

**An Order for Lay Preachers' Sunday
7th August, 2022**



Call to Worship

Leader	Hear the word of the Lord
All	<i>We are listening for the teaching of our God.</i>
Left side	Why should I care about your weekly worship,
Right side	<i>your fine liturgies,</i>
Left	your earnest prayers,
Right	<i>your Bible studies?</i>
Left	Who asked you to do all that?
Right	<i>I will not listen.</i>
Left	Wash yourselves. Make yourselves clean.
Right	<i>Cease to do evil. Learn to do good.</i>
Left	Seek justice for the ones abused by the powerful.
Right	<i>Rescue those oppressed by the rich abusing their wealth.</i>
Left	Defend the ones who are ignored because people don't care.
Right	<i>Plead for those too readily condemned by popular prejudice.</i>
Leader	Then I will listen, says the Lord.

This Call to Worship is based on the Old Testament reading for the day, from Isaiah.

The notes that follow offer some thoughts and suggestions for worship on 7th August, 2022. The Synod of SA sets aside the first Sunday in August each year as Lay Preachers' Sunday, and encourages every congregation to celebrate and recognise the role that lay people, in particular Accredited Lay Preachers, play in the regular weekly provision of worship for the people of the Church.

These notes follow the standard liturgical pattern of Adoration – Confession – Hearing the word – Prayer for the world – Response of commitment. But of course every preacher will use these materials in a way that best suits the person or the local context.

Preaching the word

The readings for August the 7th are:

Isaiah 1:1, 10-20

What matters is our life, as in lifestyle, not our worship

Psalms 50:1-8, 22-23

Judgement of behaviour that does not reflect worship

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

Faith as demonstrated in a life of active obedience to God

Luke 12:32-40

The kingdom is that "space" where God's will is done.

Part of the worship for the day could include a **Celebration of Lay Preachers**, which could start with this liturgy:

There are diverse gifts:

but it is the same Spirit who gives them.

There are different ways of serving God:

but it is the same Lord who is served.

God works through people in different ways:

but it is the same God whose purpose is achieved through us all.

Each one of us is given a gift by the Spirit:

and there is no gift without its corresponding service.

There is one ministry of Christ:

and in this ministry we all share.

Together we are the body of Christ:

and individually members of it.

Based on 1 Corinthians 12:4ff and Basis of Union, para 13.

The work of Lay Preachers

To preach the Gospel, the grace of God in Jesus Christ, is one of the greatest privileges anyone can have – and a pretty significant responsibility as well! In the Uniting Church we recognise that that privilege is extended not just to Pastors and ordained ministers – Ministers of the Word and Deacons – in congregation placement, but to lay people, "ordinary" members of a congregation who respond to a Call from God to bring the Gospel of grace to their people.

The Ministry of Lay Preaching is a Specified Ministry in the Uniting Church, that is, it is of such importance that there are Regulations relating to the training and formal recognition of Lay Preachers. And those who have been through the formation will bear witness to the incredible richness of understanding, and deepening of faith, that accompanies the study involved.

We also recognise that there are many who faithfully lead their people in worship and with preaching each week and who do not have any formal recognition. The church recognises the reality that without the faithful service of these people, there would be many congregations on any given Sunday with nobody to lead their worship.

So in this celebration of Lay Preachers, we thank God for the dedication and the gifts of accredited Lay Preachers, but also all people Lay and Ordained who bring the insights of their life experience to their faith and share that with us each week.

We pray the blessing of God on them all.

Notes to accompany the lectionary readings for 7th August

(Lectionary Ordinary Time week 19)

Isaiah

The introductory verse 1 establishes the context as the Call from the Lord to Isaiah; but that Call message has the sole purpose of authorising Isaiah to speak. (It's also all the authorisation he needs.)

The first chapter of Isaiah consists of up to 6 separate sayings collected together: they introduce motifs that will recur throughout Isaiah. The chapter forms a kind of overture to the whole work. (Verses 18-20 are actually an introduction to verses 21-30, but the lectionary has used them as a conclusion to verses 10-17: how might that affect the way you use this passage for worship or preaching?)

The central issue is the people's worship – the uselessness of it, for the one simple reason that their worship makes no difference at all to the way they live. "Trample my courts no more!" says the Lord.

Things to look out for:

- Listen to what I say – v 2, 10, 19
- The reference to divine speech – v 2, 10, 20
- Two questions: "What attraction can all your worship possibly have for me?" and "Who asked you to do all this stuff anyway?"
- The Lord's 3-fold declaration – I'm not listening. I'm not looking. I'm not here.
- ... unless you start allowing your worship to shape your life / living / lifestyle / values / hearts and start showing justice, mercy and fidelity to covenant.

Psalm

Three names for God appear right at the start of this psalm: *EI* (Mighty One), *Elohim* (literally, the gods), and *YHWH* (Lord).

Psalm 50 is a word of judgement concerning the people's worship – and so sits well beside the Isaiah reading.

But this word from God is not an end in itself – it has a purpose: to get the people to mend their behaviour. To that extent then, the psalm brings a word of hope as well.

Hebrews

The book *Hebrews* is a long discourse on the superiority of Jesus over the Jewish "system" from which he emerged., and on the meaning of being a person of Cristian faith. It presents a clear Call to more than mere nominal faith and aimless life.

The lectionary passage is part of a long section. Verses 1-3 establish the foundation; the rest of the chapter is a meditation on the nature and consequences of faith. The literary structure of the chapter gives a clue to its theme: it starts (v 1-3) and ends (v 39-40) with the motif of *faith*. There are multiple uses of the phrase "by / in faith".

We should also note first that verse 1 is not a definition of faith – it is a "programmatic statement". "Faith is defined by its object, not by the act of believing."

The nature of faith (1-3): faith is the **hypostasis** of things hoped for: but that word is a bit ambiguous and there is a range of translation options: substance, assurance; even "reality", as faith takes what is hoped for and makes it a present reality, rather than just an idea or a vague hope. For example, *hypostasis* in verse 1 is to do with "substance"; in verse 3 it is God's own being; in verse 14 it is solid confidence.

It can be said that faith “proves”, as in “points to”, the reality of God’s promise.

The word translated *faith* is ***pistis***: the technical term in Greek rhetoric tradition for a proof of a point made; this the chapter has several examples of faith, ***pistis***, as proofs, ***pisteis***. It is also used in a court of law to mean conviction – the case is proved.

But above all faith is an active life of belief that shows up in (here) a list of “heroes of the faith”. In particular – Abraham believed / trusted God and acted on that trust even though he had no idea where he was going. (It took a while, but eventually what Abraham looked forward to did become a reality.)

[But one does wonder what Sarah thought of being hauled all over the countryside as a result of these conversations between Abraham and his God!]

Luke

These verses contain several ideas briefly stated, and so there are different ways of grouping them together. It should also be noted that v 32 is the conclusion of the section 22-32, not an introduction to verses 32f as the lectionary makes it appear.

In these words Jesus urges his listeners to not fret unduly over things that either don’t matter [possessions, for example] or are beyond our control [world events?]; rather the listener should not fear, because God delights in giving us the kingdom / the realm of God as a gift. That is where enduring treasure is to be found; that is why the first manifestation of the kingdom is the generosity of its people.

God grants the “kingdom” – that is, disciples then or now *do not strive for it*, or achieve it, to live boldly as a result. Rather, they choose freely to *respond* to God’s grace.

The kingdom is the place / sphere of life where the will of God is done, as demonstrated by human needs being met, sinfulness is forgiven, people’s lives transformed to show the depths of God’s love. Generosity in this scenario is an expression of devotion to God (33-34).

Luke uses a range of images to urge his listeners / readers to be ready for instant action at any time. He assures us (sounds more like a threat!!) that God will act to make the realm of God a reality – it’s just that we can never know when. But Jesus’ words are not all threat: there is also the promise and assurance.

But what does it mean to “Be ready”? Luke makes it plain that it means ***Be living*** as people of God, as followers of Christ – it’s about practical living, not theological belief.

It is sometimes said that we should see life as a gift from God; some Christians take that as a declaration that their wealth and privilege are also a gift from God, a sign of God’s favour. That’s arguably a serious error: there are extremes of wealth distribution just in our nation, let alone across the worldwide population. It can hardly be said that such inequity is God’s gift to humanity generally – it is much more likely that a lot of what we hold comes to us at the expense of abused and desperately poor people: we just happen to be on the beneficiary end of an unjust economic system. Therefore the truth that the first manifestation of the kingdom is the generosity of its people applies especially to us as Australians; and failure of generosity on our part will undermine any claim we make to be people of the Kingdom.