



KAURIHOHORE / KAMO CO-OPERATING PARISH

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Sunday 1 February 2026 – Epiphany 4

Our Service today 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.

Mission Statement: Sharing God's love, creating hope, working for justice.

Community time during the service is a good opportunity to ask for prayers for yourself or others.

After the service you are invited to share in morning tea either in the kitchen or on the deck.

If you, or someone you know, would appreciate a visit from one of our **Pastoral Partners Team**, please speak to the service leader.

*You are invited to stand if you are able,
for the hymns and the offering prayer.*

*You are invited to share in reading aloud the responses in **Bold Type**.*

Welcome

Mōrena e te whānau. Good morning church family. My name is Mike, and it is my pleasure to welcome you to worship here at Kaurihohore this morning, the fourth Sunday of Epiphany.

I shared a few weeks ago something Diana Butler Bass had written about Epiphany – and, unsurprisingly, it turns out she writes a lot of good stuff about Epiphany, so I'm going to share something else from her this morning. She says:

As a church season, Epiphany can easily be forgotten, squeezed as it is between Christmas and Lent. After we put away the Christmas decorations and the wise men, we switch back to “ordinary time”... until Ash Wednesday. Business-as-usual church waiting for the big run-up to Easter Sunday a few months hence.

But Epiphany is anything but ordinary. “Epiphany” is a glorious word. Appearance, manifestation, insight, revelation; an illuminating discovery, intuitive understanding. This is the time of experiencing God-with-us. Honing our spiritual intuition, sensing the divine presence in our lives and the world.

Call to Worship

Come. Now is the time we have set aside to worship together.

Let us take a moment to prepare ourselves.

Let us take a deep breath, mindful of the Spirit that breathes through us.

Let us close our eyes and empty our minds of mindless chatter.

Let us open our ears so we are ready to hear God's message.

Source: L3 — Liturgy, Learning, (Purposeful) Life

Opening Prayer

Creator God, you have brought us here today.

Let us join together in worship and praise of you. Amen.

Source: L3 — Liturgy, Learning, (Purposeful) Life

Sentence: Micah 6:8 (The Message)

But he's already made it plain how to live, what to do,

 what God is looking for in men and women.

It's quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbour,

 be compassionate and loyal in your love,

And don't take yourself too seriously—

 take God seriously.

Hymn: Praise with joy the world's creator (Tune: *Lauda Anima*)

1. Praise with joy the world's creator,
God of justice, love and peace,
Source and end of human
knowledge,
Force of goodness without cease.
Celebrate the Maker's glory,
Power to rescue and release.

2. Praise the Son who feeds
the hungry,
Frees the captive, finds
the lost,
Heals the sick, upsets religion,
Fearless both of fate and cost.
Celebrate Christ's constant
presence -
Friend and Stranger,
Guest and Host.

3. Praise the Spirit sent among us
Liberating truth from pride,
Forging bonds where race or
gender,
Age or nation dare divide.
Celebrate the Spirit's treasure -
Foolishness none dare deride.

4. Praise the Maker, Son
and Spirit,
One God in Community,
Calling us to leave behind
Faith's ghettos and obscurity.
Thus the world shall yet believe
When shown Christ's vibrant unity.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 5:1-12

Our Gospel reading this morning, Matthew 5:1-12, is the beginning of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount – the Beatitudes.

As I was preparing for today's service I came across something Joy Cowley wrote about the Beatitudes. She says:

The Beatitudes in Matthew 5 are profound but can seem stark in their brevity...

When we are young, the Beatitudes make little or no sense. In our youth, we are gatherers, accumulating experience, a sense of identity, a place in the world. Jesus' words in this reading may even seem to threaten us.

It is only when we have a mature understanding of who we are, and are at the stage of letting go, that we see the beatitudes as a rich blessing.

They are all about emptying ourselves so that we can be filled with God's presence.

It sounds easy on paper, but achieving it is the work of a lifetime.

As part of her article, she also included a paraphrase of the Beatitudes. This morning Kim and Rory are going to read our Gospel reading in unison – Kim will read from the New Revised Standard Version, and Rory will read the Joy Cowley paraphrased version (*the shaded text below*).

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ² Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

³ 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who are not full of themselves, for they have room for God.

⁴ 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are those in sorrow, for although grief is painful, it has a cleansing effect and can make space for new growth.

⁵ 'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are the meek. Because they are not self-absorbed, they will feel connected with everyone and everything.

⁶ 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are those whose hearts are hungry, for God is the shape of that hunger.

⁷ 'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are those who show kindness, for what they do for others they also do for themselves.

⁸ 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are those who are in love with God, for they will know God in all creation.

⁹ 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are not judgmental. They will see as God sees.

¹⁰ 'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who meet criticism with love, for God is love, and they are replacing ignorance with an experience of God.

¹¹ 'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Hymn: Blessed are the poor in spirit

(Carolyn Winfrey Gillette;

Tune: Nettleton)

1. Blessed are the poor in spirit; all God's realm is surely theirs.
Those in mourning will find comfort as an answer to their prayers.
Meek ones whom this world despises will inherit everything.
God, your kingdom still surprises; may we seek the reign you bring.
2. Blessed, too, are those who hunger and who thirst for what is right.
They will not be prone to wander, for your will is their delight.
Those who show God's care and mercy will receive that mercy too.
God, in Christ you show us clearly of the joy we have in you.
3. Those who share the peace God gives them will find blessings as God's own.
Those oppressed for faithful living will call heaven's kingdom Home.
When the world's ways seem distressing and we feel life's painful sting,
God, remind us of the blessings of the wondrous life you bring.

Poem: “*Beatitudes for a Queerer Church*” by Jay Hulme from *Backwater Sermons*

Our highlighted value for today's service, which you can read on the front of the service sheet, is 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.

One of my favourite poets, Jay Hulme, has a fantastic poem called *Beatitudes for a Queerer Church* which beautifully links our highlighted value and today's Gospel reading.

Blessed are the outcasts;
the ostracized, the outsiders.

Blessed are the scared;
the scarred, the silent.

Blessed are the broken;
for they are not broken.

Blessed are the hated;
for they are not worthy of hate.

Blessed are those who try;
those who transform, who transition.

Blessed are the closeted;
God sees you shine anyway.

Blessed are the queers;
who love creation enough to live the truth of it,
despite a world that tells them they cannot.

And blessed are those
who believe themselves unworthy of blessing;
what inconceivable wonders you hold.

Prayer of Confession

For all the times we have failed, we say sorry.

For all the times we have hurt one another and ourselves, we say sorry.

A time of silence

Gracious God, hear these words of confession,
the ones spoken aloud and the ones spoken in our hearts.

Thank you for your loving reassurance of forgiveness in your mercy and love. Amen.

Source: L3 — Liturgy, Learning, (Purposeful) Life

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

Reflection

Two weeks ago, the Lectionary readings guided us to the beginning of First Corinthians, where Paul is giving thanks for the church in Corinth, despite all the tensions and challenges at play, and showing them, as NT Wright puts it, how every point of their story is intertwined with Jesus' story.

Then last week's passage moved on to the first of those challenges the Corinthian church was facing – Rev Johanna talked about the quarrelling that was happening; the church dividing into factions, and that Paul and Jesus both build a network of relationships, of behaviours that lead to a better understanding of living in heaven now.

Which brings us to today's passage, which is all about power and foolishness. At the beginning of the passage Paul says: The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are being destroyed. But it is the power of God for those of us who are being saved. I like Eugene Peterson's Message translation for this too, which says: The Message that points to Christ on the Cross seems like sheer silliness to those hellbent on destruction, but for those on the way of salvation it makes perfect sense. This is the way God works, and most powerfully as it turns out.

Paul finishes this passage with further talk of power and foolishness: But to those who are called—both Jews and Greeks—Christ is God's power and God's wisdom. This is because the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

Paul is writing to a church that has been heavily influenced by the culture of the city it is located in – if you recall Corinth was a relatively young city, founded by the Roman Emperor Julius Caesar only about 100 years before the letter was written. A city where power came by influence, or force.

We haven't really moved on from that notion of power as a world, have we?

Look around at what is happening with Russia and Ukraine, the United States and Greenland. I was reading an article in The Guardian newspaper as I was preparing for this service, where Mark Carney, Prime Minister of Canada was quoted as saying “This is rupture not a transition... the end of a pleasant fiction and the beginning of a brutal reality where the geopolitics of the great powers is subject to no constraints”.

And in that same article the European Commission's president, Ursula von der Leyen, said: “We now live in a world defined by raw power, whether economic or military, technological or geopolitical. In an increasingly lawless world, Europe needs its own levers of power.”

It's all about power for these leaders. That's obvious on the face of it for Trump and Putin, but even the European Commission's president is still focused on the need for their own levers of power.

Which is where our Scripture readings today provide a distinct contrast. This concept of power is upended, turned on its head.

As Paul is saying, we need to think about the power of God in different terms. Jesus rejected these notions of power relating to influence and force. Instead, Jesus became a humiliated, crucified. A Messiah, Christ, crucified on the cross? That is quite a different lever of power. And it did look like foolishness to the Gentiles in the city of Corinth.

But that was all part of the upside-down kingdom that God was inaugurating. You can see it in our sentence from the prophet Micah at the beginning of the service: this is what the Lord requires from you: to do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God.

And you can see it in the Beatitudes, one of the most famous examples of Jesus upending norms; blessing those who the world definitely would not consider powerful: the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, the peacemakers...

To finish today's reflection, I wanted to share some of what Nadia Bolz-Weber has to say about the Beatitudes and God's power. She says:

Maybe the Sermon on the Mount is all about Jesus' lavish blessing of the people around him on that hillside who his world—like ours—didn't seem to have much time for: people in pain, people who work for peace instead of profit, people who exercise mercy instead of vengeance.

Maybe Jesus was simply blessing the ones around him that day who didn't otherwise receive blessing, who had come to believe that, for them, blessings would never be in the cards. I mean, come on, doesn't that just sound like something Jesus would do? Extravagantly throwing around blessings as though they grew on trees?

So I imagine Jesus standing among us offering some new beatitudes:

Blessed are the agnostics.

Blessed are they who doubt. Those who aren't sure, who can still be surprised.

Blessed are those who have nothing to offer.

Blessed are they for whom death is not an abstraction.

Blessed are they who have buried their loved ones, for whom tears could fill an ocean. Blessed are they who have loved enough to know what loss feels like.

Blessed are they who don't have the luxury of taking things for granted anymore.

Blessed are they who can't fall apart because they have to keep it together for everyone else.

Blessed are those who "still aren't over it yet."

Blessed are those who mourn.

Blessed are those who no one else notices. The kids who sit alone at middle-school lunch tables. The laundry guys at the hospital. The sex workers and the night-shift street sweepers.

Blessed are the forgotten. Blessed are the closeted.

Blessed are the unemployed, the unimpressive, the underrepresented.

Blessed are the wrongly accused, the ones who never catch a break, the ones for whom life is hard, for Jesus chose to surround himself with people like them.

Blessed are those without documentation. Blessed are the ones without lobbyists.

Blessed are those who make terrible business decisions for the sake of people.

Blessed are the burned-out social workers and the overworked teachers and the pro bono case takers.

Blessed are the kindhearted football players and the fundraising trophy wives.

Blessed are the kids who step between the bullies and the weak.

Blessed is everyone who has ever forgiven me when I didn't deserve it.

Blessed are the merciful, for they totally get it.

You are of heaven, and Jesus blesses you.

(you can listen to these here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ctcjNCrGyT8>

Nadia continues:

I imagine Jesus standing here blessing us all because I believe that is our Lord's nature. Because, after all, it was Jesus who had all the powers of the universe at his disposal but did not consider his equality with God something to be exploited. Instead, he came to us in the most vulnerable of ways, as a powerless, flesh-and-blood newborn. As if to say, "You may hate your bodies, but I am blessing all human flesh. You may admire strength and might, but I am blessing all human weakness. You may seek power, but I am blessing all human vulnerability." This Jesus whom we follow cried at the tomb of his friend and turned the other cheek and forgave those who hung him on a cross. Because he was God's Beatitude—God's blessing to the weak in a world that admires only the strong.

God bless you.

Hymn: God of my breathing (Richard Bruxvoort Colligan; Tune: *Slane*)

1. God of my breathing and God of my heart
Spirit embodied in all human parts
Would that this body, from head to the toes
Bring forth Your glory in all that I know.
2. God of my eating and God of my taste
Flavour my nourishment
full with Your grace
Bless what comes in through this mouth that it might
Bless how I live with the kindness of Christ
3. God of my hearing and God of my sight
Bless all I find from the moment I rise
Upon this mind your table be found
Prayerfully offered these visions and sounds
4. God of my footsteps and God of my path
Where these feet travel may they know no lack
Shoes on the pavement or toes in the soil
Carry your servant where Christ bids them go
5. God of my memories, Lord of this mind
God of the moment whose vision is time
All I remember and all I forget
Hold in Your keeping so this soul might rest
6. God of my limits and God of all truth
You who have knit me with joy in the womb
Would that this body from head to the toes
Bring forth Your glory in all that I know

Offering Prayer

Gracious God, for these good gifts, we give thanks. May they be used to further your work of justice in this place. Amen

Source: L3 — *Liturgy, Learning, (Purposeful) Life*

Community Time – celebrations, notices, concerns for prayer

Prayers of Intercession

As children around our community and country prepare for a new year of school, let us recommit ourselves to their nurture...

Let us also remember the children we once were and who still live within us.

Let us love them now, in this quiet moment.

Let us remember the children of our own families and the children of our friends.

Let us love them now, in this quiet moment.

Let us remember the children who are homeless
children who are separated from their families
children who are hungry or in pain
children whose lives are threatened by
drugs, crime, lack of health care.

Let us love them now, in this quiet moment.

Let us remember all children and commit ourselves to their growth and safety, their health and education, their uniqueness and their unfolding beauty.

Let us love them now, in this quiet moment.

And forever more. Amen

Adapted from: C Sternberg / UUA Worship Web

Hymn: Dare to live the dream God gives you (Protest of Praise;

tune: Hyfrydol)

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.

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.

Refrain:

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

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.

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

Benediction

Like the servant who speaks with wisdom and Jesus who blesses the humble, we are called to walk humbly, love kindness, and live God's justice.
May the Spirit of justice fill you today and always, tempting you to speak for truth, calling you to stand up for what is right, encouraging you to act with loving-kindness towards each person, animal and every part of God's good creation. Amen

Source: L3 — Liturgy, Learning, (Purposeful) Life

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*

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