

An Order for Lay Preachers' Sunday
31st July, 2022



Call to Worship

Leader: The Lord has gathered us together in this place.

All: From all directions we have been summoned.

Leader: Many, many times God has rescued us when all seemed lost.

All: God has redeemed us from loneliness and scarcity, from trouble and distress.

Leader: Let us offer our prayers of thanksgiving,

All: and tell of God's wonderful deeds, with songs of joy.

Leader: Those who are wise will often call to mind what God has done,

All: and take time out to reflect on the steadfast love of the Lord.

Leader: O, give thanks to the Lord, for the Lord is good;

All: and God's steadfast love endures forever!

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.

Opening hymn / song of praise

Prayers

If themes for the prayers are being drawn from the lectionary readings, Hosea points us to thanks and adoration for God's unending love; the confession can pick up either or both of our tendency to wander off and ignore God, or how easily we forget to care about other people.

Preaching the word

All the readings offer scope for an intensive exploration. Alternatively, for those interested in themes occurring across the texts, some ideas worth exploring will include:

^ I am God, not human – the contrast between the character of God and human limitation. [Hosea, Luke]

^ A proper relationship with God will always lead to ethical behaviour [all the readings]

^ How easy it is to let religious requirements blind us to the need for us to be the presence of God for people in need everywhere [Luke, Colossians].

A celebration 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.

If the sermon has been based on the Colossians reading in particular (but not limited to that reading), the following could be a suitable liturgy for:

- *an affirmation of the unique gifts of Lay Preachers*
- *a recognition of the gifts of all the other people engaged in various roles in the congregation:*

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.

Prayers for the world

Prayers for our world might draw from the readings for the day, or perhaps more specifically the message, and relate to any of:

The world

The church

- Lay Preachers (see notes above)
- People for whom faith is a struggle
- Individual people who may be named [*or not, if confidentiality needs to be preserved*].
The Lord's Prayer may be included here, or at any other point, according to local custom.

A song in which we commit ourselves to serve God by serving our world

Blessing

Notes to accompany the readings for 31st July

The readings set in the international Lectionary for this day are:

Hosea 11:1-11 Psalm 107:1-9, 43, Colossians 3:1-11 Luke 12:13-21

Hosea

This passage describes the perplexed parent of a rebellious child – caught between the need to punish and the desire to avoid it. It constitutes the end of the second major division of the book.

There are major **textual issues** with large parts of this passage, in that the original Hebrew text is often uncertain, or when it is plain, it doesn't make a lot of sense.

Verse 2 is translated in NRSV as "... *the more I called them, the more they went away from me*".

But the Hebrew is, "... *the more I called them, the more they went from them.*" Who's the "them"?

The *Message* translation reads, "When others called, he ran off and left me."

Similarly, for verse 3, NRSV reads "*I took them in my arms*" (a perfectly common-sense translation), but the Hebrew is "*I took them in his arms.*"

NRSV footnotes refer to more problems for verses 4, 5, 7, 9.

Notwithstanding those issues, the **structure** of the passage is clear enough:

Verses 1-2	Opening words	Israel's past disobedience
3-4	God's action	past healer
5-7	"	present destroyer
8-9	"	forgiver
10-11	Closing words	Israel's future obedience.

And how is this progress accomplished? Solely through God's action.

The **meaning** of the text:

Recent interpretations have seen here a message of judgement (Anchor Bible), especially if this passage is paired with chapter 13.

Others (eg World Bible Commentary) have seen a message of salvation, paired with chapter 14:2-9.

Either way, the order of things on God's part is love first, then a call to obey.

A final comment:

"*I am God, not human*" (v9) – at first sight the "obvious" meaning is that God is able to forgive because God is not bound by human propensity and desire for revenge; but there's an alternative: parents sometimes give up on their children – they just can't take it any more; but not God – *I am God, not human: my love never ends, my hope never fails.*

Psalm

Giving thanks for forgiveness – selected verses from the song.

The whole work is in two parts:

- Verses 1-32 Thanksgiving
- Verses 33-43 A mix of praise and Wisdom sayings.

Verses 4-9 are a song of thanksgiving for deliverance in the desert; verse 43 is a Wisdom saying.

The same motifs appear here as in the Hosea reading: here they are recast as a hymn of praise by the worshipping community.

Colossians

Context

Chapter 2:16-23 [the previous week's passage] addresses the "philosophy" into which the Colossian people have fallen; this day's passage is most of an exhortation to keep to the truth. It forms two of the last three units of the letter.

The text

Life hidden with Christ

The Gnostics called their hidden secrets ... *apokruphoi*
Paul calls the life in God ... *apokruptein*

That is, it's hidden from common view,
discernible only through the eye of faith.

Structure

Verses 1-4 talk about "heavenly" things: because these are blessed with participation in Jesus' resurrection and the life it brings.

Verses 5-11 concern unreconstructed human things that the people need to eliminate from their lives.

Meaning

New life is given as a result of God's power: Jesus is raised, lives are changed. But it's not just done to us – we are active participants in seeking these "things from above".

But note also:

... new life
... which results from being raised with Christ ..
... requires that first we die (to sin).

The instruction is to be "in" the world but not "of" the world, that is, the Christian life does not consist of some escapist retreat from real life but of full engagement with it, while at the same time no longer pre-occupied by the things that (seem to) matter in the secular world. You can't go through baptism without being changed by it.

Life application

The past does not absolutely determine the future – God can act; but we have a part to play in creating a new future – it doesn't just happen around us.

When we are filled with love, we are able to set aside the human desires that can too easily become an idolatry. Barriers between people are destroyed, human graces prevail.

The Gospel

The tyranny of things

Context

Just before this incident Jesus has been warning against hypocrisy and reminding listeners of God's ultimate authority.

The crowd are amazed by what they hear – but this man sees Jesus only as a means of validating his complaint. Has he not been listening?

The text

^ Verse 20 – *your life is being demanded of you* (NRSV and others) in the Greek original reads *tonight they demand your soul from you*. Who are "they"? "They" are the man's possessions – they have taken control of him.

^ We note also that the word "I" appears 6 times in the man's story, and "my" 5 times.

Structure

Verses 13-15 contain the warnings

Verses 16-21 form the parable

Verse 21 talks about the real "substance" of life.

Meaning

There's nothing to suggest that the man is especially greedy – he probably had a genuine case against his brother. It's just that Jesus refused to get involved, because he saw that the call for justice was actually a cover for an attitude of greed; so he's a fool because he forgets God.

Life application(s) There are so many – where to start?

^ Many religions aim to appease the gods and manipulate them to be friendly and well-disposed to us humans. But true Christian religion aims to have us do what God wants.

^ The most serious error we can make is to try to use our religion to get what we want. This "Christopaganism" has always been the biggest threat to Christianity:

- The medieval penitence system
- The Crusades
- Today's notion that if you perform the right religious duties – join this church, pray the right way, "have more faith", vote for the right political party – God will give you what you want.

^ In chapter 10, a question about eternal life gets turned into a story of a man helping a bashed-up stranger; in ch.11, a request for teaching about prayer ends up as a story of a man waking his neighbour at midnight; now here in ch 12, a claim for justice becomes a story about greed. Jesus has this habit of turning "religious" questions into real-life case studies – because he knows how easily we use religion to evade our justice and care responsibilities.

^ Many a noble cause masks base motives: a mission programme masks a chance to boast about church growth; a vision statement is cover for raw ambition.

^ John Wesley wrote this, in Sermon 119:

He said within himself, "What shall I do?" And is not the answer ready? Do good. Do all the good you can. Let your plenty supply your neighbour's needs; and you will never lack something to do. Can you not find anybody that needs the necessities of life, that is pinched with cold or hunger; nobody that doesn't have clothes to wear, or a place to sleep; nobody wasting away with depression; none that are languishing in prison?

^ Alfred Nobel was a Swedish chemist who grew wealthy by inventing and patenting dynamite. When his brother died in 1888, a newspaper mistakenly printed an obituary of Alfred. He found it a profoundly disturbing experience – the newspaper focussed largely on his invention of dynamite. Alfred Nobel decided he did not want to be remembered only as an inventor of a tool of mass destruction, so used his immense wealth to establish the Nobel Prizes for outstanding actions that benefit humanity.

^ If retirement is a gift for us, what do we plan to do with it?

^ Jesus refused to judge – that's how we should be

^ Remember – the moment we accept Christ, we are forgiven.

^ We ARE rich – and it's a sin if we fail to recognise it.

Acknowledgements

William Barclay: Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians

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Norman Smith: Mercy and sacrifice – a study of Hosea

Marion Swords & others: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary

Thomas Troeger: Sermon sparks