



# Kaurihohore Historic Church

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## **Kaurihohore / Kamo Co-operating Parish** **Sunday 19 November 2023 – Pentecost 25**

Our Service today is led by Mike Nielsen, one of our Lay Preachers

## **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 the Kaurihohore / Kamo Co-operating Parish this morning.

I wanted to start this morning by thanking all of you who supported and prayed for us as we hosted the Evolving Faith conference earlier this month. The conference, which is held in the United States but available to be streamed online, is designed for Christians who have been marginalised by the wider church and are seeking a safe space to cultivate their faith and connect with others on a similar journey. We held it over a Friday evening and Saturday at the beginning of this month, and it was an amazing time of listening and conversation both with people who attend our church (and St John's) and people from our wider community. I was inspired by the storytellers and the theologians we heard from and have scattered some of their prayers and quotes throughout today's service. We're really hopeful that holding that conference and our building better communities conversations earlier in the year are a sign of where we might be heading as a church in the future. It's exciting!

### **Call to worship:**

We rejoice in the grace of worship.

**We come willing to accept and include.**

We rejoice in the fellowship of worship.

**We come willing to welcome and share.**

We rejoice in the quiet of worship.

**We come willing to pray and listen.**

We rejoice in the challenge of worship.

**We come willing to hear the prophetic word and prepare for action.**

*Source: David Sparks (Responsive Prayers Year B)*

## Opening prayer:

**God, be with me, be with us, and be in this. Amen**

*Source: Rev Alicia Crosby Mack*

## Hymn: How Great Thou Art (translated by Stuart K. Hine)

1. O Lord, my God, when I in  
awesome wonder  
consider all the works thy hands  
hath made,  
I see the stars, I hear the mighty  
thunder,  
thy pow'r throughout the  
universe displayed;

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour  
God, to thee:*

*How great thou art! How great  
thou art!*

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour  
God, to thee:*

*How great thou art! How great  
thou art!*

2. When through the woods and  
forest glades I wander,  
and hear the birds sing sweetly  
in the trees;  
when I look down from lofty  
mountain grandeur  
and hear the brook and feel the  
gentle breeze.

## Prayer of confession

Eternal One, we confess that we are short-sighted. We put ourselves before others and are worried we don't have enough, while others around us go without. We call ourselves religious, but fail to be concerned for justice for our neighbours. We fear losing what we have, rather than living into God's ways and trusting in God's love and justice. Forgive us for our fears that hold us back, from our assumptions that cause us to not see the needs around us, and for the times we miss the mark. Call us back into Your ways. In the name of Christ, our Redeemer and Friend, we pray. Amen.

*Source: Rev-o-lution*

## Hymn: Filled With Awe We Come Before You (*David Bjorlin*; [Tune: Nettleton](#))

1. Filled with awe we come before you,  
God of mystery and might,  
and our certainties grow cloudy  
calling us to faith's dim sight.  
Shake us out of small convictions  
or a god we can explain;  
give us glimpses of your glory  
that no vision can contain.
2. Where your holiness surrounds us,  
light that hallows and reveals,  
no more can we hide in shadows  
all the dirt the dark conceals:  
words that injure, thoughts that mangle,  
acts that sidestep love's demand.  
We, O God, are broken people  
and we scar your holy land.
3. Touch our lives, O God of mercy,  
with your burning coal of grace.  
Burn away oppression's structure;  
build up justice in its place.  
Then when we discern together  
what you call us all to do,  
Move our words and works to answer:  
"Here we are, we follow you!"

**Scripture reading:** [Psalm 123](#)

**Gospel reading:** [Matthew 25:14-30](#)

Before Kim reads our Gospel reading this morning, the parable of the talents from Matthew 25: 14-30, I wanted to share a quote from Amy-Jill Levine. In her book, *Short Stories by Jesus – the enigmatic parables of a controversial rabbi*, Amy-Jill says:

What makes the parables mysterious, or difficult, is that they challenge us to look into the hidden aspects of our own values, our

own lives. They bring to the surface unasked questions, and they reveal the answers we have always known, but refuse to acknowledge. Our reaction to them should be one of resistance rather than acceptance. For our own comfort, we may want to foreclose the meaning rather than allow the parable to open into multiple interpretations. We are probably more comfortable proclaiming a creed than prompting a conversation or pursuing a call.

Religion has been defined as designed to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable. We do well to think of the parables of Jesus as doing the afflicting. Therefore, if we hear a parable and think, “I really like that” or, worse, fail to take any challenge, we are not listening well enough.

## **Reflection**

Phew – that is some parable!

So, to recap – we have a man going away on a journey – and this isn't your average person – the picture being painted here is of a very rich and very powerful man. Before he heads away on his journey, the man, or the master, to use the term the storyteller gives him, distributes significant sums of money to his slaves, with an expectation that they will use that money to make him even more rich.

The parable uses the word talent – which is a challenge for us today to get our head around. From what I've read, one talent was worth about fifteen years wages for the average worker in those times. To bring it into modern times, he'd be dishing out millions of dollars to each slave.

He basically gives them a truckload of money, then heads away on holiday saying, “you know what to do, don't disappoint me”.

And the first two slaves go away and do their master proud. On his return, they've doubled what he gave them – the slave who was given five talents makes another five; the slave given two, another two. They are praised and invited to “enter into the joy of their master”.

As I was reading about this passage some commentators noted that this would have caused original hearers of the parable to be disgusted by the greed on display (how are they going out and making that much of a return; what dodgy practices are going on and who is being stepped on to achieve this goal?); modern readers, perhaps not so much... what a return on investment!

The third slave though, he knows his master is a harsh and ruthless man; he's afraid of his master, so he takes the single talent he's given and buries it. The master is furious when he returns and sees that the third slave has not made any further money for him – he flips out, suggesting that the slave could have at least put the money in the bank and earned interest on it, then orders the slave to be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be great weeping and gnashing of teeth.

This is the word of the Lord, right?!

It's like the Lord's Prayer but in reverse – blessed are the rich, blessed are those who manipulate the system, who exploit the poor and the environment for profit, for you will enter into the joy of your master. Woe to you who are downtrodden, who fear your boss, who provide voice to those with no voice, you will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be great weeping and gnashing of teeth.

If we're reading this as a parable about the kingdom of God, if we're viewing God as the master in this story, then I'd suggest, to use a phrase that Dr Joyce del Rosario used at the Evolving Faith conference, that we're conflating capitalism with Christianity. God becomes someone who only cares about maximising profits, and is hard-hearted and ruthless.

This doesn't sound like the God we hear Jesus talk about elsewhere in the Gospels, or the type of merciful God the psalmist imagined in our reading from the Hebrew scriptures this morning. But perhaps it's the type of God that we've unwittingly being led to believe is real.

In her talk at the Evolving Faith conference, Sarah Bessey, author, and co-founder of the conference said:

We imagined God as Zeus. We were taught that God could be capricious, and our imagination was somehow filled with a God of bargaining and performance and earning and striving like somehow, we

were here to placate God. We began to think of God in terms of judgement and cruelty and even baptising what would actually be abusive behaviour in some sort of sacred language which is not only profane but a really bad reading of scripture to boot.

If we view this as a parable about the kingdom of God, view God as the master in the story, then it's difficult to work out how it fits with Jesus' other teachings. But it can also have real implications for our theology, the way we imagine God.

Back to Sarah Bessey, she says:

Our imaginations aren't just misused and underused and misunderstood and abused, they've been thwarted and squashed. We need to repair our imagination because so many of us were given such a broken and incomplete image when it came to ourselves, when it came to God, and when it came to the world.

So, what if this isn't a parable about the kingdom of God, painting a picture of a ruthless hard-hearted God? What if this is a parable about the world? What if this is Jesus giving us insight into how the world works? If we're reimagining this story, what if the third slave isn't useless and disobedient, but actually the hero of the story.

What if, when the third slave speaks, he is doing so prophetically, he is speaking truth to power: I knew you were a harsh man (which has echoes of the Pharaoh's hardheartedness in the Exodus story); reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed. He's laying out the master's dubious business practices for all to see. He's what we'd now call a whistle blower. Bringing to light the unjust practices of this ruthless man.

The master won't have any of this though. The slave is made an example of, like many prophets before him (and many afterwards, perhaps Jesus is also echoing what is to come for him in this story?) – the lowly one is made more lowly by those in power, and the parable ends with a scathing indictment on both the world then and the world today: For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.

Author Christena Cleveland says, "Imagination is theology; we can only believe what we can imagine".

I think in this parable, the parable of the talents, Jesus is calling us to imagine not a hard-hearted ruthless God, but a God of love, a God of hope, a God of justice (to echo our church's new mission statement).

Coming back to Amy-Jill Levine, she says we have domesticated the parables of Jesus; German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote about our tendency to interpret the teaching of Jesus in a way that leaves us safe, comfortable, and unchallenged. Perhaps we've knowingly or unknowingly domesticated the parable of the talents to make it more palatable to the rich and powerful?

I invite you to instead look at this parable with fresh eyes, with an imagination of a God who is focused on hope, on love, on justice. Let us see this story through the eyes of the lowly and downcast, through the eyes of those yearning for a saviour, yearning for Jesus. Let us consider what this reimagining means for us in our lives, how our actions can bring about hope, love and justice, in the lives of others. This isn't easy, but it's something we are called to do as followers of Jesus.

In her communion sermon at the Evolving Faith conference, Nadia Bolz-Weber said that the Lord's Prayer sets a different agenda for the kingdom compared to that of the world. The Lord's Prayer sets a framework for our imagination of who God is, so let us now pray this prayer together – there are many different translations – I've included one in the service sheet, however you can pray whichever version and whichever language you are most comfortable with.

**Lord's prayer:**

**Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.**

**Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.**



**Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and forever.**

**Amen.**

**[Hymn: God, Make Us Agents of Joyful Rebellion \(David Bjorlin\)](#)**

1. God, make us agents of joyful rebellion  
called to resist sullen empires of fear,  
fuelled not by hatred but love for all people,  
we stand united, assured you are here.
2. Some will be Marys who sing down injustice.  
Others like Moses will speak truth to power.  
Few, like brave midwives, will shield life from evil.  
All must be prophets awake for this hour.
3. Laughing in answer to snarling derision,  
we dance to counter oppression and pain.  
Feasting together despite our divisions,  
we pledge ourselves to Christ's upside-down reign.
4. God, make us agents of joyful rebellion  
called to sing out till our faith is made sight.  
Fuelled by the stories of saintly subversives,  
we stand united, your justice our light.

## **Offering prayer:**

With these gifts, loving God, we bring our prophetic enthusiasm.

**We will speak out for what is just.**

**We will be prepared for radical change.**

**We will stand up to the powerful and controlling.**

**We will recognise the downtrodden with compassion.**

**We will endure finger-pointing and criticism.**

You bless our gifts, loving God.

**You bring us peace. Amen.**

*Source: David Sparks (Responsive Prayers Year A)*

## **Prayers of intercession:**

God of the heartbroken,

Where are you?

Be with the children who cry out.

Be with the mourners and the grievers.

Be with the frightened and the weary.

Be with the thirsty and the hungry.

**God, come near.**

God of justice,

Where are you?

Obliterate our apathy.

Grow our empathy.

Bolster our solidarity.

Turn us toward goodness.

**God, come near.**

God of abundant life,  
Where are you?  
Move us to forsake violence.  
Make us people of healing and care.  
Lead us out of fear and hatred.  
Guide us along the path of peace.  
**God, come near.**

God of steadfast love,  
Where are you?  
Soften human hearts.  
Grant us courage and vision.  
Give us spirits of mercy and hope.  
Show us the way to mutual flourishing.  
**God, come near.**

Source: Jeff Chu (<https://jeffchu.substack.com/>)

### **Hymn: Dare to live the dream God gives you (David Bjorlin; [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.

*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.

## **Blessing**

The world now is too dangerous  
and too beautiful for anything but love.  
May your eyes be so blessed you see God in everyone.  
Your ears, so you hear the cry of the poor.  
May your hands be so blessed  
that everything you touch is a sacrament.  
Your lips, so you speak nothing but the truth with love.  
May your feet be so blessed you run  
to those who need you.  
And may your heart be so opened,  
so set on fire, that your love,  
your love, changes everything.

*Source: Black Rock Prayer Book*

## **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*