



Kaurihohore Historic Church

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Kaurihohore / Kamo Co-operating Parish Sunday 15 October 2023 –Pentecost 20

Our Service today has been prepared by Richard Smith, one of our Lay Preachers

Welcome

Welcome to worship at Kauri this morning. The election is over and the All-Blacks rugby quarter-final game against Ireland now too.

It is a time of change. Now we wait to see just how the outcome of the election will work out in policies, programmes, and practice. Who will take up what responsibilities and what will happen on the ground, especially to those facing the greatest hardship and deprivation. Some in our communities are elated. Those they wished to, have won the chance to govern. Others are devastated that despite all their hard work and hope those they had hoped would have the power to implement the policies they thought best, have lost any chance of putting them into practice. Communities, groups and even families have been divided in opinion as the election drew near. Now is the time to pause, to reflect and to begin the reconciling and healing. To adapt to make the best of the outcome and to prepare ourselves to continue to speak up as God's people, to advocate for those things we consider are right and proper, in our community, our nation, and our world.

It is also a time of change in the church year as we complete the Season of Creation and continue in Pentecost exploring how the Spirit of God is acting in us and in the world. Today is the twentieth Sunday in the Season of Pentecost. Let us prepare ourselves to worship and open ourselves to learn anew what the spirit is calling us to, in this day and this age.

God is like a loving mother calling all her children into dinner, reminding each to wash their hands and to help the little ones, challenging the impetuous and greedy to leave enough for the shy and timid, and looking out for those who are so unsure of their welcome that they hold back in the fringes of the room or wait hesitantly outside.

Let us heed the call and join in the feast of worship.

Call to Worship *(please read aloud together the words in bold)*

John, in his gospel says, “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:24)

Come you who are ready to worship in spirit and in truth.

¹ Praise the LORD!

**O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures for ever.**

² Who can utter the mighty doings of the LORD,
or declare all his praise?

³ Happy are those who observe justice,
who do righteousness at all times.

⁴ Remember me, O LORD, when you show favour to your people;
help me when you deliver them;

⁵ that I may see the prosperity of your chosen ones,
**that I may rejoice in the gladness of your nation,
that I may glory in your heritage.**

⁶ Both we and our ancestors have sinned;
we have committed iniquity, have done wickedly.

¹⁹ They made a calf at Horeb
and worshipped a cast image.

²⁰ They exchanged the glory of God
for the image of an ox that eats grass.

²¹ They forgot God, their Saviour,
who had done great things in Egypt,

²² wondrous works in the land of Ham,
and awesome deeds by the Sea of Reeds.

²³ Therefore he said he would destroy them—
**had not Moses, his chosen one,
stood in the breach before him,
to turn away his wrath from destroying them.**

Opening Prayer

Holy and loving God, source of creativity and compassion, we gather with a mixture of emotions and a turmoil of thoughts this morning as we seek your presence and come to hear your word to us in this time.

We are part of a community and a nation that has been torn by division and contention, with different visions of the way forward, and a variety of hopes and fears for the future. Guide and support us as we seek your leading to rebuild our community, reconcile separated factions, and unite to care for the alienated and the poor, that all may experience your call to care for their neighbour, forgiveness for the hurts they have inflicted, and the blessing of being loved. **Amen.**

Hymn HFTC 525: [Lead Us, Heavenly Father, Lead Us](#) (Tune: Mannheim)

Prayer for Centring and Renewal

In joy and in despair you call us to come to you, to become your faithful people, trusting you to provide for us in the wilderness places of this life. Help us to hear your call, to respond in obedience and to open ourselves to your invigorating spirit. Open our eyes to see our golden calves for what they are and inspire us to turn again to seek your presence in our lives. Forgive us for our apathy, complacency, and idolatry. Clothe us with the humble robe that enables us to participate in your wedding banquet with all those from the streets of our world.

Amen.

Scripture readings

Introduction to the reading from the Hebrew scriptures. (Seasons of the Spirit)

This week's texts invite reflection on moments that make us falter in our faith, the moments when our fear, however small, prevails over our instincts to do good.

In Exodus 32, the people are camped near Mount Sinai. Moses has gone with his assistant Joshua to meet with God. Moses has left his brother Aaron and nephew Hur in charge of the camp. Moses and Joshua are gone for 40 days and 40 nights – a biblical number symbolic of birth, rebirth, and change. While they are away, the people get restless and make demands on Aaron. They seek assurance of God's presence, but in the form of idols from nature-religions of the ancient Near East with which they would have been familiar and comfortable. The golden calf was an image of strength and virility, common in religions of that area – it was meant to soothe their troubled hearts. Moses returns from the mountain to the camp with

clear divine instruction about how the gold brought from Egypt is to be used, only to find that it has been moulded into an idol of another religion.

In the story of the golden calf, Moses stands, according to our Psalm reading, “in the breach” that has developed between God and the rest of the community. Moses repairs the broken trust on both sides, calling God and the people back into covenant. Who stands in the breach today? How can we be people who repair broken trust between different entities? What kind of faith, leadership, and patience would that entail?

Exodus 32:1-14 New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised (page 136)

The Golden Calf

32 When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered around Aaron and said to him, ‘Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’ ² Aaron said to them, ‘Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.’ ³ So all the people took off the gold rings from their ears, and brought them to Aaron. ⁴ He took the gold from them, formed it in a mould, and cast an image of a calf; and they said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!’ ⁵ When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said, ‘Tomorrow shall be a festival to the LORD.’ ⁶ They rose early the next day, and offered burnt-offerings and brought sacrifices of well-being; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to revel.

⁷ The LORD said to Moses, ‘Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; ⁸ they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshipped it and sacrificed to it, and said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!”’ ⁹ The LORD said to Moses, ‘I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. ¹⁰ Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation.’

¹¹ But Moses implored the LORD his God, and said, ‘O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? ¹² Why should the Egyptians say, “It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth”? Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people.

¹³ Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, “I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it for ever.”’ ¹⁴ And the LORD changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

Introduction to the reading from the Christian scriptures.(Seasons of the Spirit)

At a surface level our reading from the gospel of Matthew seems jarring, it appears that the people who do not dress right are the ones whom God punishes. Why would God do this, forgetting a preferential option for the poor and oppressed? God is the one who teaches that fineries matter less than spirit. This is a parable, and parables speak in symbol and irony. Read on a deeper level, the clothing signifies our spiritual preparedness for what God provides. Perhaps the robe is a robe of justice, or equality, or community. When are we so busy or fearful or distracted and forget to clothe ourselves in these values?

Matthew 22:1-14 New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised (Page 1538)

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

22 Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: ²‘The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. ³He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. ⁴Again he sent other slaves, saying, “Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.” ⁵But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶while the rest seized his slaves, maltreated them, and killed them. ⁷The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. ⁸Then he said to his slaves, “The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.” ¹⁰Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests. ¹¹‘But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, ¹²and he said to him, “Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?” And he was speechless. ¹³Then the king said to the attendants, “Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” ¹⁴For many are called, but few are chosen.’

Hymn FFS 11: [Come, Teach Us, Spirit of our God](#)

Reflection

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

This morning we have two stories, one from the literature of ancient Hebrew culture, probably in its present form compiled around the time of exile and then release in 600 to 500BCE, the other a more recent compilation of stories by a Jewish Christian writer probably in the eighties of the first century CE.

Yet we read them with reverential intent expecting to gain something for them more than we would from just any old story. Why? In church language we often refer to these scriptures as, “The Word of God.” What makes old stories sacred?

I want to share with you some of my thoughts in the hope they are helpful for you as you think these issues through.

Walthe Brueggemann, probably the foremost biblical theologian this century describes the Exodus stories as, “a retelling of paradigmatic confrontation.”

I think these stories are ancient literature but they become, for us, the “Word of God” when we let them speak to us in our own context as the Jews did their literature and the early Christians did theirs. Not only do we come to these stories seeking what they have to say to us today, but in a way these stories come to us asking us what do you say to the Word We bring to you? These stories read us as we read them. In that process these old writings become for us in our own context as the Jews did their literature and the early Christians did theirs. Not only do we come to these stories seeking what they have to say to us today, but in a way these stories come to us asking us what do you say to the “Word” we bring to you? In a sense these stories read us, as we read them. In that process these old writings become, “The Word of God” for us in our time.

Let me illustrate. The Hebrew slaves had been called out of slavery in Egypt into the wilderness where they had, under Moses’ leadership, sworn a covenant to follow God. In today’s story, they renege on that covenant and get Aaron to make a golden calf to worship. This story becomes “Word of God” for us the moment we reflect, “What are my golden calves?” “What do I worship in place of the God who calls me to love my neighbour as myself?” I can remember a telling sermon in my youth from a minister who likened the devotion paid, through careful weekly washing and polishing, of the shiny monsters which graced many drives in the suburb we lived in, to this golden calf.

So, take a moment now to reflect and discuss with those nearest to you, what are the golden calves in your lives and the life of our communities? Reread the story on page 136 and 137 to refresh your mind if you like.

Now that story has become the “Word of God” for you. It has begun to interrogate your life, to stimulate you to listen to what God is saying to you today.

I have been reflecting if our economic system is one of the golden calves we have set up in place of the God who called our ancestors out of Europe to settle in this country of promise.

Otherwise, why can't we feed those who go hungry in a land of plenty, and house those who are homeless in a land with over forty thousand houses reportedly empty in Auckland alone? I'm sure there are other golden calves; fame or notoriety on social media, shopping as entertainment buying things we don't need, watching sport in place of healthy exercise,

Now let us turn to our second biblical story. What is the wedding robe? The moment we begin to question whether we are suitably robed to share in God's banquet this story becomes a "Word of God" to us. What do you think we need to be eligible to share in the kingdom of heaven, or God's feast? Initially I had difficulty getting my head around how this might apply to me.

Then I thought of a comment one of my clients once made about being made to feel small and useless when he went to apply for a benefit. Arrogance and superiority may not be suitable clothing for the kingdom. What do you think may get in the way for you?

Again, take some time to reflect, reread the story on page 1538 if you wish, then discuss with your neighbours.

As I wrestled with this reading during the week, I was sent an article from last week's Listener on the cost-of-living crisis. In this article Oliver Neas commented that, "In November 1966, five women in Auckland placed an advertisement in the paper with a simple message: "Who wants to do something about rising prices?" Their phones started ringing and CARP the Campaign Against Rising Prices was born. Branches sprang up around the country, protests, letter writing, lobbying, boycotts, followed; prices dropped as a result.

In 2023, Fonterra has just posted a profit nearly triple what it was last year. Kmart, Bunnings, Fletchers, Mainfreight, NZ Steel, petrol retailers and banks all had surging profits in 2021 /2022. Why is there no similar protest campaign these days? I wonder if the reason is spiritual – have we lost our belief in community, of collective action to address injustice? Where is our sense of solidarity with the poor? The Bible repeatedly affirms God is on the side of the poor and powerless, the marginalised. But have we lost our covenant connection with that God who brought the slaves out of Egypt, just as the Israelites did when they demanded Aaron make them a golden calf?

The "Word of God" requires us to open our eyes and our ears to listen carefully, to reflect thoughtfully and to be open to His spirit to enlighten our understanding. There is a spiritual dimension to this everyday world and you and I are called to respond to the calling of the spirit. That is what this Season of Pentecost is all about.

Community Time; Notices, Celebrations & Concerns

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Holy God, we give thanks for the freedom and responsibility of living in a democracy where we can participate in voting to select who will form our government. We pray for those elected and those who offered themselves but were not elected, for all those who worked to ensure a fair and valid electoral process. We pray for all in positions of power and influence that they may hear your call to care for the sick and to include those who have been rejected. We thank you for the amazing capacity of healing and rebuilding in our minds and bodies and in our communities. Help those who have suffered hurt, loss and disappointment to find again new hope and purpose.

We celebrate the unfolding spring with fresh growth and new life. We celebrate We rejoice when all God's chosen ones join in the celebration.

We pray for those in fear and anguish, those caught up in armed conflict, in Israel and Palestine, in Ukraine and Syria, the Congo and Sudan, and in all the other places where conflict rages on. We pray for all on the streets of our cities, who have no safe place to sleep at night, who do not know where or when they will have a nourishing meal, who live lives empty of joy and purpose. We especially hold before you this morning the girls and families of our Girls' Brigade Loving Lord inspire us to be your servants scouring the streets to invite all to share in your banquet of life and to know your love.

Hymn: [God Who Weeps](#)

Offering and Prayer of Dedication

God of nurture and of challenge we come before you, grateful for your gift of life, for the ability to see and hear, however imperfectly, and the opportunity to receive your invitation to share in your banquet. **Receive and bless our gifts, and us, as we dedicate ourselves to become your chosen people inviting all to your table and the hall of your presence. Amen.**

Hymn HFTC 531: [O Jesus I Have Promised](#) (Tune: Day of Rest)

Blessing and Commissioning *(Please find the laminated card in the pew bibles to share in singing the blessing)*

The Lord of Life has blessed you and calls you to go into the streets and invite everyone you find to the banquet.

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you.

The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you Peace.

Sung Amen *(three fold)*