

HYMNS: 90 181 260 511

INTROIT: Psalm 146

Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul!

Let me praise the LORD throughout my life! Let me sing praise to my God all my life!

Do not trust in noble people, in a descendant of Adam, who cannot save! When his spirit departs, he will return to his earth. On that day his plans will perish.

Blessed is the one who has the God of Jacob for his help! His hope is in the LORD, his God, **who has made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them**, who remains faithful for ever, who provides justice for those who are oppressed and who gives food to those who are hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free.

The LORD opens the eyes of blind people. The LORD raises up those who are bowed down. The LORD loves righteous people.

The LORD watches over resident-foreigners. He helps up the orphan and the widow. However, He makes the way of wicked people crooked.

The LORD will reign for ever, Your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD!

COLLECT: O God, You make the minds of Your faithful people to be of one will. Grant that we may love what You have commanded and desire what You promise, that, among the many changes of this world, our hearts may be fixed where true joys are found; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Welcome to all worshipping with us today!

Pastor Peter Ziebell, Phone 0407583922.

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Please notify pastor of anyone who is unwell or in need of a visit.

READINGS:

Acts 6:1-9, 7:2a, 51-60 & 7:55-60 The stoning of Stephen.

1 Peter 2:2-10 The Cornerstone.

John 14:1-14 I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Acts 6:1-9, 7:2a, 51-60

¹ In those days, as the number of the disciples was multiplying, those who spoke Greek brought a complaint against those who spoke Aramaic, that their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. ² The Twelve called the whole group of disciples together and said, "It is not satisfactory for us to give up the Word of God to serve at tables. ³ Brethren, select seven men from among you who have a good reputation and who are full of the Spirit and wisdom, and we shall put them in charge of this duty. ⁴ However, we shall devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word."

⁵ The proposal pleased the whole group. So, they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolaus from Antioch, who had previously become a Jew. ⁶ They placed these men before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

⁷ The Word of God kept on spreading. The number of disciples in Jerusalem was growing very large. Even many of the priests were becoming believers, as God wanted them to.

⁸ Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, was working great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. ⁹ Some men of the Synagogue of the Freedmen, as it was called, men from Cyrene and Alexandria and men from Cilicia and Asia, rose up to argue with Stephen...

7:2a Stephen answered, ... ⁵¹ **"Stubborn people and uncircumcised in hearts and ears! You are always resisting the Holy Spirit. As your fathers have done it, you are doing it too. ⁵² Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who announced that the Righteous One would come, and now you have become the ones who have betrayed and murdered Him. ⁵³ You were the people who received the Law through angels who were directed to transmit it, but you have not kept it."**

⁵⁴ When they heard these things, they became furious and ground their teeth at him.

⁵⁵ However, full of the Holy Spirit, he looked intently up to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶ He said, "Look! I see

heaven opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

⁵⁷ However, they shouted aloud and held their ears shut. They rushed at him with one purpose, ⁵⁸ threw him out of the city and began to stone him. The witnesses laid their outer clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

⁵⁹ While they were stoning Stephen, he was making an invocation and saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” ⁶⁰ Then he knelt and shouted aloud, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them!” When he had said this, he fell asleep.

1 Peter 2:2-10

² Like new-born babies, long for the pure milk of the Word, that by it you may grow up to salvation! ³ For **you have tasted that the Lord is good.**

⁴ You are coming to Him, as to a living **Stone**, whom human beings have rejected but whom God has **chosen** and who is **precious** to Him; ⁵ and you are also being built, as living stones, to be a spiritual temple and to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices, which are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For in Scripture it says, “**See, I am laying a Stone in Zion, a chosen and precious Cornerstone, and the person who believes in Him will by no means be put to shame.**”

⁷ Therefore, He is **precious** to you who believe; but to those who do not believe, “**He is the Stone, which, although rejected by the builders, has become the Cornerstone,**” ⁸ and “**a Stone over which they stumble and a Rock over which they fall.**” They stumble because they disobey the Word. That is also the end appointed for them.

⁹ You, however, are a **chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own special people**, that you may **extol the wonderful deeds** of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light. ¹⁰ Once you were “**not a people,**” but now you are “**the people of God.**” Once you had “**not received mercy,**” but now you have “**received mercy.**”

John 14:1-14

¹ “Let not your hearts be troubled! Believe in God and believe in Me! ² In My Father’s house there are many rooms. If it were not so, I would have told you, because I am going to prepare a place for you. ³ If I go to prepare a place for you, I shall also come again and take you to be with Me, that you also may be where I am.

⁴ You know the way to where I am going.”

⁵ Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going. How can we

know the way?"

⁶ Jesus told him, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. ⁷ If you have known Me, you will know My Father also and from now on you know Him and have seen Him."

⁸ Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father! Then that is enough for us."

⁹ Jesus asked him, "Have I been with you for such a long time, and have you not known Me, Philip? The person who has seen Me has seen the Father. How do you say, 'Show us the Father'? ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and that the Father is in Me? These Words, which I am telling you, I am not speaking on My own authority, but the Father, who remains in Me, is doing His works. ¹¹ Believe Me, that I am in the Father and that the Father is in Me. Or else, believe because of the works themselves!

¹² "Truly, truly, I tell you, the person who believes in Me will also do the works that I am doing and do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.

¹³ I shall also do whatever you ask in My name, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask Me for anything in My name, I shall do it.

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE AND THE PRESENT

Sermon for the Fifth Sunday of Easter 2023

John 14:1-5

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is John 14:1-5, that part of our Gospel today where Jesus says there are many rooms in His Father's house: "**Let not your hearts be troubled! Believe in God and believe in Me! ² In My Father's house there are many rooms. If it were not so, I would have told you, because I am going to prepare a place for you. ³ If I go to prepare a place for you, I shall also come again and take you to be with Me, that you also may be where I am. ⁴ You know the way to where I am going.**"

⁵ Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going. How can we know the way?"

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

You have to have hope. Hope is faith in facing the future, something we must look forward to. Without hope, life becomes a constant struggle with nothing to look forward to. Without hope, we shall lose heart, get depressed, and our hopelessness will paralyse us. So, we need hope for the future to function well in the present. And really, we need hope for the big future, *the eternal future*, because the reality is, at some point, we shall depart this life. At some point, death is going to carry us away. Do you have hope that you can deal with that? *A sure hope?* Do you have a hope for the future that strengthens you to carry out your calling in the present? Today, let us learn what the Word of God says about such things.

Let's start with that hope for the future.

Hope is a beautiful thing. It lifts our spirits and helps us to carry on. We need hope in our lives, but we need hope that can also deal with death. As St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, "*If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all other people*" (15:19). If we have hope in Christ only in this life, if there is no resurrection to the bliss of heaven, we have made a sad choice. That hope would be an idle dream if the words at the close of the creed, "*the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting,*" were never true - what a miserable end to a great hope and a dedicated life!

No, this life is short and full of trouble and will end in death for everyone, and we need hope that reaches beyond the grave. How can we deal with that discouragement, the prospect of death looming before us?

As we meet them today, the disciples were dealing with discouragement and a lack of hope. It's a night when Jesus, their Master, had told them some troubling things. He had said to the disciples, "*One of you will betray Me*" (John 13:21). He told them He was going away: "*You cannot follow Me now where I am going*" (John 13:36). Obviously, this would have been very troubling and disconcerting to the disciples. So to give them hope, Jesus tells them, "**Let not your hearts be troubled! Believe in God and believe in Me! ² In My Father's house there are many rooms. If it were not so, I would have told you, because I am going to prepare a place for you. ³ If I go to prepare a place for you, I shall also come again and take you to be with Me, that you also may be where I am. ⁴ You know the way to where I am going.**"

Jesus was going away, and this troubled the disciples. Their hearts were troubled, their hope dashed. But that's not the end of the story. Jesus calls them to faith - faith in God and Jesus Himself as the One who had been sent from the Father to do the Father's will. Jesus speaks peace to troubled hearts by pointing His disciples to where He is going and what He will do there. He is going to His Father's house to prepare a place for those who believe in Him and follow Him.

“In My Father’s house there are many rooms.” Jesus had come from the Father and now was returning home. By speaking of God as **“My Father,”** Jesus affirmed His identity as the only Son of God came from heaven. He is the eternal Word made flesh, full of grace and truth.¹ Now, He would return to His Father, having come and done His will. He’s going home to His Father’s house, but He’s not the only one who will be going there. There is room for more. **“In My Father’s house there are many rooms.”** Many more will come.

In fact, Jesus is going there first to get the place ready. **“I am going to prepare a place for you,”** He says. Jesus is preparing a place for His disciples, all those who believe in Him, trust in Him and follow Him. *That includes us!* Jesus is preparing a place in His Father’s house *for us!*

“If I go to prepare a place for you, I shall also come again and take you to be with Me, that you also may be where I am.” Jesus is going away, but He will come back, get us, and take us to where He is. Jesus is going to His Father’s house, preparing a place for us, and He will bring us there to be with Him, where He is, forever. This is the hope Jesus gives His disciples. His going away is really for their benefit. And, He tells them, **“You know the way to where I am going.”**

But now, this raises a host of questions. Thomas starts: **“Lord, we do not know where You are going. How can we know the way?”** This whole going-away business was still *troubling* the disciples. It was still shrouded in mystery for them. It would be for us, too, except we get to look at it now on this side of what would come that night. We know where Jesus was going that night - and the next day. That was the night our Lord was betrayed, arrested, and put on trial. The following day, He would be delivered to Pilate, condemned to death, and handed over to be crucified. That’s where Jesus is going, and He knows it as He speaks to His disciples. Jesus is going to the cross to suffer and die for them and us.

The way to the Father’s house runs through the cross. Jesus had come to do His Father’s will – to die for the sins of us all. Here is the greatest service and sacrifice ever made: Jesus serving and saving us with the perfect sacrifice for sins. *“No one has greater love than this, to lay down his life for his friends”* (John 15:13). That is what Christ our Saviour has done for us. ***He has willingly laid down His holy, innocent life so that He, not us, would pay the penalty for our rebellion against God - death under God’s judgment.*** Jesus takes the death that otherwise would strike us down.

¹ John 1:14

But Jesus emerges from this battle victorious, having defeated our enemies for us. Our divine Champion has defeated and conquered sin, death, and the devil! His resurrection on Easter Day is proof. Our Saviour still bears in His glorified body the wounds by which He won our salvation, the marks in His hands and side. The way to the Father runs through the cross.

We need hope that reaches beyond the grave. The good news is, we have it! Christ Jesus has conquered the grave for us and gives us the hope of eternal life. We rejoice in hope of the glory of God. The Apostle Peter writes, *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! He has given us new birth by His great mercy, through raising Jesus Christ from the dead.”* Then immediately adds, *“Therefore, we have a living hope”* (1 Peter 1:3).

We have hope, real hope! And we rejoice in this hope, even amid the difficulties of this life. Life can be complicated and full of trouble. We lose a loved one. We have heart trouble and troubled hearts. We grow old and grow weak. Physical ailments, emotional wounds, and discouragement are the afflictions we face in this life. But Jesus speaks hope to troubled hearts: **“In My Father’s house there are many rooms. If it were not so, I would have told you, because I am going to prepare a place for you. ³ If I go to prepare a place for you, I shall also come again and take you to be with Me, that you also may be where I am.”**

You see, we are looking forward to a place much grander and more glorious than our home here. With the hope that only Jesus gives, we look forward to our home in heaven, our Father’s house. Jesus is preparing that place for us, and He will come again and take us to Himself, that where He is, we shall also be, forever. This is our hope for the future.

Therefore, this hope for the future arms and strengthens us for the present. It enables us to carry out our calling in the here and now as members of a “present priesthood.” A priesthood? Yes, you and I are called to be priests. In our Second reading today, from 1 Peter chapter 2, Peter says that we are being built up *“to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices, which are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ”* (2:5).

“A holy priesthood.” That’s who we are; you don’t have to be a pastor to be part of this priesthood. No, we were brought into this priesthood at our baptism. There God put His name on us. There we were made holy, set apart to belong to God alone, set apart for His service. The Old Testament priests were consecrated, set apart, holy to the Lord, and dedicated to His service. That’s what priests are; that’s what priests do.

In fact, the whole people of Israel were set apart to be God’s holy priesthood in the world. In Exodus 19, after the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt and brought

them to Mount Sinai, He told Israel: “*You will be a special treasure to Me... You will be My kingdom of priests and My holy nation*” (19:5-6). And then, in Deuteronomy, Moses reminds them: “*For you are a people that is holy to the LORD, your God. The LORD, your God, has chosen you out of all the other peoples on the surface of the earth to be a people that is His personal property*” (7:6).

God’s treasured possession, a chosen people, a holy priesthood. Notice, this is the very same language Peter uses and applies to us now as the church. He says, “*You, however, are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own special people, that you may extol the wonderful deeds of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light*” (1 Peter 2:9). Yes, we are a holy priesthood, a royal priesthood, dedicated to the service of our king, Jesus Christ. And what do priests do? They offer up sacrifices. Now here we need to be clear. The sacrifices we offer are not sacrifices for sin. No, our great High Priest, Jesus Christ, already offered that once-and-for-all sacrifice. His sacrifice on the cross is the only sacrifice that atones sin, and that sacrifice is total and complete. It is finished.

And because of Christ’s complete sacrifice for sin, now you and I offer our sacrifices in service to the Lord. As Peter says, we “*offer spiritual sacrifices, which are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*” What are these sacrifices? These are our prayers and praises and thanksgivings to God. These sacrifices occur as we proclaim the excellencies of “*Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light*” (1 Peter 2:9). When we sing our hymns, when we pray for the people of this world, when we confess the faith to one another and bear witness to the world, we are offering up spiritual sacrifices as the holy priesthood. When we carry out our vocations in the world, however humble they may be - father, mother, son, daughter, employer or employee - when we carry out our various vocations with faith in God and service to our neighbour, we are doing priestly, God-pleasing work, and these sacrifices are pleasing to God because of what Christ has done for us.

Dear friends, today, we embrace our identity as the people of God. We are a holy priesthood, set apart to belong to God, dedicated to His service, offering up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. We have a sure hope to strengthen us for this service. Our hope for the future as people who will live in our Father’s house enlivens and animates us as we carry out our calling in life. We hope for the future and a present priesthood: In Christ, that’s what we have. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, You have sent Jesus, Your holy Servant, into the world, not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life to redeem all people. After He had offered His life as the one sacrifice for all sins for ever, You raised Him from the dead by Your glorious power. Give us a living faith in Him, so that we may possess the sure hope of eternal life through Him.

We thank You for all Your kindness in our lives. We praise You for every blessing that You give us, and that Your mercy is never-ending.

We thank You, O Father of all light, for taking away the darkness of our minds and spirits, and for revealing to us Your Word of truth in Jesus Christ. Pour out Your Spirit on us, that He may continually plant Your Word in our hearts. Increase our willingness to study the Scriptures, and our understanding of them.

We thank You for the fellowship of believers in Your church. Keep us all in the unity that the Spirit gives, and in the peace that binds your children together. Keep us in faith in Christ Jesus, in joyful obedience, and in loyalty to Your infallible Word. Bless Your church everywhere, protect it from all its enemies, and give it success in all the work that believers do in Jesus' name.

We thank You for our Christian homes. Surround every family with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, that love, peace, forgiveness, comfort, joy, and moral purity may fill their lives.

We thank You, Lord, for the blessings that we enjoy in our rich land. Defend it, both within and without, from all who would harm it by sin, undermine it by strife and rebellion, or destroy it by war.

Strengthen the faith of those in our midst who are suffering illness, who are bereaved, and who are lonely, or depressed in any other ways.

We thank You for health and healing, education and social joys, friends and companions, and all the beauties and wonders of Your creation. Fill us with gratitude for Your goodness, and give us opportunities to use what You give us to serve you.

Surround us all with Your love, and finally receive us into perfect, unbroken fellowship with You and our Saviour Jesus Christ. Hear these prayers in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

Article: Acceptance and Forgiveness

Television programs and newspaper articles often deal with the problems of teenagers. We hear again and again what we have heard before. Teenagers need to be accepted but feel pressured to succeed. They fear that they will fail and be rejected. People of every age are in that situation. We need to be accepted by other people. But society pressures us to achieve “success,” whatever that is.

It gets complicated. We begin to fear rejection in case of and because of failure. The pressure increases when personal worth is based on achievement. Our value, even in our own eyes, comes to depend on some idea of performance.

What are we to do? We can work like mad to achieve success. But that effort is doomed to failure, eventually, for everyone. Even those who succeed most in worldly terms are not satisfied. They still want more and more success.

Or we can struggle to be free from mental and emotional slavery to success. We can view our worth - and the worth of others - as a reality with or without money, fame, beauty, power, or any of the elements that spell “success” in the world.

Do not misunderstand. We should work hard and do our best to be helpful in family and community. But our sense of worth and our acceptance by others should never depend on what we do but only on what we are - human persons created by God, loved by God, redeemed by God.

The point is to take the pressure off. But can it be done? In a world of sinners like us, this pressure remains rather constant. The only way for such acceptance to survive is for forgiveness to occur - and recur. We all do wrong things. We all disappoint ourselves and others. We need forgiveness. That is the only way for acceptance to endure.

What is forgiveness? It is not: “No harm done” or “It doesn’t matter.” That denies that anything is or was wrong. That is condoning, not forgiving.

Forgiveness is: “You did wrong. I was angry. But I never stopped loving you. I have forgiven you. I am not angry anymore.” Forgiveness is acceptance despite wrongdoing (or wrong-saying, or wrong-thinking, or wrong-being).

Christianity is the religion of forgiveness and acceptance by God. Other religions tell us we can do enough good work to make God like us and accept us. Christianity admits that we are sinners and that sin is seriously wrong.

But God loves us despite our sins! God the Father has sent His Son to be our Saviour. Jesus has suffered God’s entirely justified anger against our sins. He has satisfied that anger for us. He has appeased it by His pain and death.

The message of Christianity is that God forgives and accepts sinners. He welcomes believers as His children for eternity - in spite of sin, because of Christ!

God is at work in His Word to convince us that He really has forgiven our sins for Jesus’ sake. It is not based on anything we do. That forgiveness is the only really powerful motive for us to forgive and accept others also.

Children's Message:

Have you ever been chosen for something? Maybe you have been chosen to be on a sports team or chosen to be in a play. How did you feel when you were chosen? Did you feel excited? Nervous? Honoured? How do you feel when you aren't chosen for something or when you're the very last person to be chosen? Usually, when you are chosen for something, you think of it as a great honour, right? It's exciting to know that someone wants you on their team. But if you aren't chosen, or if you're the very last to be chosen, it can make you feel sad, like people don't want you.

God tells us that we are His chosen people, and that is wonderful news! It's also very surprising news! Why would I say that? I say that because we're all sinful. That means we don't love God or other people as we should. God is pure love. Sin is the opposite of pure love. So how can God choose us to be His people when we're sinners?

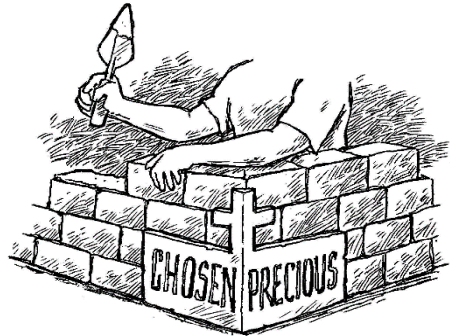
God the Father chooses us "in Christ." The Apostle Peter says that we are those "*whom God has chosen and who is precious to Him*" (1 Peter 2:4).

Our heavenly Father connects us to Jesus. When did He do that? When He baptised us. The Bible says that we have been baptised into Jesus' death and resurrection. When God baptised you, you became Jesus' child. So now, when God the Father looks at you,

guess whom He sees? He sees Jesus. He sees Jesus' holiness. He sees Jesus' love. And so God chooses you in Jesus to be His special people! Isn't that exciting?

Now that we're God's chosen people, how do we want to live? Do we want to live selfish lives that are unloving? No! That's the very thing Jesus came to save us from! Now that God has chosen us in Jesus, it makes us want to live lives that are loving, that help other people know God loves them too.

We won't do this perfectly. We're still sinners. We still do unloving things every day. But that's why it's so great to come to God's house. This is where God's children come to confess our sins - that means we tell God the things we've done wrong - and God gives us His forgiveness. Because of what Jesus has done when He died on the cross and rose from the dead, God forgives our sins and wraps us in Jesus' holiness. For Jesus' sake, we are still His precious, chosen people! *Thank You Father, for calling us through Your only Son Jesus to be Your children, who are precious to you! Amen.*



WEEKLY ANNOUNCEMENTS

14 May 6 Easter	18 May (Thursday) Ascension Day	21 May 7 Easter
8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA LR 9.00am GRN LR 9.30am AUB LR 9.00am LOWOOD HC (Ascension Day Service)	7.30pm GRN HC Readings: Acts 1:1-11 Ephesians 1:15-23 Luke 24:44-53 Hymns: 771, 169, 111, 372, 291, 113	8.30am OAK HC 9.00am TMBA LR 9.30am AUB LR 10.15am GRN HC 9.00am MARBURG LR
Sunday, 14 May		
READINGS: Acts 17:16-31; LOWOOD: Acts 1:1-11;	1 Peter 3:13-22; Ephesians 1:15-23;	John 14:15-21 Luke 24:44-53
HYMNS: 767 322 197 643 LOWOOD: 771 169 111 372 294 113		
Sunday, 21 May		
READINGS: Acts 1:12-26; 1 Peter 4:12-19; 5:6-11 John 17:1-11		
HYMNS: 498 783 80 (175 85) 416		

Tuesday, 9 May, 7.30pm. Men's Fellowship at Oakey. Opening devotion: Barry.

BIBLE STUDIES:

Friday, 12 May, Greenwood, 7.30pm.

Thursday, 25 May, Lowood, 10.00am.

Friday, 26 May, Oak/Aub at Aubigny, 7.30pm.

Sunday, 28 May, Toowoomba, 8.00am.