

**SUNDAY DEVOTIONS**  
**28 June 2020 – Pentecost 4**

OPENING PRAYER

O God, you have prepared for those who love you - for those who have faith in you - joys beyond understanding. Pour into our hearts such love for you that, loving you above all things, we may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire. Be present to us as we are present to you in this time of worship - and throughout this blessed day - we ask it in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SONG\*     [Be still for the presence of the Lord](#)     CCLI 120824

**PSALM 13** (*A fresh translation*)

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me for ever?

***How long will you hide your face from me?***

How long must I bear the pain in my inner being  
and have trouble in my heart daily?

***How long will my enemy be exalted over me?***

Look on me and answer me, O LORD, my God;

***bring light to my eyes lest I sleep the sleep of death,***

lest my enemy should say "I have prevailed over him."

***and rejoice because I have been shaken***

But I have trusted in your faithful and inexhaustible love;

***my heart will rejoice in your salvation.***

I will sing to the LORD ,

***because the Lord God has dealt bountifully with me.***

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PRAYER OF ADORATION

In a world shaped by conflict,  
where we seem to be slipping  
back into tribal divisions,  
you call us to welcome those  
with whom we have absolutely  
nothing in common.

In a culture full of inequalities  
which only seem to be widening,  
you call us to treat each person  
as our sister and brother.

In a time of intensifying injustices  
which are found in every community,  
if not in every neighbourhood,  
you call us to yoke ourselves  
to your radical hope.

In a lifestyle which idolizes the individual  
to the exclusion of all others,  
you call us to notice  
the parent who works three jobs,

the dementia-diminished senior,  
the refugee family on the corner.

May we offer not just cups of cold water,  
but all that we are and all we have  
to those who are in our midst,  
even as we pray to you,  
God in Community, Holy in One. Amen.

#### PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Spirit of Life, you have led us through the wilderness, through the dark valleys, to silent and still places. We confess that the noise and clutter of the world today makes it hard for us to know your presence. We are bombarded with images that we need more, that we ought to want more, that what we have isn't enough. We despair over the news of violence, of poverty, of hate and hunger and disease. We dread the news of political leaders that still do not see every human being as your child and make decisions that harm instead of help.

Stir in us, Spirit of Life, and move the distractions away so that we can seek you. Stir in us, Spirit of Life, your compassion and justice, so that we will know what to do. Stir in us, Spirit of Life, so that we can sit in the eye of the storm and know that you are God, and you are always with us. Spirit of Life, flow in us, move in us, and lead us to life. Amen.

#### DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

Trust in the love of God, for God saves us.  
Though once you were slaves of sin,  
you have been set free and now live in God's grace  
where sin can have no dominion over you.

Brothers and sisters in Christ,  
Be at peace.  
Your sins are forgiven.  
**Thanks be to God. Amen.**

SONG     [The power and the glory](#)     CCLI 1406901

#### BIBLE READINGS

[Genesis 22:1-14](#)

[Romans 6:12-23](#)

[Matthew 10:40-42](#)

SERMON   [A living wage in God's economy](#)   [sermon.mp3](#)

SONG     [There is a Redeemer](#)     CCLI 11483

## PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

God of the prophets, your word of love is true. Sometimes your words come to us as challenges in our lives and we don't want to believe them. Sometimes your words come as comfort and we cling to them. Send trustworthy messengers into this world. Raise up for your church preachers, teachers and volunteers whose words and actions teach others of your never-ending love. (Jeremiah 28:5-9)

Steadfast Lord God, your love for all humanity is established forever. Yet, here on earth we continue to divide ourselves along lines of nationality, economics, gender identity, education and so many other human-made categories. Help us to understand that we are all one people in you. Wipe away prejudice and distrust so all people can know your peace. (Psalm 89:1-4, 15-18)

Life-giving God, your promise to forgive sins was proven when your Son, Jesus, overcame death and the grave. We pray for those who feel trapped in sinful lives. We pray for those who think they have no sin. We pray for ourselves, that we may recognize our own need and, in turning to you, might be cleansed. Help us to be messengers to others, spreading abroad your offer of hope and love. (Romans 6:12-23)

Welcoming God, you offer fresh water to those who thirst. You are ever mindful of the little ones and their needs. Be present with these friends and loved ones and all people who need your care:

This morning, we pray especially for...

Embrace them with your comforting hope. (Matthew 10:40-42)

Into your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy, through your son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SONG     [Our God](#)     CCLI 5677416

## WORD OF MISSION AND BENEDICTION

Go now as those who have been brought from death to life,  
and welcome the Christ in all whom you meet.  
Present yourselves to God  
to be put to work in the service of righteousness.

And may God provide for you in mercy;  
May Christ Jesus greet you as you welcome the stranger;  
And may the Holy Spirit lead you in the ways  
of sanctification and eternal life. Amen.

\*Songs chosen by Allan

## A LIVING WAGE IN GOD'S ECONOMY

Pentecost 4 Year A

Gn. 22:1-14; Ps. 13; Rom. 6:12-23; Mt. 10:40-42

28/06/2020

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“The wages of sin is death.” No doubt, you have heard that phrase more times than you care to remember. You have probably seen it on any number of homemade billboards you may have driven past over the years. More than just a few church signs have sported this just-less-than good news, too. It’s the kind of thing non-Christians expect to hear from finger-wagging preachers or other pious purveyors of the Gospel. It’s what vaguely excited street preachers shout out on street corners, standing on top of an inverted milk crate and assailing passers-by with this platitude of judgment.

When we read this within the context of Romans 6, however, it is just possible to take these words another way. Certainly, they still won’t be the best news anyone has ever heard. This other possible angle on this now-famous phrase won’t evacuate all hint of judgment, either. But it is just possible that Paul is being a little more matter-of-fact than hellfire-and-brimstone. It’s possible that at least in part—possibly even in large part—that Paul is less predicting some divine judgment when the roll is called up yonder and more making a simple observation about how life works in this world of ours.

During the last few months, we have had somewhat of a taste—both good and bad—of just how the world works when natural, unfiltered life is challenged. We have seen acts of great heroism and compassion but we have also seen acts of blatant evil and selfishness. In the end, Paul remind us, that all of us will get our just rewards—one way or the other. It’s the way of God’s economy. And how we live our life is about stewardship of what God has given us—our time, our talent and our resources.

Throughout the Scriptures, God teaches us a lot about stewardship in both surprising and not so surprising ways. Jesus talked more about the right use of money and about the treatment of the disadvantaged and marginalized than he did about anything else. And for God, our worth (or our wages/pay/compensation—whatever you want to call it) is intimately bound with grace, mercy, and salvation. What God removes from the divine economic picture, however, is our capacity to earn wages, to merit our own eternal existence, and to “matter” on our terms. In short, it’s not about us at all.

All over the world, people have struggled, and are still struggling, to secure some kind of minimum or basic living wage to ensure that nobody needs to live in poverty. In Australia, while I still believe that there is much disparity between what people earn and what people are believed to be worth, both positively and negatively, I still think we are far better off than many in other countries. In the USA, for example, I believe the basic living wage is something like \$7.25 per hour. It may have gone up since the record I read, but it

still falls way short of Australia's understanding of a wage whereby a person can actually enjoy a basic standard of living on what he or she earns. In other countries, it's far worse.

But what does this have to do with Paul—with God's economy? Well, quite a lot actually—and it's also the stuff that makes those who proclaim and teach more than a little nervous. On the one hand it's always risky to touch on economics and justice in the church, because of our age-old bondage to sin and the will. We humans have a tough time seeing beyond our own self-interests to the in-breaking of God's reign and desire for good for all God's children. We make judgments. We assign values. We protect our own turf. We have a remarkable capacity to justify our sinful actions and desires. I read recently—it may have been that font of all irrelevant information, Facebook—of a person saying: "I hate judgemental people—I can tell who they are just by looking at them."

Anyway...on the other hand, it's even more risky *not* to address the divine perspective on grace, sanctification, and what it means to realign one's life as a slave to God. There is a seemingly fantastic freedom that such utter dependence and trust brings, in opposition to the slavery to fear, sin, death, and navel-gazing that is the unfortunate alternative dressed up in socially-acceptable clothing.

This is the counter-cultural, radical nature of the gospel message. This is where discipleship rubber hits reality road. In presenting this alternative way of being—one that is life-giving, process-oriented, and dominant-culture-challenging—we truly offer life in the midst of the death humans so furiously deny.

To borrow a phrase from this week's gospel lesson, this is a cup of cool water to those little ones. And that truly is good news—a vision of hope that exposes the lies of the world, stanches the insidious creep of evil, and releases real life for all people. Yes, in God's economy we're the priceless recipients of an eternal living wage.

Consider some of the basic principles of discipleship that Jesus teaches: love of God (as seen in faithful worship, prayer, study of scripture and its application), love of neighbour (as seen in relationships, justice, serving others), and generosity (as seen in faithful and just use of resources and sharing of those resources). Add to those any others you might identify.

How would you value each of those aspects? What's their "worth" or "performance" based on those categories of discipleship? Think of it in terms of performing an evaluation or conducting a hiring interview. Where would they rank on the wage scale based on these categories? Would they even earn you a living wage? Could you survive on what they would bring in? Thankfully, God's economy doesn't work that way, and God grants an eternal living wage to God's beloved people.

There are plenty of people who come in God's name singing doom and gloom, but that is not what God wants us to be. He wants us to be prophets of hope and salvation.

In our discipleship as Christians, we are called beyond mere obedience. Not only do we renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject evil, and repent of our own sin. Not only do we turn from a secular life of apathy and selfishness to a life of faithful discipleship. We also accept the freedom and power God gives us to resist those things—to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves!

This is what it means to confess Christ as our Saviour and to put our whole trust in his grace and promise to serve him as our Lord. Jesus himself is all about a brand-new kind of obedience, which each one of us has to work out for ourselves—with proverbial “fear and trembling.” It's our response and our responsibility to respond, in new and changing, creative and life-giving ways, to our own lives and to life all around us!

Yes, Paul calls us beyond mere obedience. Our orders, our authority and our appointment to serve in the name and the manner of Jesus, come not from the sin that controls us but from the grace that saves us and sets us free! The grace that heals us and makes us whole! We are not under law but under grace, the very fulfillment of law. “Thanks be to God,” proclaims Paul. Once we were slaves of sin, which may require the law to make known to us. But now, with Jesus—not only crucified under law—his execution was perfectly legal—but also raised to new life by grace—we have the chance to go beyond mere obedience to that “obedience from the heart” that leads us from sin—defined by domination, intimidation, fear and control—to righteousness! Righteousness is no less demanding than sin, as gospel is no less demanding than law, and peace is no less demanding than war.

Living the gospel is really hard work. When “hugging a sinner” really repulses us and we would rather be doing anything but this, you can bet that this is what the love of God is calling you do. At this point the gospel really becomes challenging. We will fail. We will let sin rule us. We will offend, ignore, and become slaves to our sinfulness. But thanks be to God! It is only through Jesus Christ that we are forgiven, renewed and then recommissioned to go back to share the good news of the gospel.

How much better it is, Paul advises, than being slaves to sin, to let yourself be a slave to Christ! And that, Paul reminds the Romans, is who you are now. This is their new identity in Christ—and it is also your new identity as Christ's disciples. This is who you are *now*. Act like it! Be happy slaves to righteousness in Christ. Because—and this also bears itself out in common sense observations of everyday life—this leads to delight in God's good creation. Not just in the sweet by and by but also in the here and now, living happily

inside the moral boundary fences God has established leads to a flourishing and a joy in all that God has made.

True, the Christian life can be the persecuted life, too, and no one needed to remind Christians in Rome (of all places) of that reality. And also true, just being a believer is no insulation against sickness or tragedy coming your way. But living in the ways of God leads to life, not death, to joy not despair. Lean into all that goodness, Paul says. It is who you are now by baptism in Christ.

“The wages of sin, is death.” That may sound like puritanical judgmentalism. But then again, there are any number of burned out, chewed up, hungover, heroin-addled, sexually broken people in this world who would need no convincing that this is true. Just ask them.

“The wages of sin is death,” Paul says, and we all understand wages. You get what you deserve. You do the wrong thing, and you pay the price. The trouble is, we often carry that assumption into the next line and so we completely mishear it. We think it says, or at least means, “and the wages of righteousness is eternal life.” Again, you get what you deserve, just as the law would demand. But Paul doesn’t say that at all. He says, “but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Under the rule of sin and law, you get wages; exactly what you deserve, no more and no less. But under grace, you get a free gift of boundless life. A free gift because it’s always way above and beyond anything we could ever have earned or deserved. A free gift because God is anything but a harsh and demanding God who restricts us just to test our loyalty and crushes the things we most love just because he can. A free gift because God is totally and utterly for us. When you catch a hold of that vision of a God who wants only the best for you and gives it freely and generously, then a lawless life no longer looks like a threat at all, but like the pathway to true goodness, and turning our backs on any god who sanctions violence and persecution looks like the pathway to true godliness.

The wages of sin may be death “but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

To him be all glory, honour, majesty and praise. Amen.