.

And so I want to emphasise today the importance of prayer and with that in mind, we're going to read Psalm 13. I would encourage you to pause at this moment, take some time and find Psalm 13, and then we're going to read it. If you want, you can read along with me.

Psalm 13.

Psa. 13:0 To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David.

Psa. 13:1 How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

2 How long must I take counsel in my soul

and have sorrow in my heart all the day?

How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

Psa. 13:3 Consider and answer me, O LORD my God;

light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death,

4 lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him,"

lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.

Psa. 13:5 But I have trusted in your steadfast love;

my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.

6 I will sing to the LORD,

because he has dealt bountifully with me.

For some of us, right now, we're struggling. And I want to acknowledge that with this Psalm. I want to share this Psalm with you as a way to help you. But maybe you're not struggling right now. One of my friends I was talking to recently said to me that he doesn't mind lockdown. Maybe that's you. But I want to share this psalm with you also because if you're alive and living in this world, you will come to a season of struggle and suffering.

But this Psalm is really for all of us because it teaches us in a way to pray. I want to give you three things that you can do to pray. Cry, ask, trust.

Firstly, cry. Cry out. And when we go through struggling, through difficult times, sometimes, it feels like as we're going through suffering it feels like God has forgotten us. That's what David feels in this Psalm. Will you forget me forever is his cry? It feels like the LORD has abandoned him. But you know, it's okay to cry out to God in our most difficult moments. It's okay to cry out to him, to be honest about how you feel about the situation you find yourself in. That's what David did in this psalm. Have a look, if you have your bibles,

Psa. 13:1 How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

2 How long must I take counsel in my soul

and have sorrow in my heart all the day?

How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

What is David doing here? He's actually lamenting. Lamenting is a crying out in pain to God. And it's something that we see in the Scriptures. In fact, 1/3 of the Psalms are lament. I've been reading, this book called *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy*:

Discovering the Grace of Lament, by Mark Vroegop. It's a great book. I recommend it. He says the following about lament,

Lament is the honest cry of a hurting heart wrestling with the paradox of pain and the promise of God's goodness.

Every time we lament, every time we cry out in our suffering, we are wrestling with the paradox of pain and the promise of God's goodness. We are wrestling with the reality of pain that we feel and at the same time, remembering that God is good. You are allowed to lament. So I want to encourage you to cry out the LORD, just as David does in this psalm. Are you struggling? Then lament. Are you suffering? Then lament. Are you hurting? Then lament. Are you tired? Are you weary? Cry. Even if you're not going through suffering right now, I think it's important that we are honest with God. You might remember that book, Paul Miller's *a Praying Life*. One of his main points is that we are to come to Jesus with all our thoughts. He quotes Matthew 11,

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30 (ESV)

Paul Miller says this,

The criteria for coming to Jesus is weariness. Come overwhelmed with life. Come with your wandering mind. Come messy. What does it feel like to be weary? You have trouble concentrating. The problems of the day are like claws in your brain. You feel pummeled by life. What does heavy-laden feel like? Same thing. You have so many problems you don't even know where to start. You can't do life on your own anymore. Jesus wants you to come to him...

So, cry out to him. Go to him.

Secondly, ask. I also want to encourage you to be bold in asking. When you lament, you don't only cry out but you also boldly ask. You can ask God with what it is that you want. I mean, who enjoys suffering? Who enjoys hurting? Ask God what it is that you need. That's what David does. Have a look,

Psa. 13:3 Consider and answer me, O LORD my God;

light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death,

4 lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him,"

lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.

David is bold in asking. He asks the LORD, consider and answer me! Please turn your face to me because it feels like I am being punished. David says, 'Light up my eyes,' breathe in me the breath of life because without your LORD, it feels like death right now. Please help me through the suffering. I think about children, and how they are bold in asking parents. Parents, I'm sure, find it frustrating at times, but it's also a delight, to know that their children come boldly to them. That their children are willing to come to them to ask boldly. Every time we cry out to our Heavenly Father in our pain, we can also ask boldly of the LORD. It's like that hymn, And Can It Be,

Bold I approach the eternal throne,

And claim the crown, through Christ my own.

Bold I approach the eternal throne,

And claim the crown, through Christ my own.

We can be bold in approaching the eternal throne not because of anything we have done, but because of who we are in Christ. The writer to the Hebrews says this,

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:14-16 (ESV)

I think that in our denomination, we are a bit too scared to be bold. Who am I to be bold with Jesus? But in Scripture we see confidence, honesty, boldness, we can come to Jesus with our requests! We can be bold, not because of what we do, but who we are in Christ. So be honest, be bold.

And finally, trust. Trust in the God who loves. Lamenting, prayer moves us from crying out in pain to trust. You need all three. You need crying out, you need bold asking. But you also need to declare your trust. And that's what David does that in the last stanza.

Psa. 13:5 But I have trusted in your steadfast love;

my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.

6 I will sing to the LORD,

because he has dealt bountifully with me.

When we lament, we are moving our hearts to trust. Mark Vroegop says this,

Lament is a prayer in pain that leads to trust. It is not only how Christians grieve; it's the way Christians praise God through their sorrows. Lament is a pathway to praise when life gets hard.

We are moving our hearts from pain to praise. That's what lament is. And I want to encourage you to never leave your prayers in either crying out, or in boldly asking, but to end them in praise. One of my friends, talking to him over zoom recently, he's got an 8 month year old. And if you've ever had to deal with an 8 month year old, it can be tricky. My friend's been trying to help his daughter settle at bed time. And it's hard because when she's crying out, my friend is on the other side of the door listening. And he's told me that his heart breaks at her crying, because he desires to hold her. But he also knows that he can't because it's an act of love. Sometimes, it feels like God is distant, but he is there listening. And in the silence, he wants us to learn to trust him more. Elisabeth Elliot says that suffering is never for nothing. She says,

"The deepest things I have learned in my own life have come from the deepest suffering. And out of the deepest waters and the hottest fires have come the deepest things I know about God."

Through the suffering and the pain, there's a purpose. One of those glorious purposes is to teach us, to help us to cling to him. To cling to him. Let's cry out to him, to boldly ask and to trust.

I wanted to end it here, by sharing about why we can trust God in our weakness. Why we can trust God in our suffering? Because God has shown, as Rachel said

earlier, that he will always be with us through thick and thin. He has promised to be faithful, to never leave us, he has promised to be our hiding place. And we see that don't we at the cross of Jesus. Jesus shows himself to be the one who walks with us even through the valley of the shadow of death. He shows himself to be the one we can trust because he doesn't let us down at our most important moment. So let's cry out to him, be bold in asking and trust him.

I'm going to pray. But I'm going to pray a prayer from Lamentations 3:19-24. You can pray it with me too if you like!

Lam. 3:19 Remember my affliction and my wanderings,

the wormwood and the gall!

20 My soul continually remembers it

and is bowed down within me.

21 But this I call to mind,

and therefore I have hope:

Lam. 3:22 The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;

his mercies never come to an end;

23 they are new every morning;

great is your faithfulness.

24 "The LORD is my portion," says my soul,

"therefore

Amen.

Church Family Prayer

I've asked Michael Eggleton to pray. So if he could please come down to pray. No, just kidding. I wouldn't ask him to break NSW Health orders. I've actually asked Mike O'Sullivan to pray the church family prayer over recording.

Hi everyone. I hope that you are all well.

I'm Mike O'Sullivan and I will lead us through the family prayer.

Unlike our church services at Caringbah, this week again, we are using technology to help keep in touch and while it is not as personal as face to face sharing, for the near term, it is a safer approach.

Covid restrictions have been extended and tighter rules are coming into place and we understand these are all for our protection.

At this time, we give thanks for our medical personnel working tirelessly through the pandemic. We give thanks for those in our community who are in front line roles, helping to lift the spirits of our nation's people and keep our country moving forward.

We are blessed to have a wonderful Church, in our country that is largely free of the devastating effects of this terrible pandemic, for this we give thanks.

We are thankful for our loving Church Family - for Lynette forwarding the prayer points so that we can remember and pray for those we know who may be in need of our prayers. We pray for the older members of our congregation who may be more vulnerable to infections. We pray for the family of Ruth Edwards who passed away recently and for Rose Mikhail and her family after the loss of her husband and our friend Noshi. We pray for Mervyn Goonpan who remains in hospital, for Julie Mc Dermaid's improved health and for June Mac's continued improvement after her operation and we give thanks for the loving help her daughter Kim has given her during this time.

We Pray for our friends who may not have seen your love, we pray that they will see your love through our demonstrated faith and actions that they may open their hearts and minds to listen to and read your work.

Lastly Lord, we pray for our own own families, be they with us, interstate or over-seas, may our prayers for their health and safety be heard and may they always feel our love.

Help our church family to remain strong and remember your words from Psalm 46:1 ...

1. God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.
2. Therefore we will not fear....

For all these things, we give you our thanks and pray you will watch over us in the coming week.

Closing

That's the end of our shortened service this week. Hopefully, we're going to be able to meet in person next week. I'll be sure to let you know if we can, by email, phone, Facebook, website. And we'll hopefully see each other real soon. I've included some songs that you can listen to. They're in the links below.

I Surrender All: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JaHYX2eu9uo>

Jesus, Strong and Kind: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5Y8s-Sz_ac

It is Well: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zY5o9mP22V0>

From Whom All Blessings Flow: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tP3CsHfU7dc>