# Bethlehem Lutheran Church Wagga Wagga

# 12th Sunday after Pentecost

# 23rd August, 2020

# The Triune God meets with us

## Present your bodies as a living sacrifice,

### holy and acceptable to God. (Rom 12:1 NRSV)

## In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

### Amen

# We confess our sins to God the Father…

## Friends in Christ:

## Let us confess our sins in the presence of God and of each other.

### We confess to you, almighty God, before the whole company of heaven, and to each other, that we have sinned in thought, word and deed, by our own fault.

### Have mercy on us, for Jesus’ sake, forgive us all our sins, and bring us to eternal life. Amen.

# …and God forgives us

## Maythe almighty and merciful Lord grant us pardon and forgiveness of all our sins.

### Amen.

# Jesus leads us as we pray

## The Lord be with you

### And also with you.

## Let us pray for the church. *[silence]*

## Thank you, Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, that you have established your church on earth and opened the door to your Father’s presence.

### Build us up as your church on the sure foundation of faith in you. For you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

### Amen.

# 1st Reading – God speaks through his prophets

## **Isaiah 51:1–6** *The earth will pass away, but God's salvation is forever*

## 1 ‘Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness

## and who seek the Lord:

## look to the rock from which you were cut

## and to the quarry from which you were hewn;

## 2 look to Abraham, your father,

## and to Sarah, who gave you birth.

## When I called him he was only one man,

## and I blessed him and made him many.

## 3 The Lord will surely comfort Zion

## and will look with compassion on all her ruins;

## he will make her deserts like Eden,

## her wastelands like the garden of the Lord.

## Joy and gladness will be found in her,

## thanksgiving and the sound of singing.

## 4 ‘Listen to me, my people;

## hear me, my nation:

## instruction will go out from me;

## my justice will become a light to the nations.

## 5 My righteousness draws near speedily,

## my salvation is on the way,

## and my arm will bring justice to the nations.

## The islands will look to me

## and wait in hope for my arm.

## 6 Lift up your eyes to the heavens,

## look at the earth beneath;

## the heavens will vanish like smoke,

## the earth will wear out like a garment

## and its inhabitants die like flies.

## But my salvation will last for ever,

## my righteousness will never fail.

## This is the word of the Lord

### Thanks be to God

# We respond with Psalm 138

## 1 I will praise you, Lord, with all my heart;

### before the ‘gods’ I will sing your praise.

## 2 I will bow down towards your holy temple

## and will praise your name

## for your unfailing love and your faithfulness,

### for you have so exalted your solemn decree

### that it surpasses your fame.

## 3 When I called, you answered me;

### you greatly emboldened me.

## 4 May all the kings of the earth praise you, Lord,

### when they hear what you have decreed.

## 5 May they sing of the ways of the Lord,

### for the glory of the Lord is great.

## 6 Though the Lord is exalted, he looks kindly on the lowly;

### though lofty, he sees them from afar.

## 7 Though I walk in the midst of trouble,

## you preserve my life.

### You stretch out your hand against the anger of my foes;

### with your right hand you save me.

## 8 The Lord will vindicate me;

### your love, Lord, endures for ever –

### do not abandon the works of your hands.

# 2nd Reading – God speaks through his apostles

## **Romans 12:1–8** *The basis of ethics, and advice on gifts*

## 1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship. 2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.

## 3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. 4 For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. 6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; 7 if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; 8 if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

## This is the word of the Lord

### Thanks be to God

# Gospel Reading – God speaks through Jesus

## **Matthew 16:13–20** *Peter declares Jesus to be the Christ*

## 13 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say the Son of Man is?’

## 14 They replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’

## 15 ‘But what about you?’ he asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’

## 16 Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’

## 17 Jesus replied, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. 18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.’ 20 Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

## This is the gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, O Christ. Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for revealing yourself as the Son of God.

### Help us always to confess and proclaim you.

### Amen.

# Children’s Message

# We meditate on the hymn ‘They Knew Who He Was’

### 1 When Jesus came, the demons cried,

### Oh, how they cried;

### They knew they had no place to hide,

### No place to hide.

### *They knew who He was,*

### *They knew who He was,*

### *Yes, they knew who He was*

### *And they cried, how they cried.*

### 2 They knew He wasn't just a man,

### Not just a man;

### They felt the power of God's great hand,

### God's mighty hand:

### *They knew who He was,*

### *They knew who He was,*

### *Yes, they knew who He was*

### *And they cried, how they cried.*

### 3 No devil could withstand God's Son,

### God's only Son;

### They trembled when His time had come,

### His time had come:

### *They knew who He was,*

### *They knew who He was,*

### *Yes, they knew who He was*

### *And they cried, how they cried.*

### 4 Now Jesus lives, and all is well,

### Yes, all is well;

### He rules in heaven, He rules in hell,

### Heaven and hell:

### *They knew who He was,*

### *They knew who He was,*

### *Yes, they knew who He was*

### *And they cried, how they cried.*

#### Robin Mann

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# God speaks to us

## *The LCA provides this sermon edited for lay-reading, with thanks to the original author.*

## *Sermon for Proper 16A - The text: Matthew 16:13–23*

## What kind of person do you warm to? Someone who brags about their achievements and never seems to mess things up? Or someone who makes mistakes, but is quick to admit them and stands by you when the going gets tough? We can more easily identify with someone who is very human, can’t we? Someone who displays weaknesses common to many of us, and yet remains an inspiration to us. We may often wonder about the kinds of people Jesus calls to serve him.

## They seem to us to be the most unlikely of candidates to achieve great things for Christ. Simon Peter was the most unlikely of candidates to lead a religious revolution. He’s been called ‘the apostle with the foot-shaped mouth’. Peter was eager and enthusiastic, bold and outspoken, with a habit of revving his mouth while his brain was still in neutral. Our four gospels are remarkably candid about the faults and failures of the first leaders of the Christian church. Their weaknesses and shortcomings aren’t smoothed over by some public relations expert.

## Rather, the candid recording of erring disciples by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John is part of the evidence for the reliability of their narratives about our Lord. Both their strengths and weaknesses are revealed to us to give hope to all of us. In a sense, there are no great Christians, only the great grace of Christ, which is either eagerly embraced and used to make a life Christ-like, or is sadly neglected and underused. Our world isn’t looking for perfection from those of us who bear Christ’s name – it is looking for reality, for people who quickly admit what they’ve done wrong instead of blaming others for what’s happened. No Christian is a finished product. We’re all learners with a lifelong learning process still ahead of us to ‘grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ’, as St Peter urges us out of his own experience.

## When Jesus called Peter to be his disciple, the life of Simon Peter the fisherman changed dramatically. He became not only the most prominent of Christ’s followers, but also later became the leader and principal spokesman of the fledgling Christian church. He’s a fascinating Christian because of his fallibility, and yet impetuous enthusiasm. Peter wasn’t born a giant of history, but became one through his lifelong love for Christ and his desire to cling to Jesus Christ, no matter what happened.

## One day, when many of Jesus’ disciples deserted him, Jesus asked his 12 apostles: ‘Will you also go away?’ Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God’ (John 6:67–69). In other words, Peter’s saying that he could not contemplate following anyone but Jesus. There’s no other option worth considering!

## Christ called Peter to follow him when he was having no success in his work as a fisherman. When he obeyed Jesus, Peter had an extraordinary catch of fish. He instantly realised that he wasn’t just having good luck in fishing. Rather, in Christ, he was in the presence of a power beyond his comprehension. His immediate response was one of unworthiness. He fell down before Christ and said, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord’.

## But Jesus didn’t depart. It was precisely such a person as Peter, a man who knew his own weakness and sinfulness, but could at the same time recognise and acknowledge the presence of God’s power that Christ wanted. Leaders are involved in the middle of the action. They are curious and love asking questions as did Peter. His readiness for adventure means he had the potential to be a great leader. He had the habit of opening his mouth when he should have opened his ears instead. From time to time, he didn’t fully understand what he himself was saying.

## One such occasion was when Christ was transfigured in all his heavenly glory before his eyes. After Peter spoke, St Mark bluntly tells us that Peter didn’t know what to say! His great confession of faith in today’s gospel is all too soon followed by Peter’s unguarded and unthinking tendency to protest what Jesus says. As the proverb states: ‘Fools rush in where angels fear to tread!’ Jesus had just lavished great praise and blessing on Peter for his profound, Christ-centred confession of faith. Jesus then addresses Peter as a minister and says, ‘On this rock [that is, on this ministry] I will build my church’. Then Jesus adds the hope-filled, comforting and encouraging promise that the Gates of Hell can never overpower Christ’s church.

## This promise has sustained and empowered the martyrs and missionaries of the church ever since. All the organised opposition and hostility towards Christ’s church will never wipe it out. Christ guarantees his bride, the church, will remain forever.

## The first Director General of the BBC, Lord Reith, was visiting a group of people, preparing a radio program. One of the group members told Dr Reith what the program was all about. It was to be about ‘giving the church a decent burial’. ‘Young man’, Dr Reith responded, ‘the church of Jesus Christ will stand at the grave of the BBC’. We might add ‘and at the grave of every other secular organisation!’ Christ’s church is like an anvil that has worn out many hammers.

## Jesus gave to Peter and the ministers of his church the ‘Office of the Keys’, that is, the authority to forgive the sins of those who repent. Peter would especially treasure his own forgiveness by Christ, and his rehabilitation at Easter after Peter had so cruelly denied he ever knew Jesus. Prior to his denial of Jesus, Peter was super-confident that he alone would never deny our Lord. No thoughtful Christian will want to point an accusing finger at Peter, because the depths of his failure to be faithful to his Lord is matched by the depth of his repentance when he realised what he’d done. When Jesus turned to look at him, Peter went out and wept bitterly. Peter repented because Jesus prayed for him.

## A sense of our own vulnerability to letting Christ down is essential. If we don’t recognise and acknowledge our own vulnerability, and plead constantly for Christ’s help, we too set ourselves up for failure.

## An alcoholic had been sober for a number of years. He was asked what the secret was to his recovery. He replied, ‘As simple as it sounds, it was the hardest lesson for me to learn. Every time I crave a drink, the last thing in the world I want to do is pray. I will do anything not to pray. But I finally discovered that when the pressures build up to get drunk and go on a binge, if I will force myself to pray for five minutes, the temptation will fade away. But you don’t know how hard that is. When a man needs a drink, the last thing he wants to do is pray about it’.

## Peter learned that same lesson in the Garden of Gethsemane when he failed to join our Lord Christ in prayer. In his two letters, where he shares with us all the marvellous things he learned from our Lord, Peter writes, ‘Keep sane and sober for your prayers’ (1 Peter 4:7). He starts his first letter off with the marvellous difference Christ’s resurrection can make for all of us. He writes, ‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy, he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time’ (1 Peter 1:3–5).

## In St Peter, the New Testament gives us a portrait of a disciple who, through weakness, was made strong. In our weakness, we too can discover Christ’s strength and the inexhaustible sufficiency of his grace. Jesus says, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness’ (2 Corinthians 12:9).

## The life of St Peter reminds us that church leaders are weak and human like every other Christian and need the prayers of their people for their ministry to be truly blessed by Christ. When Christ called Peter the ‘rock’, he was referring to what Peter would become. Christ views all of us in light of what we can still become by his grace alone. Thank God for that mercy! Instead of sacking us when we fail, our Lord Jesus longs to forgive us and recommission us for his service.

## What a marvellous incentive that is – to continue in the work of the Lord knowing that in the Lord, our labour is not in vain. Amen.

# We confess our faith in the Triune God

### I believe in God, the Father almighty,

### maker of heaven and earth.

### And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,

### who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,

### born of the Virgin Mary,

### suffered under Pontius Pilate,

### was crucified, dead, and buried.

### He descended into hell.

### The third day he rose again from the dead.

### He ascended into heaven,

### and sits at the right hand of God, the Father almighty,

### from thence he will come to judge the living and the dead.

### I believe in the Holy Spirit,

### the holy catholic\* church,

### the communion of saints,

### the forgiveness of sins,

### the resurrection of the body,

### and the life everlasting.

### Amen.

#### \* ‘catholic’ here meaning 'universal'

# We meditate on the song ‘Indescribable’

### 1 From the highest of heights to the depths of the sea

### Creations revealing Your majesty

### From the colours of fall to the fragrance of spring

### Every creature unique in the song that it sings

### All exclaiming

### *Indescribable, uncontainable,*

### *You placed the stars in the sky and You know them by name.*

### *You are amazing God*

### *All powerful, untameable,*

### *Awestruck we fall to our knees as we humbly proclaim*

### *You are amazing God*

### 2 Who has told every lightning bolt where it should go

### Or seen heavenly storehouses laden with snow

### Who imagined the sun and gives source to its light

### Yet conceals it to bring us the coolness of night

### None can fathom

### *Indescribable, uncontainable,*

### *You placed the stars in the sky and You know them by name*

### *You are amazing God*

### *All powerful, untameable,*

### *Awestruck we fall to our knees as we humbly proclaim*

### *You are amazing God*

### *Indescribable, uncontainable,*

### *You placed the stars in the sky and You know them by name.*

### *You are amazing God*

### *All powerful, untameable,*

### *Awestruck we fall to our knees as we humbly proclaim*

### *You are amazing God*

### *Incomparable, unchangeable*

### *You see the depths of my heart and You love me the same*

### *You are amazing God*

### *You are amazing God*

#### Jesse Reeves, Laura Story

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# We give of ourselves

## Thank you, Lord, for giving faith to us and to your whole church, and for the gift of forgiveness.

### Help us in gratitude to offer ourselves in your service. Lead us to work in harmony with one another, using the gifts you have given us for the common good.

### Amen.

# We pray for others

## *God brought Peter to confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. So let us bring our requests to God as we pray for the church and the world.*

## Heavenly Father, thank you for your marvellous mercy which adopted us into your true Israel by baptism, and which works faith in Christ through the gospel. Send messengers to take this good news to the Jews, and to all who neglect their baptism, and bring them to repentance and faith.

## Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

## We are weak Lord, but you are strong. Protect your church and build its faith so that we may not despair in times of trouble, but be sure that not even death and hell can overcome what you build. And so protect and strengthen all who suffer persecution for their faith, and in particular all Jewish Christians.

## Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

## Guide the ministers of your church, that they may use your authority to forgive sins with wisdom and compassion. Bring each person to know the gifts you have given them, and to serve your church accordingly.

## Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

## Thank you for the public services our church is able to offer – schools and early childhood facilities; aged care and welfare services. Bless those who benefit from these and those who serve in them.

## Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

## Unite all the members of our families in faith and devotion to you Lord. Thank you for the faithful families of this congregation and for their service to your church, and give each a clear sense of their gifts and calling.

## Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

## Heal and help the sick, O Lord, and support those with disabilities. Meet the needs of all we know who are in trouble and whom we now name in our hearts... *(brief silence)*

## Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

## Heavenly Father, move us to offer ourselves in service to you, so that your love may be seen also through us. We ask this through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

### Amen.

# We pray the prayer of Jesus

### Our Father in heaven,

### hallowed be your name,

### your kingdom come,

### your will be done,

### on earth as in heaven.

### Give us today our daily bread.

### Forgive us our sins

### as we forgive those who sin against us.

### Lead us not into temptation,

### but deliver us from evil. *Matt 6:9-13*

### For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

# The Triune God sends us out with blessing

## May Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, shine on us and make us ready to meet him when he comes in glory.

## And the blessing of almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be with us always.

### **Amen**.

# We meditate on the hymn ‘Freely, Freely’

### 1 God forgave my sin in Jesus' name,

### I've been born again in Jesus' name,

### And in Jesus' name I come to you to share

### His love as he told me to.

### *He said, "Freely, freely, you have received,*

### *Freely, freely give.*

### *Go in my name and because you believe,*

### *Others will know that I live."*

### 2 All power is given in Jesus' name,

### In earth and heaven in Jesus' name,

### And in Jesus' name I come to you to share

### His power as he told me to.

### *He said, "Freely, freely, you have received,*

### *Freely, freely give.*

### *Go in my name and because you believe,*

### *Others will know that I live."*

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# Announcements