

2 June 2024 at 9,00 am and 10.30 am communion services

WE ARE ABOVE ALL A THANKFUL PEOPLE

Sermon preached by The Revd Dr Tony Martin delivered at Cromwell
Presbyterian Church



READINGS:

Isaiah 58:9-14

Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;

you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.

**“If you do away with the yoke of oppression,
with the pointing finger and malicious talk,
10 and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry**

**and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,
then your light will rise in the darkness,
and your night will become like the
noonday.**

**11 The Lord will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched
land**

**and will strengthen your frame.
You will be like a well-watered garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail.**

**12 Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins
and will raise up the age-old foundations;
you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls,
Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.**

**13 “If you keep your feet from breaking the
Sabbath**

**and from doing as you please on my holy
day,**

if you call the Sabbath a delight

**and the Lord’s holy day honourable,
and if you honour it by not going your own
way**

and not doing as you please or speaking
idle words,
14 then you will find your joy in the Lord,
and I will cause you to ride in triumph on
the heights of the land
and to feast on the inheritance of your
father Jacob.”
For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Hebrews 12:18-29

The Mountain of Fear and the Mountain of Joy

18 You have not come to a mountain that can
be touched and that is burning with fire; to
darkness, gloom and storm; 19 to a trumpet
blast or to such a voice speaking words that
those who heard it begged that no further
word be spoken to them, 20 because they
could not bear what was commanded: “If even
an animal touches the mountain, it must be
stoned to death.” 21 The sight was so
terrifying that Moses said, “I am trembling
with fear.”

22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the
city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.
You have come to thousands upon thousands
of angels in joyful assembly, 23 to the church
of the firstborn, whose names are written in

heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

25 See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? 26 At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” 27 The words “once more” indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our “God is a consuming fire.”

Luke 13:10-17

Jesus Heals a Crippled Woman on the Sabbath

10 On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, 11 and a woman was there

who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. 12 When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, “Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.” 13 Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.

14 Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue leader said to the people, “There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.”

15 The Lord answered him, “You hypocrites! Doesn’t each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? 16 Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?”

17 When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.

SENTENCE FOR THE DAY

**You, O Lord are my hope, my trust from my youth. Upon you have I leaned since my birth.
Psalm 71:5-6**

INTRODUCTION

The passage of scripture today from the prophet Isaiah I find quite inspiring:

**12 Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins
and will raise up the age-old foundations;
you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls,
Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.**

As I get older in life ... one of the things I experience is a growing sense of gratitude ... despite some of the obvious challenges.

Firstly, for the many good things of life we enjoy and,

Secondly, gratitude for those who went before us ... and who provided such a remarkable inheritance.

We should remember with gratitude ... the wonderful heritage of the Church ... and of the Otago settlement.

Christian people, above all else, I believe, should be thankful people.

You know, we have received so much from the Lord.

And we are blessed by the prayers ... hard work ... vision ... love of family ... and of fellow believers ... many of whom are not with us today.

One of the provinces early European settlers expressed his gratitude for the pioneers of Otago this way,

“Oh! Blest are they who live and die like these, loved with such love, and with such sorrow mourned.”

And it is good to recall a significant part our European settler history ... which for Otago ... began in Scotland ... with the Church of Scotland.

Now here is a date to remember: the 18th May 1843, was a very bleak day for Scotland where 450 ministers, led by the Reverend Thomas Chalmers ... left the Church of Scotland General Assembly at the Church of St Andrew in George Street ... Edinburgh ... to form the Free Church of Scotland.

They left the auld Kirk because church law ... and civil law ... did not permit the congregation to call its own minister ... but rather receive one given it by the local patron ... who was usually a wealthy landowner.

The congregations judged these ministers as not always to be men of God ... with undivided loyalty to Christ.

Compromise ... heart ache ... and conflict ... had worn the people out.

Many were exhausted ... punch drunk ... by the dramatic events ... which ripped the fabric Scottish society.

The auld family Kirk ... the family graveyard ... the centre of community life ... the auld house of God ... was left behind.

And what lay ahead ... was a very uncertain future indeed.

Hope, love, faith ... and a deep trust in God ... sustained the imagination and heart of these courageous godly people.

But truth is ... many of them were broken people ... as one can imagine.

With their obvious virtues of ... strength of character ... came a narrow vision ... and a defensive posture ... to those of a different mind.

The Disruption ... as it was later called ... was basically a spiritual phenomenon ... and for its proponents ... it stood in a direct line ... with the Reformation ... and the National Covenanters.

Sadly, splitting the Church ... in those tumultuous days ... had major implications.

Those who left ... forfeited livings ... manses ... and pulpits ... and had ... without the aid of the establishment ... to found and finance a national Church from scratch.

But this was done with remarkable energy ... zeal ... and sacrifice.

Slowly ... imperceptibly at first ... quietly ... the mists of conflict ... and confusion cleared.

And appearing ... like a kind of Promised Land ... given by the Lord ... were the shores of Otago.

And I quote from [Fifty Years Syne](#):

“If half of what yon man says about Otago be

true, it is a far better place than this” ... At last he said with startling abruptness, “I think we should go, Jean.” Her face sank, for she saw by his face, and knew from the tone of his voice, that while his words were tentative his mind was resolute. She said nothing, but her eyes were on the little dress, and her thoughts were in the Kirk yard where the rime was slowly whitening the green sod, above her beloved child ...

Well, plans were afoot ... to settle this remote part of the world.

And the Free Kirk ... under the leadership of the Reverend Thomas Burns ... and Captain William Cargill ... was to dominate the new colony.

Some five years after the Disruption ... in March 1848 ... the two vessels ... Philip Laing and John Wickliffe ... sailed quietly into Port Chalmers ... and began the settlement of which we are heirs today.

Of course, the province changed as people from all around the world drifted southwards.

The gold rush dramatically changed the province forever.

And in the church this morning, many people will relate their own family's heritage ... Anglican as well as Presbyterian ... which will be different from the arrival of the original Free Kirk settlers.

They came from the islands of the South Pacific, from Europe, Asia, the Americas, and later Africa and indeed the whole world.

And through it all, I hope you will agree ... that we are a pilgrim people ... and our real home is in heaven above ... no matter how much we love this beautiful land ... and how we got here.

I believe we are a greatly blessed people.

And we have much to be grateful for.

Irrespective of our personal history ... I am sure you will agree that the Lord set his heart ... on this patch of land ... in the South Pacific.

It was his intention to do a ... most wonderful work ... in establishing Otago.

A beautiful land ... land of freedom ... land of promise ... land of prosperity ... a land where the Kingdom of God would shape family life ... education ... civic leadership ... and cultural life.

This morning ... in harmony with our spiritual heritage ... I want us to thank God ... for four things.

In my mind, these are the big four.

These are the top items.

If you know Jesus Christ ... if you are a believer ... then you have every reason to thank God ... for these four things.

FIRSTLY, I'M GRATEFUL TO GOD ... FOR THE MERCY AND GRACE THAT ... GOD HAS SHOWN ME

The Bible says in **1 Peter 3:3**

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

What is mercy ... you might ask?

Well, mercy and grace are very closely related.

Grace is everything God does for us ... even though we don't deserve it.

Grace is God giving us what we need ... not what we deserve.

We need his forgiveness, but the Bible says we deserve his judgment.

The Bible says that everything we have ... comes by grace ... our life ... our redemption ... our glorification.

Everything God does in us ... and through us ... and for us ... and to us ... is by grace.

We don't earn it ... we don't deserve it ... we don't work for it. It's a free gift.

Well ... why is that so? ... I don't know.

Now Psalms 103, clarifies just some of the things God does in our lives by grace. It says,

“I will not forget the glorious things God does for me. He forgives all my sins. He heals me. He ransoms me from hell. He surrounds me with love. He fills my life with good things. He is merciful and tender to those who don't deserve it. He is slow to get angry. He never bears a grudge. And He has not punished us as we deserve for our sins.”

Are those things to be thankful for?

I'd say so.

Aren't you glad that God doesn't give you what you deserve?

Aren't you glad ... that instead ... God shows you ... mercy and grace?

If we don't understand grace ... and if our heart doesn't warm with gratitude ... when we understand the grace of God ...

then I believe ... we have no idea of ... what bad shape we were in ... before we met Christ.

Let me summarise it in one word – hopeless.

From an eternal perspective ... the Bible is very clear ... it says outside of Christ ... we had no ultimate meaning ... no transcendent purpose ... in our life.

And as our experience tells us ... we were often filled with regret ... guilt ... fear ... bitterness, worry ... loneliness ... rejection ... and longing for meaning ... value and purpose in life.

I am reading presently a very interesting book by Alister McGrath of Oxford called, The Twilight of Atheism ... where he charts the rise and decline of atheism ... in Western Civilization. He says (p157),

Humanity may have revolted against God and declared itself to be autonomous; yet the outcome is a world ridden with anxiety, despair and alienation - a far cry from the secular paradise envisioned by the dreamers of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

You see ... somehow the secular paradise ... has been postponed again.

Yet in contrast ... in some places ... the world is witnessing a remarkable resurgence ... in spirituality ... and a dramatic growth in the Christian Church ... when it takes spirituality seriously.

You see, I believe ... we are powerless to overcome our existential ... anxieties and despair ... but the words of Christ ... speak with fresh power and clarity ...

Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life.

**He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.
John 6:35**

Now, I say to you this morning ... that has been my experience.

So, I am deeply thankful to God ... for the mercy and grace ... shown me in Jesus.

SECONDLY, WE SHOULD BE THANKFUL TO GOD ... FOR THE PLAN ... HE HAS FOR US.

The Scripture is very clear that God has created us ... for a purpose ... and individual life ... has meaning and direction ... when we surrender ourselves to the Lord.

Life is not an accident.

We were made for a reason.

We were made for a purpose.

God has a plan for our life.

Our parents may not have planned us, but God will give us purpose and meaning.

No baby is ever born illegitimate ... in the eyes of God.

You see there may be abusive ... and violent parents ... but that is not the final verdict ... on a child's life.

If you're alive ... you're breathing ... and your heart ... and pulse are going ... that means God has a plan for your life.

And I believe God's plan ... is a good plan.

It's not a plan ... we have to worry about ... that we have to be afraid of ... or be anxious about.

It's a good plan.

Through the prophet Jeremiah, God says,

'I have good plans for you', says the Lord, 'I don't plan to hurt you. I plan to give you hope and a good future.' Jeremiah 29

So, is that something you can thank God for?

Friends, God's plan is so good ... and so great ...

that God even takes our mistakes ...

our faults ... our failures ... and the things that other people do to hurt us ...

and weaves them into something beautiful ...

and brings good out of them.

Now, I have discovered ... that the Lord's plan for our life is not always happy ... or comfortable

I wish it wasn't true ... but it seems God's plan ... allows pain in our life.

And God's plan ... also seems to permit ... some disappointments.

And the plan ... certainly involves ... discipline.

Below our breath ... in a quiet mumble ... I am sure we all agree ... that if we were never disciplined ... our character would be unchanged ... for the worse.

I have found .. that God's plan in our life ... involves some unanswered prayers.

Yet, I can confidently say ... the Lord does it all for good.

It's for a future.

And for that we should thank God.

**THIRDLY, I'M GRATEFUL ... FOR THE
HOME ... THE LORD HAS PREPARED FOR
ME ... IN HEAVEN**

1 Peter 3:8

Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, 9 for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Friends, human beings were made to last forever.

Every human being ... that's ever been created ... God made them ... not for just time ... but for eternity.

God makes human beings to last forever.

One day our body is going to die ... but that's not going to be ... the end of us.

One day our body will decay, ... and fall apart ... and cease to exist.

But that's not going to be the end of us.

The Bible says we were created in God's image ... and that means we have a spirit.

So, as Christians, we don't have to be afraid of the future ... especially of death.

Christians, of all people ... are the most confident about death ... because of the resurrection of Christ.

We know where we're going.

Someone said to me once,

Tony, you are not ready to live, until you are ready to die.

And I have to say ... I thought at the time ... that was a strange ... and rather morbid thing to say.

But there is truth in it.

You see ...understanding God's love for me ... gives meaning ... and confidence ... in my destiny.

Are we ready to die? What is our destiny like ... do you think?

The Bible says in Four words:

Reunited. In heaven ... we're going to be reunited ... with loved ones ... who are believers.

Rewarded. The Bible says ... in heaven we will be rewarded for our faith ... rewarded for our service ... rewarded for our trust in Christ ... rewarded for our faithfulness in praying ... and serving ... and giving ... and sharing.

Reassigned. In heaven ... we will all be reassigned to do new tasks ... new things to do ... with our lives ... that keep us occupied.

God is creative ... and we will thrill to live in God's creation ... but on a higher and different level.

Contrary to popular opinion ... when we get to heaven ... we are not going to sit on a cloud ... and play a harp.

Released. The Bible says that ... in heaven ... we will all be released from ... pain ... from unhealth ... from fear ... from depression ... from sorrow ... from conflict ... from tears ... from stress.

The Bible says there will be ... no more tears.

There will be ... no sorrow.

But there will be ... great joy.

So, listen to this wonderful verse from 1 Peter 1,

God has reserved for His children the priceless gift of eternal life. It's kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. And God in His mighty power will make sure you get there safely, to receive it, because you're trusting Him, so be truly glad."

So, I'm grateful to God ... for the grace he has shown me.

... And I'm grateful to God ... for the plan He has for me.

... I'm grateful to God ... for the home he has prepared for me.

But there's one more thing ... that can overwhelm me. I am deeply moved ... when I think about this issue.

FOURTHLY, I'M THANKFUL TO GOD ... FOR THE CHANGES ... HE'S MAKING IN ME.

I am so glad ... that I am not the same person I used to be.

You see ... the Lord is helping me ... to make changes ... in my life ... that I could never do on my own.

I'm so grateful for that.

God looks at us and says ... **"I see that lump of clay. I could do something with that."**

And God saw our potential ... when nobody else saw it.

And when maybe ... everybody else is writing us off ... and we feel they are saying ... worthless!

God says, "No. I see something beautiful in you ... I made you ... and I value you."

CONCLUSION

So, in conclusion ...

Today, as my time ... as Stated Supply Minister ... starts to draw to a close ... I have so much to be grateful for.

And what about you ... I wonder?

The ... attitude of gratitude ... can do a miracle in our life.

Gratitude will honour God ... and will release the power of God ...

Therefore today ... let us thank God ... for the many good things in life.

We could pray something like this,

Dear Lord, I am so grateful for the grace that you've shown me, for the plan that you have for me, for the home that you've prepared in heaven, and for the changes you're making in me.

Help me to live a life of gratitude ... which succeeding generations ... will remember ... and will honour ... as we remember and honour those who have gone before us.

AMEN