

# No-one Here Is Average

Sunday 11 April 2021

## Call to Worship

*Psalm 133*

### *The Blessedness of Unity*

How very good and pleasant it is  
when kindred live together in unity!

**It is like the precious oil on the head,  
running down upon the beard,  
on the beard of Aaron,  
running down over the collar of his robes.**

It is like the dew of Hermon,  
which falls on the mountains of Zion.

**For there the LORD ordained his blessing,  
life forevermore.**

## I serve a risen Saviour

I serve a risen Saviour, He's in the world today.  
I know that He is living, whatever men may say.  
I see His hand of mercy; I hear His voice of cheer;  
And just the time I need Him He's always near.

He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today!  
He walks with me and talks with me a  
Along life's narrow way.  
He lives, He lives, salvation to impart!  
You ask me how I know He lives?  
He lives within my heart.

In all the world around me I see His loving care,  
And though my heart grows weary, I never will despair;  
I know that He is leading, Through all the stormy blast;  
The day of His appearing Will come at last.

Rejoice, rejoice, O Christian, Lift up your voice and sing  
Eternal hallelujahs To Jesus Christ the King!  
The Hope of all who seek Him, The Help of all who find,  
None other is so loving, So good and kind.

Reading 1 John 1:1-10

### *The Word of Life*

**1** We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— <sup>2</sup> this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us— <sup>3</sup> we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

### *God Is Light*

<sup>5</sup> This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. <sup>6</sup> If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; <sup>7</sup> but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. <sup>8</sup> If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup> If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

### Prayer of Adoration and Confession

*With words from Rev. Mindi Welton-Mitchell*

Dear Lord God

There is no one like you,  
You made the wind blow and the rain fall,  
You help us when we are alive,  
You bring us life when we are feeling sad,  
You bring healing to those who are sick,  
And free those who are in chains.  
Is there anyone like you?  
No way! You are a God of mighty acts,  
Praise be to you forever

Holy God, we confess our doubts.  
When our childhood understandings fall away,  
we feel naked.  
When our long-held beliefs seem to crumble,  
we feel lost.

When our convictions are questioned,  
we feel ashamed.  
Guide us into right paths, O God.  
Guide our feet into the way of peace.  
guide our hands to care for others.  
guide our hearts to love our neighbours.  
Call us back to You, O Christ, and renew our faith.  
When the ground is unsteady,  
loving God, put us back on right paths  
by doing justice, loving kindness,  
and walking humbly with You. Amen.

The Lord is our chosen portion and our cup.  
God binds us in, counsels our minds and instructs our hearts.  
God helps us to stand firm for justice, mercy, and peace.  
When we fall, God lifts us up, forgives us,  
and remembers our sins no more. Amen.

## Reflection

## Notices

## The Peace

### Everything that has breath – Parachute Band

He is our God

Let all creation bow

The sovereign King most holy one

He sacrificed His life

Washed and cleansed within

Portioned by faith

We're destined to win

Everything that has breath praise the Lord

Everything that's in me praise the Lord

I can praise Him on the highest mountain

Praise Him in the lowest valley

Everything that's in me praise the Lord

## Reading John 20:19-31

### *Jesus Appears to the Disciples*

<sup>19</sup> When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." <sup>22</sup> When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

### *Jesus and Thomas*

<sup>24</sup> But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

<sup>26</sup> A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." <sup>28</sup> Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" <sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

### *The Purpose of This Book*

<sup>30</sup> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. <sup>31</sup> But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

## Message No-one Here Is Average

I have grown a savage dislike for the throwaway phrase applied to investors and business people – Mum and Dad investors or business owners. It tries to make out that there is some kind of average or 'normal' parents who have somehow managed to get into investing or business creation. Now, don't get me wrong. There are many parents who have their own business, who have bought extra properties, and who are trying to make their way in the world. And every one of them is as different to the others as chalk is to cheese.

In fact, lets take that idea of **chalk and cheese** and look at it a little. Here is some chalk. And here is some cheese. It's pretty obvious that even if these two

things were the same colour, they would still be essentially different to each other. Chalk is chalk and cheese is cheese. There is no, 'average', chalk and cheese. At best we might moosh it up into some sort of horrible mixture. But then we would have nothing useful at all. You couldn't write with the chalk, and you certainly wouldn't want to eat the cheese!

This is an extreme example, and yet it illustrates the myth of the average. Marketing people love to talk about averages. The reason for that is they can either make you feel as though you are part of the group – the team of five million, or that you are missing out because you are not part of the group – do you have your ticket to Australia booked yet? By wrapping all the messy realities of life up in a lovely blanket of average you are included or excluded according to the whim of the marketer. To go back to my example – can you squeeze yourself into the title of Mum and Dad investor? Then you should be righteously outraged at the government for toying with your property investments. And if you can't make yourself fit the pattern, then you should feel sorry for those who do.

Of course, we use the term average in all sorts of ways. An average student, an average year for fruit growers, the average income. **Yogi Bear liked** to say that he was, 'smarter than the average bear.' But what does all this averaging mean?

Let's think about average income for a moment. In the year ended 2020 the statistics department said that after housing costs were deducted the average income was \$38 000 per year. In other words, if the 'average family' was paying \$10 000 a year in rent, then their income before housing would be \$48 000. Now it may be true that there are a few people/families whose income is \$48 000 per year before housing is taken into account. But, particularly in New Zealand the average tells us nothing at all. **Look at this image produced** by the New Zealand Treasury for 1995-96 – I couldn't find a more recent version – my understanding is that the situation has worsened considerably in the last 25 years. See the average – here? Now look where most people sit on the graph. The average is no indicator at all of where most people's incomes lie. It could be considered deceitful to use the average to talk about what people earn in New Zealand because it points to a minority, rather than a majority of income experiences in this country. It is an issue that illustrates my point about the average, and also illustrates the size of the community of the poor that the Bible calls us to minister with.

So, as in most of my messages, you are probably wondering what any of this has to do with the Scriptures we read today. I would like to suggest that the readings point to the incredible diversity of the church. There is no average person in the church. We come in all varieties – even more so than **liquorice allsorts**. Let's take a moment to think about the people in our stories from the last few weeks. Peter all bluster before denying Jesus, James and John falling asleep in the garden, Mary and Salome running terrified from the tomb, the wealthy Joseph of Arimathea supplying the tomb, Judas, devastated at the effect of his betrayal, Thomas not believing the stories of Jesus' resurrection, Cleopas and his friend not recognising Jesus on the road to Emmaus. They really cover a wide range of responses. Not one of them is average. Not one of them has a 'normal' response.

I think that is one of the reasons I love Thomas, and I love the response Jesus has for him. Thomas doubts. And he doesn't hide his doubt, afraid of what others might think. He doesn't back away from that confrontation that is at once deeply honest and incredibly sad. His heart has been broken and there's no way some hearsay from the others is going to break down the barrier he has raised to keep himself safe from further pain. What if he were to get his hopes up only to find that it was some delusion, or worse. No, the safest thing was to push back and only believe on evidence. And I get that. I think I get something of that pain of loss. I get the putting up of a barrier to make sure it doesn't happen again.

And how does Jesus respond? He holds out his hands and invites Thomas to feel the scar. He shows Thomas the wound in his side says, put your hand here. He understands Thomas' doubt and far from rejecting him because of it, draws him near and accepts him in exactly that doubt. Let me repeat that because it matters. A lot. Jesus accepts Thomas in the **midst of his doubt**. He sees a wounded man, cast down by his sense of loss and pain and he brings him close and loves him through it. Let's hold that for a moment and pause to allow it to sink in.

I suspect the doubt that Thomas bears is doubt that all of us carry to an extent. Because all of us, in our non-average ways carry the pain of loss, the fear of that pain made worse. And that pain and fear lead to doubt. Doubt that Jesus will be there for us. Doubt that the preacher is really being honest with us. Doubt that it could possibly be real. Perhaps the only real difference between us and Thomas is that we are slower to call out our doubt. We are afraid of

what those around us might say. We are afraid that if we confess that we are not average others might make fun of us, or ask questions we can't answer, or push us away. And so we remain silent. We hold our fear and our pain close and we keep others away so they never suspect. And worse, we keep it away from Jesus. We are afraid that if Jesus sees us in this state of doubt that he will push us away. So we push away first and **build a wall** – better to be in control of that small thing at least.

We forget that Jesus walks through walls. He comes into our broken space, and says, 'It's OK. I accept you in all your doubt and brokenness. I love you for exactly who you are.' There are no if's or but's. There are no provisos or prerequisites. We don't have to meet a certain standard before Jesus will reach out to us. He just does. He reaches out without expectation and loves us right where we are. Somehow, I think, in all our efforts to fit in, to be like everyone else, to be average, to be normal (and yes, I can hear some disclaiming any sense of normal right now) we forget that we are loved just as we are.

So I want to remind you, me, all of us, that no-one here is average. And to pretend that I am normal is to attempt to live a lie that God sees straight through. No-one here is average, there is no 'mum and dad' investor in the kingdom of God. We are, each and every one of us, unique creations before God. We carry our own unique set of strengths and weaknesses, talents and failings. And we are loved in all of it.

The hard part is accepting that we are loved then accepting the love. I may be chalk to your cheese, but God loves us all equally. So let me say to you clearly. You are not average. There is no such thing. And God loves you that way. How cool is that?

### We Pray

Loving God. When you created the world you didn't deal in averages. You made high mountains and deep valleys and plains in between. But none of it is average. All of it is superb. Then you made us, tall and short, quick and slow, wise and simple. None of us is average and all of us are superb in our own unique way. Help us to accept your love. Help us to learn to accept ourselves as you love us. Help us to accept each other as you have made us. Walk through our walls and come close. And teach us to share your love with those who have no sense of you or your love.

Hear us from within our walls as we wait to leave those walls behind.

Amen.

## When the music fades

When the music fades, all is stripped away,  
And I simply come  
Longing just to bring, something that's of worth  
That will bless Your heart

I'll bring You more than a song  
For a song in itself is not what You have required  
You search much deeper within, through the way things appear  
You're looking into my heart

I'm coming back to the heart of worship,  
And it's all about You, all about You Jesus  
I'm sorry Lord for the thing I've made it  
When it's all about You, all about You Jesus

King of endless worth  
No one could express how much You deserve  
Though I'm weak and poor  
All I have is Yours, every single breath

## Offering

Holy God, we continue to hold on to the celebration and triumph of Easter. As we look back over the past year, we realize that many of us can identify with Thomas's doubt. "Can we be the church, the body of Christ, when we can't see the body gathered in our sanctuary?" Yet Christ has opened our eyes to his risen body that can't be confined by walls and is not diminished by precautions and social distance. As we make our gifts to you, we affirm the Resurrection power that we have seen, and so we say again, "Alleluia!" In the powerful name of Jesus, we pray. Amen!

## Prayer for Ourselves and Others

*Words in Italics by Revd Bernard Kyamanywa, Tanzanian Lutheran minister*

*Jesus is risen, alleluia! Worship and praise him, alleluia!*

*Now our redeemer bursts from the grave;  
lost to the tomb, Christ rises to save.*

*Come, let us worship him, endlessly sing;  
Christ is alive and death loses its sting.*

*Sins are forgiven, alleluia!  
Jesus is risen, alleluia!*



This is beyond belief! People don't rise from the dead, especially after so much suffering and torture. Despite hearing Jesus himself tell them he would die and rise from the dead three days later, the disciples, both men and women, still could not believe it was possible.

Holy One, enable us to navigate this uncharted path of faith. I believe: help my unbelief.

*'Don't be afraid!' the angel had said,  
'Why seek the living here with the dead?  
Look, where he lay, his body is gone,  
risen and vibrant, warm with the sun.'*

When we lose someone we love, wherever we are, whoever we are, of whatever culture or ethnicity, with faith or faithless – we want to do everything we can to do everything decently and lovingly to lay them to rest. Yet when those closest to Jesus found his body had disappeared, the beings of light where Jesus's body had laid asked them, "Why seek the living among the dead?"

In so many tragedies – war, natural disaster, air crashes, or disappearance whether through political turbulence or unexplained circumstances – the not-knowing is like a continually draining wound. Regardless of how deep our faith is, in our humanity we often need "someone with skin on" to comfort us or be a listening ear. Enable us to be these, your hands and ears for your beloved people.

Holy One, in our emptiness, fill us with your love and spirit to meet the needs of those we meet, both near and far.

*Go and tell others, Christ is alive.'  
Love is eternal, faith and hope thrive.  
What God intended, Jesus fulfilled;  
what God conceives can never be killed.*

The passion-filled life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the whole Holy Week and forthcoming Eastertide, is about re-discovering that Love is the greatest energy in our lives, world and creation. So many of us in this last year have rediscovered this in a new way for ourselves. We give thanks for the love, faith and compassion of so many who have gone out of their way to do acts of

kindness for others – often unknown to them. We pause to bring our prayers for those we know and love.

As Woody, an 8-year-old autistic English boy said, “I don’t want life to go back to normal. I want it to go back to better.”

Holy One, enable us to dare to trust and live in tune with you, as Jesus showed us. It’s all about Love, and You ARE Love.

*Let heaven echo, let the earth sing:*

*Jesus is saviour of everything.*

*All those who trust him, Christ will receive;*

*therefore rejoice, obey and believe!*

AMEN.

## Communion

### Great prayer of thanksgiving

Almighty God we extol Your name

Maker of all things, without beginning or end

You are worthy of our praise

In a universe of wonder, from the mightiest star

To the tiniest particle, every ingredient designed to match

By Your word You have called into being

The mighty mountains and the cold mountain streams

The depths of the earth hold no wonders for You

For you formed it all, the breadth, the depth

The height of creation, all of it is Yours

You have made us, fashioned us with love and attention

And placed us on this earth of Your design

Down through time you have spoken Your Word

Your message has been sent to individuals and nations

And we have spurned and ignored it, as if Your Word was worthless

Then in time You entered this world You have created

Your Word made flesh, come to dwell among us

And still we did not respond, nailing you to a cross

Hoping that finally you would be silent

But then, in a victory that cannot be explained away

You conquered death, turning the cross of death  
Into a symbol of life, the empty tomb a silent beacon of hope

Jesus, raised from the dead, exalted on high  
Name above all names, Lord of all

And so we praise you, together with all your people  
And in the company of the heavenly host

**Holy, holy, holy Lord  
God of power and might  
Heaven and earth are full of your glory  
Hosanna in the highest  
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord  
Hosanna in the highest**

And now we live and proclaim the life, the death and resurrection  
The ascension and glorified greatness of our Lord Jesus Christ

**Christ has died  
Christ has risen  
Christ will come again**

### The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father in Heaven, holy 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.  
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever.  
Amen**

God of love, send your Holy Spirit upon these gifts, that as we receive this  
bread and wine we shall by faith receive the body and blood of Christ.

The Lord Jesus, on the night of his arrest, took bread, and after giving thanks to  
God, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take, eat. This is my body,  
given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

In the same way he took the cup, saying: This cup is the new covenant sealed  
in my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do  
this in remembrance of me.

Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the saving death of the risen Lord, until he comes.

Jesus said: I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. **John 6:35**

This is the Lord's Table. Our Saviour invites all those who trust him to share the feast he has prepared. You are loved beyond measure and we are one in the bond of love.

## Community of Christ

*By Shirley Erena Murray*

Community of Christ

who make the Cross your own,  
live out your creed and risk your life  
for God alone:

the God who wears your face,  
to whom all worlds belong,  
whose children are of every race  
and every song.

Community of Christ,  
look past the Church's door  
and see the refugee, the hungry,  
and the poor.

Take hands with the oppressed,  
the jobless in your street,  
take towel and water, that you wash  
your neighbour's feet.

Community of Christ,  
through whom the word must sound --  
cry out for justice and for peace  
the whole world round:  
disarm the powers that war  
and all that can destroy,  
turn bombs to bread, and tears of anguish  
into joy.

When menace melts away,  
so shall God's will be done,  
the climate of the world be peace  
and Christ its Sun;  
our currency be love  
and kindness our law,  
our food and faith be shared as one  
forevermore.

### Benediction and Grace

May the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Love of God,  
and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit  
be with us all, now and forevermore. Amen.