



Kaurihohore Historic Church

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Kaurihohore / Kamo Co-operating Parish Sunday 16 June 2024 – Pentecost 4

The service this morning is led by Mike Nielsen,
one of our Lay Preachers

Welcome to our service this morning.

In working together on our shared mission, we commit to seven core values:

Togetherness, Humility, Curiosity, Love, Inclusiveness, Justice, Sustainability.

Inclusiveness: we recognise the full equality of the entire human family to share in ministry, leadership, and worship, regardless of race, age, physical ability, neurodiversity, marital or economic status, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

We invite you to:

*Join in the congregational responses printed in **Bold**.
Stand if you are able, for the hymns and the offering prayer*

Welcome

Call to worship:

Come to worship with abundant hope.

Our worries and limitations will no longer bind us.

Come to worship with abundant hope.

We will find joy with our faith community friends.

Come to worship with abundant hope.

In Christ we will find a challenging path to follow.

Come to worship with abundant hope.

Undreamt-of opportunities will open for us.

You come to worship with abundant hope.

We do, thanks be to God.

Source: Responsive Prayers Year B (David Sparks)

Opening prayer:

There is room for everyone in God's home.

The downhearted and troubled find hope there.

There is room for everyone in God's home.

The rejected and excluded find a welcome there.

There is room for everyone in God's home.

The dejected and inward-looking find a vision there.

There is room for everyone in God's home.

Those without direction or faith find the way of Jesus Christ there.

You are invited to God's home.

We rejoice that we will find love without end there. Amen.

Source: Responsive Prayers Year B (David Sparks)

[Hymn: O God our help in ages past \(HFTC 37\)](#)

Touched by the Spirit: Julian of Norwich

One of the things we're trying out during this season after Pentecost is a part of the service called touched by the spirit, where we share short stories about people in the wider Christian family, past or present, and the way the Holy Spirit has worked in their lives.

Today I'm going to talk about Julian of Norwich. Now we don't know Julian's actual name – her name was taken from St Julian's Church in Norwich, where she lived as an anchoress for most of her life, over 600 years ago. If you're also wondering – what is an anchoress – then you're not alone – I had to look that one up while I was preparing for today – an anchoress is a woman who chooses to live a solitary life focused on prayer.

She was a spiritual counsellor. People would come to her to seek advice. Considering that, at the time, the citizens of Norwich suffered from plague and poverty, as well as a famine, she must have counselled a lot of people in pain. Yet, her writings had a strong focus on hope and trust in God's goodness.

She is most famous for writing *The Revelations of Divine Love*, the earliest surviving book written in English by a named female author. This book details visions she had while seriously ill and, records a number of revelations she had about God's love, including presenting Christ as an exemplar of motherly love.

Transgender poet Jay Hulme has written a collection of poems based on various saints – which includes one about Julian of Norwich which I thought I'd share with you this morning – this poem weaves throughout it metaphors of Christ as mother. We'll then sing a new song from the *Protest of Praise* hymnbook called *as a mother loves her children*.

Poem: Mother Julian – by Jay Hulme, from *The Vanishing Song*

Hymn: As a mother loves her children (Protest of Praise; Tune: Tryggare Kan Ingen Vara)

1. As a mother loves her children
and delights in their great
gladness,
so you revel in our pleasure
and bring comfort to our sadness.
2. As a mother seeks her children
where the prodigals have
wandered,
so you find those long abandoned,
for your love is never squandered.
3. As a mother guards her children
from unneeded pain and sorrow,
so today you will defend us
and give strength for our tomorrow.
4. Though our human mothers
leave us
when by death's hand they
are taken,
we are always your own children,
never orphaned or forsaken.

Scripture reading: [1 Samuel 15:34 – 16:13](#)

Gospel reading: [Mark 4:26-34](#)

Reflection

Our story from 1st Samuel this morning is the earliest introduction we have to David – a well-known and pivotal character both in the Hebrew scriptures, and the Bible more broadly.

1st Samuel and its sequel, the aptly named 2nd Samuel, sit at the transition from the period of the Judges (who God raised up from time to time to protect the loosely affiliated tribes of Israel), to the monarchy – the age of kings in Israel. The books stretch over a period of about 60 to 100 years and took place approximately 3000 years ago.

The author of the book is unknown; however it is named after one of the main characters – Samuel – who was Israel's last judge, a prophet, a

priest, and importantly, a king-maker. It is Samuel who anoints the first two kings of Israel.

So, the books of 1st and 2nd Samuel are primarily historical books telling, what theologian Aaron Higashi calls, a multigenerational epic set at the dawn of the monarchy of ancient Israel.

Saul is the first of the kings anointed by Samuel. Earlier in the book the people of Israel have come to Samuel and asked for a king – they wanted to be like all the other nations. Samuel was grieved by this, and warned them to, essentially, be careful what they wished for, however following a conversation with God he eventually relents and anoints Saul in chapters 9 and 10.

As Samuel warned, the reign of Saul isn't great, and Samuel is grieving this at the point where our scripture reading today picks up.

While Samuel is sad, God is ready to move on at the beginning of chapter 16 – effectively telling Samuel: you've mourned long enough, now go and find Saul's replacement. God points Samuel in the direction of Bethlehem but doesn't tell him who the next king will be.

Samuel's worried – if Saul finds out that I'm actively searching for the next king, he'll kill me! The stakes are high. However, Samuel obeys God and, with a heifer in tow, heads to Bethlehem.

When Samuel gets to Bethlehem it's the leaders of the towns turn to be worried – word has got out that one of the last things Samuel's done is kill one of the foreign kings – he's an intimidating presence, and they are nervous.

Samuel reassures them that he comes in peace, and just wishes to present the heifer as a sacrifice to God.

With everyone slightly calmer, Samuel invites Jesse and his sons to the sacrifice. It's looking promising when Jesse turns up – his sons are the

epitome of what a king should be – strong, tall, handsome. Surely amongst them he would find the new king.

However, God tells Samuel that no, none of these sons are the next king. We get the famous line: ‘Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as people see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.’

Having cycled through all seven of Jesse’s sons, Samuel asks “Are these all the sons you have?” to which Jesse replies, “oh, there’s also the youngest one, he’s still out in the fields looking after the sheep”. Samuel sends for him, saying ‘we won’t sit down until he arrives’. And as soon as David gets there, God tells Samuel this is the one, and Samuel anoints him with a horn of oil.

Now the horn of oil is an interesting point – it’s a direct contrast with the flask of oil that Samuel used to anoint Saul earlier in the book. Anointing new kings with oil was commonplace in the ancient world. However, the use of an animal horn to do so appears to be quite specific to ancient Syria and Palestine, where the horn often indicated power. So, Samuel anointing David with a horn, rather than a flask, suggests that David will be a superior king to Saul.

Why would that point be focused on by the author of the book? Well, you know that saying, history is written by the victors? Well, some scholars argue that there is something like that going on here.

1st Samuel is not a standalone book. It doesn’t just join up with 2nd Samuel, but it’s part of a broader collection of books known as the Deuteronomistic history – it’s a complex word but basically refers to the books of Joshua, Judges, 1st and 2nd Samuel and 1st and 2nd Kings. These books were written at a time when the Israelites were in exile in Babylon – things had gone poorly during the age of kings – the Israelites had been conquered and were once again at the mercy of a more powerful empire.

And while these are historical books, theologian Joel Baden says that not all narratives are straightforward historical recounts and the modern idea of history as it actually was, just telling the facts – isn't something that existed until a couple of hundred years ago. He and many others argue that 1st Samuel and these other books act as an apology for David. Not an apology in the 'I'm sorry' sense, but in a literary sense, what we'd now call propaganda, or spin.

Pete Enns says:

This is not an objective history of Israel, but a story with an axe to grind; namely explaining how the exile could have happened and giving some hope for the future. These books act like an apology, a defence, a justification for David and his dynasty; one of the themes of the Deuteronomistic history is that David is God's chosen and most favoured king.

That's why images like Samuel anointing David with a horn of oil are used. The story is setting up David as God's chosen king and establishing his legacy.

Even though the books are acting as an apology, David certainly isn't whitewashed through the story of 1st and 2nd Samuel. While he has many strengths, he is a deeply flawed character and those flaws are not hidden from view – a lot of bad things happen to people around David which benefit him both personally and politically – we won't get into these today, perhaps in a later service as they do come up in future lectionary readings, but suffice to say, despite the story painting him as God's chosen king, I think David is at best a morally ambiguous man who hurts and abuses a lot of people.

Which is why I find that famous quote about David being a man after God's own heart so fascinating. God is looking not at outward appearance, but at the heart, and yet David (flaws and all) is still chosen? There's a definite tension here.

To quote Pete Enns again, he says “the message of the David story is not ‘be like David!’”

Sally Lloyd-Jones’ The Jesus Storybook Bible puts it another way, saying in its introductory chapter “other people think the Bible is a book about heroes, showing you people you should copy; well the Bible does have some heroes in it, but as you’ll soon find out, most of the people in the Bible aren’t heroes at all. They make some big mistakes, sometimes on purpose; they get afraid and run away; sometimes they are downright mean”

So what do we do with this character of David – this morally ambiguous character, or, as Jeff Chu describes him: faithful yet flawed David, valiant yet temptation-prone David, blessed yet murderous David.

What do we do with David?

He’s definitely not a hero, however if we continue the story on another thousand years, from the line of David does emerge a new king, Jesus – a new king who brought about God’s kingdom on earth.

Jesus spent a lot of his time giving us glimpses of what God’s kingdom was like through parables, like those in our Gospel reading today.

Take the parable of the mustard seed: Jesus says this is one the smallest of all the seeds on the earth; but when it’s planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all vegetable plants, with such large branches that the birds in the sky are able to nest in its shade.

Now I don’t think Jesus is aiming to give a scientifically accurate description of what happens when you plant a mustard seed here. As with all parables there are multiple interpretations though.

I like a few of the interpretations that theologian Amy Jill Levine provides in her book “Short Stories by Jesus”. One interpretation is that even small actions... have the potential to produce great things.

Another is that God's kingdom is found in what we today might call 'our own backyard', in the generosity of nature and in the daily working of men and women... and that the kingdom is present when humanity and nature work together, and we do what we were put here to do – to go out on a limb to provide for others, and ourselves as well.

These parables are full of different interpretations, but centre us and get us thinking about God's kingdom and our part in it. Once again, Amy-Jill Levine says the surplus of meaning is how poetry and storytelling work, and it is all to the good.

Coming back to David. I admit, I still don't know what to do with the story of David in 1st and 2nd Samuel, God's chosen king; man after God's own heart.

But I do know that his story is just part of the broader story of God in the Bible, one that ultimately points to redemption and hope through a new king, Jesus, who through his life, death, and resurrection, inaugurated God's kingdom, one where we each play a part, no matter how big or small, to share God's love, create hope, and work for justice with our neighbours, within our community, and into our world.

Let us pray.

Prayer

We say that we aren't the ones to be peacemakers.

You, loving God, remind us of our ability to bring calm where there is conflict.

We say that we don't have the time to listen to a friend in need.

You remind us of our ability to find time for those activities most important to us.

We say that our church hasn't got the ability to bring change to our local communities.

You remind us of the power that comes from working faithfully together.

We say that our church lacks the vision to bring change in the way of Jesus.

You remind us of the saints, past and present, who have changed their small corner of the world for good.

(time of silent reflection)

When we doubt our own abilities,

you, loving God, remind us of occasions when we have been an influence for good.

When we lack the courage to say the words that are needed,

you, loving God, help us find the willingness to speak them clearly.

When we recognise the just action but are afraid to take it because of the consequences,

you, loving God, enable us to realise that we can conquer our fear and act.

And when we fail to say the needed word or do the faithful deed,

you, loving God, give us the strength to pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and start all over again. You renew us, you restore us, you forgive us. Thank you, loving God. Amen.

Source: Responsive Prayers Year B (David Sparks)

Hymn: God has chosen me (Bernadette Farrell)

1. God has chosen me, God has chosen me
to bring good news to the poor.
God has chosen me, God has chosen me
to bring new sight to those searching for light:
God has chosen me, chosen me:

Refrain:

And to tell the world that God's kingdom is near,
to remove oppression and breakdown fear,
yes, God's time is near, God's time is near,
God's time is near, God's time is near.

2. God has chosen me, God has chosen me
to set alight a new fire.
God has chosen me, God has chosen me
to bring to birth a new kingdom on earth:
God has chosen me, chosen me:
3. God is calling me, God is calling me
in all whose cry is unheard.
God is calling me, God is calling me
to raise up the voice with no power or choice:
God is calling me, calling me:

Offering prayer

These gifts will bring God's kingdom closer.

God's kingdom, where those with the least are placed first. God's kingdom, where power is used for the good of all. God's kingdom, where cooperation is practiced all the time. God's kingdom, where the teachings of Jesus are lived out.

God's loving kingdom.

We will rejoice as we bring God's kingdom closer. Amen.

Source: Responsive Prayers Year B (David Sparks)

Prayers of intercession

Oh God, so many are suffering beyond what they can bear.

Come quickly

with help that is stronger than death.

You see the vulnerable,

who face what we find hard to imagine.

And their caregivers and healthcare workers, families, teachers, and helpers of every kind who string together scarce resources while they're running on empty.

Blessed are we,

still in our relative ease, still jars of clay, yet broken,

who give to others what we yet can give, who pray, boldly,

and love fiercely.

This is the very ground of our being-God's love for us and love working through us.

God, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Spirit, have mercy.

Amen.

Source: The Lives We Actually Have: 100 Blessings for Imperfect Days (by Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie)

Hymn: Dare to live the dream God gives you (Protest of Praise; [tune: Hyfrodol](#))

1. Dare to live the dream God gives you,
Seek out paths as yet unknown,
For the Spirit leads you onward,
And you never walk alone.

Refrain:

Go in courage, walking humbly,
Bearing love none can destroy.
Doing justice, loving mercy,
Go with God, and go in joy.

2. When the dread of doubt assails you,
And the road remains unclear,
Yet our faithful God will guide you
Through the doubt and dread of fear.

3. Journey on with true companions,
Joining hands and sharing bread,
For we share a common journey
And in friendship we are fed.

4. Dare to live the dream God gives us,
Brave the path, and face the fear,
For the Spirit will unite us;
Christ himself is always near.

Commissioning

No longer afraid, we go forth with joy!

The love of God will motivate and direct us.

Filled with hope, we go forth with praise on our lips!

The example of Jesus Christ will show us the way.

Held in the love of God, we go forth to bring change for good!

We will be inspired to work with God's Holy Spirit.

Source: Responsive Prayers Year B (David Sparks)

Closing karakia:

Kia tau ki a tātou katoa
Te atawhai o tō tātou Ariki, a Ihu
Karaiti
Me te aroha o te Atua
Me te whiwhingatahitanga
Ki te wairua tapu
Ake, ake, ake
Amine

Translation

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus
Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy
Spirit be with you all
Forever and ever
Amen*