



Sunday 4 May 2025 – Easter 3

Today's service has been prepared by Richard Smith, 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.

Humility: we recognise we do not have all the answers but are prayerfully journeying together as we try to seek them.

Welcome

Kia ora e te whanau, welcome faith-family. Welcome to worship at Kaurihohore this morning, the third Sunday after Easter when we focus on life transformed by the indwelling spirit of Christ in the Christian community and in the world. This morning, we have a time for News and Views after the worship service, which is a time for us to share our thoughts and ideas on the future of this church as a part of our year of discernment, to hear about the Sharing Service concept planned for next Sunday, to hear about the Awaken Maranga Mai Conference and to appoint a Health and Safety Officer.

Call to Worship

Come people of God, come from wherever fear has shut you up.

We come, hesitantly, cautiously, what is this call leading us to?

Come people of God, come though you cannot see what lies ahead.

We come, thankful to have survived so far. Dare we hope for more?

Come people of God, there are stories to share, jobs to be done.

We come, longing to hear more, to find hope, to trust in love.

Opening Prayer

Holy and Loving God we come to worship you this morning, with the stories echoing in our minds of the horror and despair of Good Friday transformed into Good News of hope and new life of Easter.

Continue to calm our fears, open our eyes to see new possibilities, our ears to trust new stories, inspire our minds to adventure in courage and our hearts to leap with joy, as we explore with you, your call to follow your way.

Guide us we pray to walk your way, to learn from your example in Jesus and to open ourselves to your Spirit to lead us into your kingdom. Amen.

Hymn WHAV 33: We Give Thanks

(Lyrics: Jan Chamberlin [Tune: Blaenwern](#))

1. We give thanks, O God, creator,
For our lovely native land:
Mountains, rivers, lakes and forest,
Roaring seas and golden sand.
Ours is called the lucky country:
Some would say it is God's own.
We've done nothing to deserve it:
All this bounty is on loan.
2. Help us not to be complacent
That we work and play in peace:
While our friends in other countries
Live with wars that never cease.
May we never take for granted
Doctors, schools and winter heat:
When our neighbours struggle daily
Just to get enough to eat.
3. As we tread our daily pathway,
Show us how to love and give:
Teach us how to care for others,
Live as you would have us live.
If we are the lucky country,
Blessed with wealth and beauty rare:
May we know our obligations,
All our riches here to share.

Centring Prayer

God of Life, we come this morning with the Easter stories echoing in our ears, new life, new hope, but the doubting Thomas in us cannot quite get our heads around it and take it on board. Like Paul we ask, "Who are you, Lord?" Help us let go of the scales over our eyes.

Creator God, we come this morning doing things like we are used to, knowing it isn't working like it did before. Are you calling us to a new way? Which way Lord? What will change require of us?

Loving God, we come this morning to explore your message that life will triumph over death, that hope will triumph over despair and that love will triumph over fear. Be with us in our struggle to believe it and to live it into our daily lives. **Amen.**

Hymn WHAV 29: I Cannot Hear You Calling Me

(Lyrics: Jan Chamberlin [Tune: Londonderry Air](#))

1. O God, my guide, I cannot hear you calling me
In all the noise and turmoil of today.
When life is ruled by microchip technology,
It's hard to find a quiet time to pray.
I lose you in bombardment from the media,
And in my family's daily strain and strife,
I cannot pray when this world catches up with me,
And I am lured away from you and Christian life.
2. I cannot find you when I strive for worldly gain;
When I ignore my neighbour's pressing need:
When I am pushing egotistic interests,
And fail to love, in thought or word or deed.
Help me, my God, to see the way ahead for me;
To know your wisdom in my darkest hour:
Push me along the road you have prepared for me,
Supported by your endless love and grace and power.
3. Most patient God, the world is always calling me,
And moments when I seek you out are few:
But you are there, regardless of my selfishness,
And I can always find my strength in you.
O risen Lord, break through the maze of busyness,
And help me learn to listen with my soul.
May I find true direction on the path ahead:
For you, my God, and you alone can make me whole.

Readings

Acts 9:1-20 New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised

The Conversion of Saul

9 Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³ Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' ⁵ He asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' The reply came, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶ But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.'

⁷ The men who were travelling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹ For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

¹⁰ Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' He answered, 'Here I am, Lord.' ¹¹ The Lord said to him, 'Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, ¹² and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.'

¹³ But Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; ¹⁴ and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.' ¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; ¹⁶ I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.' ¹⁷ So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.'

¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, ¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Saul Preaches in Damascus

For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, ²⁰ and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God.'

Jesus Appears to Seven Disciples

21 After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. ² Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. ³ Simon Peter said to them, 'I am going fishing.' They said to him, 'We will go with you.' They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

⁴ Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Jesus said to them, 'Children, you have no fish, have you?' They answered him, 'No.' ⁶ He said to them, 'Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.' So, they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. ⁷ That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!' When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the lake. ⁸ But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

⁹ When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.'

¹¹ So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, 'Who are you?' because they knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Jesus and Peter

¹⁵ When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' ¹⁶ A second time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend my sheep.' ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' And he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep.'

¹⁸Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.' ¹⁹ (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, 'Follow me.'

Reading of “Song - My Love Came Through the City”

Written by James K. Baxter

Read by Jeanette Osborne

Sermon / Reflection - “What does it mean to, ‘Follow Jesus’?”

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

I am not sure if I am brave or foolish to have selected these two texts from the lectionary readings to preach on this morning.

Unfortunately, we do not have time to really explore either text in depth, let alone to investigate how they each illustrate the understanding of what it meant to the early church to follow Jesus. I have instead chosen to focus on what we might hear in these texts about discerning how we are being called to follow Jesus in Te Kamo and Kaurihohore in the twenty-first century.

The story of Saul’s conversion on the road to Damascus is so famous that the phrase, “Damascus Road experience” has become a common metaphor in everyday secular society for a life-changing experience. This story is told three times in slightly different ways in the book of Acts written by Luke (Acts 9, 22, 26) and Paul himself mentions it in his letter to the Galatians (1:13-17).

In Galatians Paul, referring to this experience, says, “when God, was pleased to reveal his Son to me ...” The descriptions in Acts all talk of Saul having an experience in which Jesus appeared to him as a living reality in the present, although Saul does not immediately recognise who he is. Both Acts and Paul’s letters agree that Saul, was radically transformed by the experience. Hence his being called not Saul but Paul from then on, reflecting that he had a new character. This transformation is symbolised in the story by Saul being made blind, then after three days, on being blessed by Ananias, “immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptised”

The story in the Gospel of John about Peter and his mates going fishing, immediately resonates with many of us whose experience of fishing is similarly remembered for catching nothing.

But notice that again in this story the figure on the lakeside is not immediately recognised, “Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus”. This time the message from the lakeside figure is to do something unconventional, “Cast the net to the right side of the boat”. I understand the boats were designed for the net to be cast on the left side not the right side. The resulting catch led to them recognising the figure on the lakeside as Jesus. We then get the characteristic story elements of feeding, challenge and call to follow. In this case Peter is challenged three times, “Do you love me?” One for each time he had denied he knew Jesus in the crucifixion story. With the challenge each time, “Feed my lambs.” “Tend my sheep.” “Feed my sheep.” With the story ending with the injunction, “Follow me.”

The Easter message of Resurrection has been interpreted by some to mean that Jesus’ physical corpse came to life again and walked out of his grave. An interpretation sometimes called “Physical Resuscitation”. While this understanding would fit with some aspects of the stories it is hard to reconcile with the consistent difficulty people had in recognising the resurrected Jesus and in some aspects of the stories symbolism. It is also hard to make sense of Paul’s Damascus Road experience as fitting with this understanding of Resurrection.

The other common interpretation is based on that given by Paul, that what died was Jesus physical body and what was raised was his spiritual body, which is also consistent with some aspects of the stories but not all.

The church does not require us to commit to either interpretation. It is a matter for individual study and conviction.

My reasons for mentioning it today is that I suspect that many in this community avoid church because they expect that we will pressure them to commit to saying they believe something they would find intellectually dishonest. They have heard different stories of what Christians believe which they either don’t see any sense in or are so contentious they would rather stay away. These thoughts are relevant as we come to News and Views and share with each our ideas for the future of this Church.

Meanwhile, I would like to focus on what I think better reflects what I understand Jesus to have been talking about when he called Peter to, “Follow Me.” Marcus Borg puts it this way, “Jesus and early Christianity were primarily focused on the transformation of lives and the world this side of death. Of course, Jesus and Paul and the other early Christians believed in an afterlife – that death was not the end. But that was not the heart of their message. Rather, it was about the kingdom of God on earth and what the world would be like under the lordship of God rather than the lords of this world.”

Life in this transformed world was referred to as, “life in the age to come” which is often translated as eternal life or life everlasting. This translation again, I think, leads many to misunderstand what we are on about.

There are reasons to not commit to following Jesus.

If your God is personal wealth or fame; if you want to dominate, exploit and control others; if having power over others is more important to you than sharing in a community where each person is respected for who they are not what they own, then following Jesus is not your priority and you do not belong in a Christian church.

If being liked by thousands or millions on Facebook and charging high rates as an influencer are your goals in life, then belonging in a faith community, where caring about the poor and disadvantaged is a core mission focus, is not a good fit for you.

But if these are not your priorities, then I would like this faith community to be one where you feel welcomed and invited to explore what following Jesus would really mean for you and whoever you choose to invite.

Community Time: Thanks, Notices & Concerns

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession:

Loving God, we thank you for Jesus of the lakeshore and the roadside, who comes to meet us both in the everyday and in the unexpected moments of our lives.

Help us to see him, despite the dazzle of sunlight in our eyes, and the disguises he wears of ordinariness and of unexpectedness.

We thank you for the questioning Jesus who calls us to take risks to do things in new ways. Help us to respond, despite our habits and traditions and the fear that drives our caution.

We thank you for the feeding Jesus of the lakeside, who has met all our needs for love and shelter, for encouragement and purpose.

We thank you for clean water to drink, for homes to live in, for a community and society in which we are free to talk, and to read and think and express our opinions in.

We thank you for

Loving God, you call us to be your body here in this place. Open our eyes to the needs of those around us, our family and friends, our neighbours and community members. Open our hearts to be generous and loving, caring for others and sharing the privileges we have, that all may live life abundantly.

We especially pray this morning for those who are ill and lonely,

.....
God of compassion, come to life again within us so that every sheep of your many flocks will be fed and know the safety of your care shown in our lives of loving service.

Where we can show your love, move us.

Where what is needed is beyond what we can do, target our prayers so that: where there is violence, peace will prevail,

where there is hatred, forgiveness and reconciliation will replace it,

where there is selfishness and greed, there will be transformation and new life, where there is sickness or ill health, health and wholeness will be restored.

These prayers we bring in the spirit of your Son, our Lord Jesus. Amen.

Hymn AA 132: [Tell My People I Love Them](#)

(Lyrics by Leonard Barlotti arr. Jan Harrington and Guy Jansen)

Chorus

*Tell My people I love them,
tell My people that I care;
when they feel far away from Me,
tell My people I am there.*

1. Tell my people I came and died
to give them liberty;
and to abide in Me
is to be really free.

Chorus

2. Tell My people where'er they go
My comfort they can know;
My peace and joy and love
I freely will bestow.

Chorus

3. Tell my people to share their wealth
And fight the sin of greed;
Care for the refugee;
The hungry they're to feed.

Chorus

4. Tell my people throughout the world
To strive for peace today
Show love for enemies,
Be servants of the Way

Chorus

Offering and Prayer of Dedication

Loving Lord, we give thanks for all we have received, life and love.

We bring ourselves and these gifts to offer in response to your call. Bless us and our giving that our time and talents may bring hope and healing wherever they are needed. Amen.

Hymn HIOS 153: [Where The Light Of Easter Day](#)

Words: Shirley Murray Tune: Jillian Bray

1. Where the light of Easter Day
shines through our life, then faith can say,
Christ is living, Christ is moving,
Christ is changing all the world.
Here is God's good kingdom!

2. Where the yeast of love will rise,
bubbling with God's new enterprise,
Christ is living, Christ is moving
Christ is working through the world.
Here is God's good kingdom!

3. Where a child can grow in trust,
Where there is joy that powers are just,
Christ is living, Christ is moving,
Christ will colour all the world.
Here is God's good kingdom!

4. Where the harvests ripen in peace,
where all the sounds of gunfire cease,
Christ is living, Christ is moving,
Christ is healing in the world.
Here is God's good kingdom!

5. Where the Spirit's flame burns bright,
where there is health and truth and light,
Christ is living, Christ is moving,
Christ will resurrect the world.
Here is God's good kingdom!

Commissioning and Benediction

Go; to continue your life's journey and as you travel the road ahead,
may you recognise Christ in the flashes of inspiration that strike you,

and take nourishment from the slowly unfolding realisations that come to you as
you live and learn from your daily experiences.

Forgive others as you have been forgiven, feed whichever of God's children he
sends in your way, love as you have been loved.

May the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you to your journey's
end.

**We go trusting God to bring hope for our despair, joy for our sadness and
his presence in the Spirit of the risen Christ into our lives and the life of this
world he loves.**

Sung Amen

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