



CROOKWELL UNITING CHURCH

“To Know Christ and to Make Christ Known”

HOME PRAYER PACK FOR SEPTEMBER 2022

As we continue to worship from home, please find enclosed materials to assist.

If you are unsure where to start, perhaps the following is a useful guide (with thanks to *A Sermon For Every Sunday*):

- If you are with your spouse, partner, and/or family, gather around a table. If you are on your own, find a place that is quiet and comfortable.
- Light a candle to symbolise the presence of the Holy Spirit, and that you are entering sacred time.
- Start with a simple opening prayer, acknowledging that Jesus promised to come to wherever people gathered in His name.
- Read through the weekly readings, as outlined in our newsletter. If in a group, take turns on reading out loud to the group.
- Follow up with a discussion based on the readings.
- Enter into a time of prayer. This can be as simple as “What am I thankful for?” and “What am I concerned about?”

If you need a bible at home, please call the church on 4832 1026, and one can be provided. If you are interested, *Songs of Praise* airs on ABC TV at 2:30pm each Sunday, and can also be watched any time at <https://iview.abc.net.au/collection/2016>

Stay safe. God bless.

September 4, 2022

Van de Laar, *Connecting With Life*, "Sacredise"

This is not going to be a fun week to preach – but it is going to be life-giving!

The essential message of this week's readings boils down to two things for me: 1) We are constantly faced with the choice to do the right thing or not; 2) Doing the right thing (or following Jesus, if you will) is very costly. Unfortunately, in our world, expediency, short-term thinking and prosperity preaching have all made the Gospel of counting the cost very unpopular. But, in truth, life is not found in quick fixes, or in pandering to our appetites – we know this. Life is found in following Christ's sacrificial, life-giving ways – which is what it means, really, to do the right thing.

May our worship lead us to count the cost, and choose to be people who always seek to do the right thing.

READINGS:

Jeremiah 18:1-11: Jeremiah is instructed to observe the potter at work, and God explains how God works – how good that is promised may not happen if a nation turns to evil, and bad that is prophesied may not happen if the nation repents and turns back to God. Then God's people are called to turn back to God.

OR **Deuteronomy 30:15-20**: The people are offered the choice of life or death. Life is to love God and live according to God's principles. Death is to turn away from God and to worship other gods.

Psalms 139:1-6, 13-18: A song of celebration for how intimately and completely God knows us – God formed us before we were born, and knows the path God wanted us to follow.

OR **Psalms 1**: Those who devote themselves to God's law and God's ways are blessed, secure and prosperous, while those who are wicked will fade away like husks blown away by the wind.

Philemon 1-21: Paul writes to Philemon asking him to "do the right thing" and accept Onesimus, his run away slave, back as a brother in Christ, without judgement or punishment.

Luke 14:25-33: The cost of following Christ is everything, and Jesus encourages us to count the cost before committing ourselves to him.

REFLECTIONS ON THEME:

The Lectionary seems to bring us back to this one question over and over – Will we choose life and good and God, or death and evil and "not-God"? – for us to think about it from a different perspective and explore it at a deeper level. A basic reality of life and faith is this question, and the way we answer it will determine how we live, and the consequences we

must face (Jeremiah, Deuteronomy and [Psalm 1](#)). Choosing life does not guarantee health, wealth and happiness – no matter what the prosperity preachers tell us. Faith is not a protection from life's struggles and suffering. Rather, the gift of choosing God's life is the wisdom, the resources and the capacity to give of self that leads us into fullness of life, and into knowing the reality of God's reign in our daily lives – no matter what we may have to deal with. The big challenge in this week's readings is the recognition that following God's way is difficult and costly (Luke). Doing the right thing, while it leads us into God's abundant life, is often counter-intuitive, and goes against our natural inclinations and reactions (Philemon). But we have the assurance that God knows us, loves and seeks the best for us ([Psalm 139](#)). If we are to find the courage to pay the price of following Christ, we need to learn to lean into God's love and grace.

CONNECTING WITH LIFE:

GLOBAL APPLICATION: How do we begin to speak about doing the right thing in our world today? When the cost of doing right is high, and often offers little short-term gain, how do we do what is right? When our leaders are faced with fickle voters, partisan misrepresentation and opportunism, and pressure from interest groups that threaten to jump ship if they don't get their way, how are they supposed to choose what is right? When business is measured quarterly and the stock market punishes anything but short-term gain-making strategies, how are corporations supposed to do the right thing? When we need power now, how do we do what is right by our planet? When we want the foods we love now, how do we grow and distribute food ethically? When we want to feel safe now, how do we negotiate and resist the temptation to go to war? When we need to grow the bottom line, how do we investigate labour practices of suppliers, or ensure raw materials are mined sustainably? In a world of instant gratification, media scrutiny and results-addiction, eternal reward and long-term results that benefit the least can be hard to sell. If we are to commit ourselves to being people who do the right thing, we will know the benefit – we will find life that is abundant and sustainable and good, and we will encounter God in our daily living. But, we will also know the cost – the sacrifice of some of our comforts, the misunderstandings and cynicism of those who stay committed to expediency, the anger of our leaders and peers as we challenge "the system". But, if we will not pay the cost, what hope is there for us and our world?

LOCAL APPLICATION: Doing the right thing comes down to the small details of our lives as individual Christ-followers and as communities of faith. It is in the choices we make that God's goodness is reflected to the world, and the true value of the Gospel is demonstrated. When we turn our faith into just another "quick-fix" or just another strategy for fast and easy personal gratification (which we all do all too often) then we deny ourselves the power and joy of God's abundant life, and we fail to proclaim the power of the Gospel of Jesus. But, when we are prepared to pay the cost – to live a life of loving, serving and caring for the least, the outcast and the unlovely – the Gospel message shouts from our lives. When we work hard to make ethical choices about our food, our clothing, our energy needs, our mode of transport, these small sacrifices have a big impact on the lives of others and on the world at large – and the Gospel message shouts from our lives. When we are prepared to live in a way that is counter-cultural, denying the short-term approach of our society, and embracing the time frame of eternity, then we build a sustainable life for ourselves, and we contribute to the sustainability of the world – and the Gospel shouts from our lives. What

“instant-gratification” choices are you making that need to change? What cost is God asking you to pay in order to live the Gospel in the daily details of your life? In what ways is the practical, life-giving, blessing of the Gospel being reflected in your life and your church?

September 11, 2022

John Van de Laar, *Connecting With Life*, “Sacredise”

The concept of repentance is a tad unfashionable these days, but justice cannot be achieved without it, and worship becomes shallow for lack of it. It’s easy to denounce the “godless” as “foolish” and to point fingers at those who bring injustice and suffering into the world, but if we’re honest, we are them – the same darkness in them dwells in us. This means we have at least two responses to make: 1) We must face our own “lostness” and repent, opening ourselves to God’s transforming grace and 2) We must offer grace and transformation to those with whom we disagree and even those we find shocking, wrong or evil. This work of justice and worship is not for the faint-hearted!

May our worship lead us into true repentance – the starting place of justice in our own hearts – this week.

READINGS:

Jeremiah 4:11-12, 22-28: God proclaims judgement on God’s foolish people, who are skilled at evil, but have no knowledge of doing good, and the land is destroyed in the wake of God’s anger.

OR **Exodus 32:7-14**: As the people worship the golden calf, God threatens to destroy them, but Moses pleads on their behalf, reminding God of God’s promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and God relents.

Psalms 14: Foolish people say there is no God and live in destructive ways, but God’s people hope in God’s salvation and the joy it will bring.

OR **Psalms 51:1-10**: David’s prayer of repentance, asking for God’s forgiveness, cleansing and restoration after his adultery with Bathsheba.

1 Timothy 1:12-17: Paul celebrates God’s mercy in that God forgave him and empowered him for ministry, in spite of his sinfulness and ignorance.

Luke 15:1-10: Jesus explains his friendship with ‘sinners’ using the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin – where celebration is inspired by the lost thing being found again.

REFLECTIONS ON THEME:

Much of the destruction and evil in our world is the result of ignorance and the failure to recognise God’s presence and purpose – so say the Lectionary readings this week. The

suffering and injustice that this causes is an offense to God that arouses God's anger (Jeremiah, Exodus and Psalm 1) but, God is gracious, seeking out what is lost – as in Jesus' parables in Luke's Gospel – and healing, restoring and forgiving those who have done wrong (as in David's Psalm and Paul's letter to Timothy). More than this, God so changes those on whom God pours God's grace that they become agents of God's grace and healing to others – as Paul testified about himself.

CONNECTING WITH LIFE:

GLOBAL APPLICATION: The suffering that is depicted in this week's readings is still so prevalent in our world today. The ignorance and destructiveness of human folly touches millions of lives every day, and God is still angered by this. As followers of Christ we cannot stand by and watch silently. As the old saying goes, "evil prospers when good people do nothing." Our hearts must be broken by what breaks God's heart (to quote another profound, if over-used, saying), and we must become God's voice for justice and righteousness in our communities and nations. Essentially this means that we need to participate in our society and its systems and structures in order to be agents of change. It is an act of faith and love to sign petitions and join in peaceful protest. It is an act of following Christ to vote for those who best represent the justice we seek and to hold them accountable. It is an act of discipleship to write letters to editors and to leaders, and to challenge the practices of the powerful in politics and in business. We are called to engage and challenge. But at the same time, we are called to be people of grace, forgiveness and restoration. Ours is the tough task of hope – in God's work and in the possibility for people to change. Ours is the gracious calling to seek justice that restores, not justice that dehumanises through punishment, vengeance and excessive restitution. How can you embrace this two-sided work today?

LOCAL APPLICATION: The word 'lost' has come to mean those who are not part of the church, or who don't believe in Christ as we do, but in the biblical sense, there are still many lost people in the Church. If we're honest, we all have parts of us that are lost, and we all need to be found more and more. In the light of this, our calling in Christ is to confront the foolishness, ignorance and evil within ourselves, and allow Christ to find, save and transform us. It's a tough and challenging thing to acknowledge the places where we are unjust or destructive, and to do the work of repentance in order to be changed, but if this is not an integral part of our calling to be people of justice, then what is? Then, we are able to become agents of God's grace and justice, working alongside the weak, the poor, the marginalised, the excluded and the oppressed, while confronting, challenging and even inspiring the strong, the wealthy, the inclusive and the oppressor. The tough questions, then, this week are these: Where do we still need to confront injustice and "lostness" in ourselves? and In what ways can we offer ourselves to be agents of healing, grace and change in our communities?

September 18, 2022

John Van de Laar, *Connecting With Life*, "Sacredise"

If you're intending to focus on the Gospel this week, you're in for a tough one. The Parable of the Shrewd Manager is a difficult one to make sense of, and a rough one to apply. But, at the heart of all of the readings this week is the idea of inappropriate grace, and releasing our inappropriate devotion to money – which opens the doors to moments of both amusement and seriousness.

May this week's worship teach us to be people of scandalous grace and generosity.

READINGS:

Jeremiah 8:18-9:1: Jeremiah grieves the destruction of his people, who insisted on worshiping idols, but for whom there is now no salvation.

OR **Amos 8:4-7**: A prophecy against the corruption and greed of the wealthy among God's people who exploit the poor, and whose wickedness God will not forget.

Psalms 79:1-9: A lament for the land of Israel which has been destroyed by foreign nations, and for the temple which has been desecrated, and a plea for God's forgiveness, compassion and restoration.

OR **Psalms 113**: A song of praise to the God who is over all nations, and who lifts up the poor and needy and includes them among influential people, and who removes the shame of the barren woman making her a mother of children.

1 Timothy 2:1-7: Paul calls for believers to pray for all people, including leaders, reminding them of Christ's pleading for us with God – for which Paul has been called as an apostle to the Gentiles.

Luke 16:1-13: Jesus parable of the shrewd manager who wins social capital and his master's commendation through the act of radical, inappropriate, forgiveness.

REFLECTIONS ON THEME:

This is a week for lots of prayer and reflection – the Gospel reading is one of the toughest parables to preach, by all accounts! But, there are two clear themes that emerge when all the readings are placed together. The first is the obvious one – the subtle power of money to lead us into corrupt and exploitative practices. Jeremiah bemoans the people's devotion to idols (of which money is a significant one according to Jesus in Luke); Amos speaks out against the corrupt business practices of wealthy merchants; **Psalms 113** praises the God who uplifts the poor and needy. Clearly, how we use our money is a spiritual concern. The second theme this week is that of forgiveness and undeserved honour. Jeremiah pleads with God for grace for God's people, as does **Psalms 79**; **Psalms 113** praises God's grace toward those who are most vulnerable, giving them undeserved honour; Paul reflects on God's grace in Christ, extended to all people, and embodied in the prayers of God's people;

And Jesus tells a story of a master who, about to be dishonoured because of his dishonest (incompetent?) manager, decides to fire him, but has to reconsider when, through radical, inappropriate, forgiveness, the manager wins honour both for the master and himself, and a connected and secure future for himself.

Put these two themes together and what emerges is the power of gracious, generous forgiveness to lift us to places of honour and connectedness.

CONNECTING WITH LIFE:

GLOBAL APPLICATION: The immediate thought that comes to mind when thinking about this week's theme is the issue of foreign debt and the corrupt system of international finance and trade regulations that has left so many third world countries irreversibly impoverished. The call of God's generous, inappropriate grace can not be mistaken – there needs to be a rising up of God's Jubilee people calling for these debts to be written off, and for effective aid to be offered where needed. But, it also goes further than this. For those of us in wealthy countries there is a tremendous responsibility to watch how we use our wealth and opportunity. We need to avoid anything that is exploitative, using our buying power to ensure that fair trade practices are employed and fair wages are paid to those who produce what we use, and that the impact on our planet is likewise just and sustainable. When we use our opportunity to accumulate wealth for ourselves, we are essentially “dishonourable”, but when we use it to uplift others, we bring honour and dignity both to them and to ourselves. As Rev. Dr. Mvume Dandala once said: “The opposite of poverty is not wealth. It is dignity.”

LOCAL APPLICATION: In many communities, the Church is among the wealthiest organisations. But, unfortunately that wealth is often taken for granted and two important aspects of its coming to us are easily forgotten – that whatever wealth we have is attained through the generosity of our people, and that our wealth is not a sign of God's blessing for us to aggrandise ourselves, but is a resource to share and use to uplift the least. This means that we need to ensure that we have not fallen into the temptation to accumulate money for its own sake. It means we must ensure that we do not engage in exploitative practices (think of how some prosperity preachers receive the offering!), and that we are quick to use our money for grace – forgiving, helping and uplifting the needy in our communities and neighbourhoods. If we take this call of the Gospel seriously, we may well find ourselves using our money in ways that “the world” would consider inappropriate, and we may find ourselves seeking connection with and offering grace to those who are considered to be undeserving. This may be a good week to do an ‘audit’ of your community's use of money – and the priorities it reveals – and to make some gracious, inappropriate, and dignity giving choices.

September 25, 2022

Kimberly Bracken Long, *Feasting on the Word*

Jeremiah 32

Prayer For Illumination

God of the Prophets,
By the power of the Holy Spirit
Speak your word to us,
And seal it within us,
That we may heed your call. **Amen.**

Psalm 91

Call To Worship

When they call to me, I will answer them,
Says the Lord.
I will be with them in trouble,
I will rescue and honour them.
With thanksgiving and praise, let us worship God.

1 Timothy 6

Prayer of Thanksgiving

God who give life
To all things,
And richly provides us
With everything,
Use these,
Our offerings,
To take hold of,
And show us,
The life that really is. Amen.

Luke 16

Call To Confession

Trusting in the mercy of God,
Let us confess our sins,
That grace might bridge
And we might cross
The great chasm between us.