

Cooma Anglican SUNDAY 15 September 2024 - Holy Communion 2.3

Hymn 187 - Let all creation dance

Let all creation dance, In energies sublime
As order turns with chance, Unfolding space and time
For nature's art in glory grows,
And newly shows God's mind and heart

God's breath each force unfurls, Igniting from a spark
Expanding starry swirls, With whirlpools dense and dark
Though moon and sun, seem mindless things
Each orbit sings Your will be done

Our own amazing earth With sunlight cloud and storms
And life's abundant growth In lovely shapes and forms
Is made for praise a fragile whole
And from its soul heav'ns music plays

Lift heart and soul and voice, In Christ all praises meet
And nature shall rejoice, As all is made complete
In hope be strong all life befriend
And kindly tend creation's song

Greeting

Blessed be God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Blessed be God's kingdom, now and for ever.

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

Sentence of the day

So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables." Acts 6:2

Prayer of Preparation

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

O God, without you we are unable to please you; mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

The Ministry of the Word

Old Testament Reading - Exodus 18:17-23

¹⁷ Moses' father-in-law replied, "What you are doing is not good. ¹⁸ You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. ¹⁹ Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to him. ²⁰ Teach them his decrees and instructions, and show them the way they are to live and how they are to behave. ²¹ But select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain —and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. ²² Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you. ²³ If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied."

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Psalm Psalms 27:7-14

⁷ Hear my voice when I call, LORD; be merciful to me and answer me.

⁸ **My heart says of you, "Seek his face!" Your face, LORD, I will seek.**

⁹ Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, God my Saviour.

¹⁰ **Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me.**

¹¹ Teach me your way, LORD; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors.

¹² **Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes, for false witnesses rise up against me, spouting malicious accusations.**

¹³ I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.

¹⁴ **Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.**

New Testament Reading - Acts 6

¹ In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. ² So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. ³ Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them ⁴ and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." ⁵ This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. ⁶ They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. ⁷ So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

⁸ Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹ Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia—who began to argue with Stephen. ¹⁰ But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke. ¹¹ Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God." ¹² So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. ¹³ They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. ¹⁴ For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us." ¹⁵ All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

Gospel Reading - John 2:18-22

¹⁸ The Jews then responded to him, "What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." ²⁰ They replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" ²¹ But the temple he had spoken of was his body. ²² After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

Sermon Acts 6 - Serving the Body Question Time

The Apostle's Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father; from there 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.

Prayers

Let us pray for the world and the church.

Response: Jesus, friend of the helpless, in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

The Lord's Prayer

Accept our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray,

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. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us

from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever.
Amen.

Sentences of Scripture

Jesus said, This is my commandment: Love one another as I have loved you. John 15:12

Prayer of Approach

We do not presume to come to your table, merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in your manifold and great mercies, we are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table. But you are the same Lord whose nature is always to have mercy. Grant us, therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. Amen.

The Confession

God is steadfast in love and infinite in mercy, welcoming sinners and inviting them to the Lord's table. Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith, confident in God's forgiveness.

Merciful God, our maker and our judge, we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, and in what we have failed to do: we have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves; we repent, and are sorry for all our sins. Father, forgive us. Strengthen us to love and obey you in newness of life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Almighty God, who has promised forgiveness to all who turn to him in faith: pardon you and set you free from all your sins, strengthen you in all goodness and keep you in eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Greeting of Peace

We are the body of Christ. **His Spirit is with us.**

The peace of the Lord be always with you. **And also with you.**

Hymn 113 (tune 530) - Now to the Lord a noble song

**Now to the Lord a noble song
Awake my soul awake my tongue
Hosanna to the eternal Name
And all His boundless love proclaim**

**See where it shines in Jesus' face
The brightest image of His grace
God in the Person of His Son
Has all His mightiest works outdone**

The spacious earth and spreading flood
Proclaim the wise and powerful God
And Thy rich glories from afar
Sparkle in every rolling star

But in His looks a glory stands
The noblest labour of Thy hands
The pleasing lustre of His eyes
Outshines the wonders of the skies

Grace, what a sweet a charming theme
My thoughts rejoice at Jesus' Name
Ye angels dwell upon the sound
Ye heavens' reflect it to the ground

Offering

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have gifts to share. Accept and use our offerings for your glory and for the service of your kingdom.

Blessed be God for ever.

The Thanksgiving

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

It is indeed right, it is our duty, our joy and our salvation, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to you, almighty and everlasting God, through Jesus Christ your only Son our Lord.

For he is the true high priest, who has freed us from our sins and made us a royal priesthood to serve you, our God and Father. Therefore with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we proclaim your great and glorious name, for ever praising you and saying:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.**

Holy and gracious God, all creation rightly gives you praise. All life, all holiness, comes from you through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, whom you sent to share our human nature, to live and die as one of us, to reconcile us to you, the God and Father of all.

Hear us, merciful Lord; through Christ accept our sacrifice of praise; and, by the power of your Word and Holy Spirit, sanctify this bread and wine, that we who share in this holy sacrament may be partakers of Christ's body and blood.

Who, when his hour had come, on the night before he went up to the cross to make full atonement for the sins of the whole world, offering once for all his one sacrifice of himself, took bread and gave you thanks; he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take, eat: this is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me.'

In the same way, after supper he took the cup and gave you thanks; he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'

Let us proclaim the mystery of faith:

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

Therefore, in obedience to his command, we commemorate and celebrate his saving passion and death, his mighty resurrection and ascension into heaven and we eagerly await his coming again in glory. We thank you that by your grace alone you have accepted us in Christ; and here we offer you a spiritual sacrifice, holy and acceptable in your sight.

Through Christ, receive this our duty and service, and grant that we who eat and drink these holy gifts may we, by your Holy Spirit, be one body in Christ, and serve you in unity and peace.

In your grace and mercy, bring us to the joy of your eternal kingdom with all the company of the redeemed. May we praise you in union with them, and give you glory through your Son, Jesus Christ. Through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, we worship you, Father eternal, in songs of never-ending praise:

Blessing and honour and glory and power are yours for ever and ever. Amen.

We who are many are one body, **for we all share in the one bread.**

The gifts of God for the people of God.

Come let us take this holy sacrament of the body and blood of Christ in remembrance that he died for us, and feed on him in our hearts with thanksgiving.

The Lord's Supper is open to all who love the Lord.

Grape juice is available. Please come to the table maintaining social distancing

Living God, in this holy meal you fill us with new hope. May the power of your love, which we have known in word and sacrament, continue your saving work among us, give us courage for our pilgrimage, and bring us to the joys you promise.

Father, we offer ourselves to you as a living sacrifice through Jesus Christ our Lord. Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory.

Hymn 155 How Great Thou art

**O Lord my God when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the works Thy hand hath made
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder
Thy pow'r throughout the universe displayed**

Chorus

**Then sings my soul my Saviour God to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art
Then sings my soul my Saviour God to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art**

**When through the woods and forest glades I wander
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur
And hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze *Chorus***

**And when I think that God His Son not sparing
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in
That on the Cross my burden gladly bearing
He bled and died to take away my sin *Chorus***

**When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation
And take me home what joy shall fill my heart
Then shall I bow in humble adoration
And there proclaim my God how great Thou art *Chorus***

Dismissal

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord: **In the name of Christ. Amen.**

Sermon - Acts 6 - Serving Christ's Body

When you think about what a church should be like, do you look to the early church in Acts as your model? Let's face it, there's a lot to be attracted to by the early church. As we read last week: *32 All the believers were one in heart and mind. They shared everything they had. 33 With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all 34 that there were no needy persons among them.*

Who wouldn't want their church to be like that? However, we have to be careful that we aren't blind to the faults in the early church.

Today's reading makes it clear that the early church was not perfect. This of course should be obvious as nobody will be perfect on this side of heaven, and so no church will be perfect, but the early church had a real problem with racism, and it caused a major division.

The Hellenistic (or Greek speaking) Jews complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. The church obviously had a program of providing food for those struggling in the community, but some were being overlooked. Since the church was located in Jerusalem, the Hebraic Jews were the majority and the Hellenistic Jews were in the minority and being overlooked, even though many of them were just as needy as the Hebraic Jews. They were poor, widowed, disabled or unemployed

Putting it bluntly, this was racism. But poor leadership also played its part. The leaders of the church should have kept a much closer eye on what was going on, and nipped it in the bud. Unfortunately they didn't, and it got to the stage where complaints were flying around. Similar situations can happen today, because all leaders are incredibly busy. Peter and the apostles just hadn't addressed the racism because they didn't see it earlier.

When they finally noticed it, the twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. They chose seven men from among them who were known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom, and turned responsibility for food distribution over to them. This approach actually has a strong biblical precedent as we heard in our Old Testament reading this morning. No less a figure than Moses, whom God called to bring his people out of Egypt, was all but overwhelmed by trying to judge all the petty disputes that came to him. He wisely recruited capable assistants who judged all the minor cases and only brought him the major ones.

Anyway, back to the passage. When I read it, it sounded very disparaging of the ministry of overseeing the equitable distribution of food by calling it 'waiting on tables'. It was already tearing the church apart, so they made sure it was managed by people known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. Seven wise, spirit filled people were given charge of it.

The quality of the people was also shown in the way Stephen, one of them, went about his ministry. He was a man full of God's grace and power, and performed great wonders and signs. Perhaps managing the equitable distribution of food would have been

miraculous enough, but Stephen did more. Even when opposition arose and they began to argue with Stephen, they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke. Dragged before the Sanhedrin and in the face of false witnesses, his face was like the face of an angel. Surely the quality of Stephen and his ministry highlighted the real value, and the real importance of what the apostles seemed to so lightly write off as "waiting on tables."

This got me thinking about leadership in Anglican churches, and the responsibilities of clergy. Some people think their ministers should lead all services, including Sunday services, mid-week services, weddings, funerals and baptisms, as well as bible studies and fellowship groups, visit all the sick and elderly, evangelise the whole town, manage the maintenance of the church, the rectory and gardens, provide for all the needy as well as be any exemplary parent in their own families. However, the Bible's model of church is that the responsibilities need to be shared.

The Anglican Church decrees that certain responsibilities, like presiding over holy communion and final responsibility for leadership of the parish must lie with someone who had been formally ordained by a bishop. All other responsibilities should be shared, with deacons, licensed laypeople, parish wardens, parish councilors and especially ordinary parishioners. It is simply not reasonable for one person to do everything, and, quite frankly, it is wrong for any minister to try.

Every Christian, every congregation member has a responsibility to do their part. We do a pretty good job at Cooma Anglican, but like most things, there is room to do better. We have church wardens, a parish council, and numerous lay people who do a great job of the administrative and financial aspects of the parish, which is great because it really isn't my forte! We have some organists, service leaders, Bible readers, small group leaders, pastoral carers, lawn mowers and gardeners, but the load would be much lighter on these people if more were involved. I know there are limitations to what any of us can do, but it would be great if all of us, especially those that don't have an existing responsibility, could seriously volunteer to serve the congregation in some capacity.

One area that would be extremely helpful is in leading the service and Bible reading on a Sunday morning. We have a small number of people on the roster, and they do a great job, but they aren't always available. When that happens, I generally do it. While that is ok by me, it does mean that the congregation has to hear my voice for the entire service as I lead, and preach, pray the intercessions and lead the Communion. It would be much better for everyone if you have some different voices to listen to!

To this end, I have scheduled some training after the service in two weeks time (the 29th of September). We will quickly go through what is involved in leading, Bible reading and operating the data projector, and then have some lunch together afterwards. The primary objective will be to show people how simple it is, and give people the confidence to volunteer, knowing you won't break anything or ruin the service if you make any mistakes! I also won't ask anyone to volunteer for the rosters until after the training, so you will know exactly what you are volunteering for. If you think you may be able to help with leading, Bible reading or data projector, just let me know and I will sign you up for the training.

After that advertisement, despite how much I try to make serving our parish easy, I realise it isn't always. It wasn't for Stephen, who went much further than overseeing the distribution of food - he did great wonders and signs and people opposed him and argued with him with false testimonies. Throughout this, however, the Spirit gave him wisdom and they could not stand against him.

You have the same strength in the same Spirit when you minister to us in this place. You might not think that you will face opposition just because you lead a service, read the Bible or operate the data projector (although I am sure evil spirits sometimes seem to be more in control of the data projector than whoever is supposed to be operating it!) But you can be sure that there will be opposition to serving God's people. It may not seem like people are opposing you, but there will always be the temptation to sleep in, to do something else, to miss your turn on the roster. Friends will invite you to other things on Sunday mornings. I know I have these temptations before many Sunday services, but like he did with Stephen, as he does with me, so will the Holy Spirit strengthen you for your ministry.

Finally, just as Jesus came to serve, so God calls us to serve. We will probably never face the level of opposition that Stephen faced, but we serve the people of the one who died and rose on the third day that we might have eternal life. We serve that true temple that was destroyed and raised on the third day. This fact was used to condemn Stephen, but he didn't turn from serving at tables, and he didn't turn from serving those who claim Jesus's name and have faith in his death and resurrection for their eternal life.

Will you follow Stephen's example in being a servant to the body of that Christ?