

# Sense or Nonsense

Waitaki Sunday Service

07 January 2024

Call to Worship – Psalm 29

Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,

**ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.**

Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name;

**worship the LORD in holy splendour.**

The voice of the LORD is over the waters;

**the God of glory thunders,**

The voice of the LORD is powerful;

**the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.**

The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;

**The voice of the LORD causes the oaks to whirl,**

**and strips the forest bare;**

May the LORD give strength to his people!

**May the LORD bless his people with peace!**

Beneath the Southern Cross

*Rev Catherine Burton and Rev Malcolm Gordon.*

From the ends of the earth

We will sing; God is here, the kingdom is near

In the Land of the Long White Cloud

Christ to dwell, Immanuel

From north and south, from east and west

Beneath the Southern Cross we rest

Found by One who came for all

In this tale of spacious love we're born

This whenua on which we stand

This holy ground made by God's hand

Marred and scarred yet marked by grace

Held and healed in Christ we find our place

God of nations, at thy feet

In the bonds of love we meet

Strangers once, now called as one

Aotearoa, wake to greet this love

## Reading

## 1 Samuel 3:1-10

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

<sup>2</sup>At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; <sup>3</sup>the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was.

<sup>4</sup>Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" <sup>5</sup>and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. <sup>6</sup>The LORD called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." <sup>7</sup>Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. <sup>8</sup>The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. <sup>9</sup>Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

<sup>10</sup>Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

## Reflection

## Listening

Have you ever listened to politicians speaking and noticed that quite frequently they talk complete gibberish? There are a few reasons for this way of what I am going to call, pseudo-communicating. In the first instance, if what you say doesn't make sense you can't be held accountable for not doing it. Then, if you speak rubbish for long enough, eventually I will either get bored and go away, or I will decide you must know what you are talking about and that it is too complicated for me to understand. The strangest thing to me is that the public – that's you and me – put up with it. So the politicians talk gibberish and the public accept it as normal. Unfortunately, it means that when we are confronted with someone who speaks the truth we are unsure what to do with them. It is almost like we have become unable to discern the gold from the surrounding rubble. I am going to read you a fine example of nonsense literature written by Samuel Foote. It somehow sounds normal but when you pause to think about what it means you realise it makes no sense at all. Oddly enough it fits into its very own category of literature which includes writers like Lewis Carroll with *Through the Looking-Glass* and Edward Lear with *The Owl and the Pussycat*. Some of you will be familiar with the *Great Panjandrum*...

### The Great Panjandrum

So she went into the garden to cut a cabbage leaf, to make an apple pie; and at the same time a great she-bear coming up the street, pops its head into the shop. 'What! no soap?' So he died, and she very imprudently married the barber; and there were present the Picinnies, and the Joblillies, and the Garyulies, and the great Panjandrum himself, with the little round button at top; and they all fell to playing the game of catch as catch can, till the gunpowder ran out at the heels of their boots. (Samuel Foote)

The point I think the writers of these things are making is that anything can sound reasonable on the surface but it is only as we begin to think about it that we understand meaning or lack of meaning.

I suspect our story of Samuel carries some of these overtones. Eli had become used to not hearing from God. So much so that when God began speaking he did not recognise what was going on. I find myself wondering if the word of the Lord being rare was that it was actually rare, or that people had ceased to listen. They had become so used to the nonsense that had grown up through the times of the judges that God's voice was obscured by the litter of competing voices. Eli didn't recognise God's voice because Eli had ceased listening for it.

I wonder if perhaps we are so enamoured with the polyphony of nonsense voices around us, news media, celebrities, politicians, social media, that we too have ceased listening for God's voice. If perhaps God continues to speak but we have lost the ability to discern what God is saying. What do you think?

## Take me into the holy of holies

*David Browning*

Take me past the outer courts,  
Into the holy place,  
Past the brazen altar.  
Lord I want to see Your face.  
Pass me by the crowds of people  
And the priests who sing Your praise.  
I hunger and thirst for Your righteousness,  
But it's only found one place.

Take me in to the holy of holies.  
Take me in by the blood of the lamb.  
Take me in to the holy of holies.  
Take the coal, touch my lips, here I am.

## Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Yesterday the sea boiled with energy  
White puffs of agitation flinging cottonwool into the sky  
Today the sea languidly rises and falls to its own sense of rhythm  
Tiny ripples all that stirs the mirror away  
Tomorrow the sea might be angry or sad, tranquil or brash  
    Awake to the manoeuvres of the moon  
    The thrashing of the wind  
    The rumblings of the earth

I watch  
    The tides bashfully advancing then retreating  
    The waves joyously nipping at the shore

I see God's hand held out

An invitation to feel  
    To experience  
    To live  
    To be

In the presence of the one who gifted it all  
    To me  
    To us

I find peace

Grant that I, that we, might dwell in your peace  
Even in our moments of fear and stress and worry

Hear our confessions now we pray...

The love of God is always offered to us,  
freely, joyfully, for all eternity.

Rejoice, dear friends,  
this is the Good News of our Lord. Amen.

## Notices

### Reading John 1:43-46a

<sup>43</sup>The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” <sup>44</sup>Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

<sup>45</sup>Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” <sup>46</sup>Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

### Reflection Seeing

It's not only our sense of hearing that can lose clarity and discernment. We live in a highly visual world that is constantly flashing images at high speed, inviting us to ever newer and more exciting experiences. Let's look at two clips from a couple of movies, one released in 1943 and the other in 2023 – 80 years apart. Casablanca and Barbie

The speed of movement, the speed of speaking, the music, the cuts, the colour – everything about them demonstrates how much faster everything is moving today than it did 80 years ago. That's not all bad. The problem we face is the deluge of information is huge. It's like trying to get a drink from the Aratiatia spillway in full flood.

Most people cope with that flood of information by reducing it to a trickle. One of the ways we do that is by making generalisations. Rich people are greedy. People wearing hats are bad drivers. Poor people are lazy. These are all generalisations that enable us to make snap judgements about other people without having to think about the implications of what we are saying. They are also almost universally untrue. One bad apple does not make the whole barrel sour.

Nathanael was applying a generalisation to the idea that Jesus was from Nazareth. Because Nazareth was a lower socio-economic part of the country – which is saying something for an area that was caught up in poverty anyway – it was easy to simply say that anyone from Nazareth was poor, probably uneducated, powerless, and unable to add any value to society. He couldn't see

Jesus for who he was because his filter prevented him from seeing the real person.

With apologies to my congregation who often accuse me of asking them to think too much, I want to suggest that we don't think enough. And because we don't think enough we fail to see Jesus at work amid the flashing deluge of images that rush past us at great speed. Have we lost the ability to discern Jesus at work because we have stopped looking closely enough? What do you think?

### Let all creation sing

*Paul Zach, Andy Zipf*

Let all creation sing before the Lord  
and every nation of the earth rejoice,  
let all the trees lift a shout of joy  
for the Lord is King.

Let the deep waters of the sea resound,  
let every mountain, every hill sing out,  
let all the fields make a joyful sound  
for the Lord is King.

Mighty river, barren desert,  
howling wind and stormy weather,  
sing your praise and give him glory.

Nature proclaims the glory of our God,  
nature proclaims his name.

Every star and constellation,  
every wonder in the heavens,  
silver moon and supernova,  
sing a shining hallelujah!

Nature proclaims the glory of our God,  
nature proclaims his name.

Takahe and every tui,  
Totara and Maui dolphin,  
Kakapo and tuatara,  
every son and every daughter.

Nature proclaims the glory of our God,  
nature proclaims his name.

La la la la la la - All the earth, praise the Lord  
La la la la la la - All the earth, praise the Lord

## The Peace

### Profession of Faith

On behalf of the whole Church, I ask you:

Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness,  
reject the evil powers of this world,  
and repent of your sin?

**I do.**

Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you  
to resist evil, injustice, and oppression  
in whatever forms they present themselves?

**I do.**

Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Saviour,  
put your whole trust in his grace,  
and promise to serve him as your Lord,  
in union with the Church which Christ has opened  
to people of all ages, nations, and races?

**I do.**

According to the grace given to you,  
will you remain faithful members of Christ's holy Church  
and serve as Christ's representatives in the world?

**I will.**

Let us join together in professing the Christian faith  
as contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

Do you believe in God the Father?

**I believe in God, the Father Almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.**

Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and will come again to judge the living and the dead.**

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic\* church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting.**

Reading [John 1:46b-51](#)

Philip said to him, “Come and see.”<sup>47</sup> When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!”<sup>48</sup> Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.”<sup>49</sup> Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”<sup>50</sup> Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.”<sup>51</sup> And he said to him, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

Reflection [Understanding](#)

I want to suggest a good thing and a bad thing from Nathanael’s experience meeting Jesus. The Good thing is that he saw Jesus for who he was. He was able to discern the truth beyond the generalisations and lost practice at listening. He was able see past the societal expectations of this man from Nazareth and discover the Son of God. What an amazing experience!

The Bad thing is that all that was necessary for Jesus to get his attention was to tell him he had been seen. Nathanael knew what he was looking at but his misconceptions and preconceptions, his generalisations and stereotypes, his lack of practice in discerning meant that he didn’t see what he was looking at. I find myself wondering how often we see Jesus at work around us, yet fail to discern what it is we are looking at because of all our own misconceptions and preconceptions. We all have our Nazareth story – how can anything good come from there? It may be a place or a person or people. It may be a lifestyle or set of personal preferences or the way someone dresses. We see, we judge and we miss what God is doing right in front of our eyes.

I picked up a young man hitchhiking from Dunedin to Christchurch a couple of weeks ago. As we talked I discovered he DJed for dance parties and raves. I learnt a lot about a part of society I know very little about. Now, don’t get me wrong, I suspect I would feel most uncomfortable at one of his dance parties – it’s just not how my world turns. But upon discovering that I am a minister he



made a most interesting comment. He said to me that his parties attract people from a wide range of society, not all as young as you might expect. Employed and unemployed, highly skilled and unskilled. And he thought that the church had something to offer that those people longed to hear. More than that, that the church could listen because those people longed to be heard. All we had to do was to turn up, without our misconceptions and preconceptions, and listen, then, perhaps, speak when asked. Perhaps that is the lesson we can take from Nathanael today. What do you think?

### We pray

God of words – you said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was. God of images – you met Moses in a burning bush. We confess that sometimes we are blind in one eye and won’t see out the other. Deaf to everything that does not fit our particular view of the world. Forgive us for the times when, like Eli you have to repeat yourself over and over before we hear you. Forgive us for the times when, like Nathanael we have to be confronted with our misconceptions before we ever see you. Teach us to be discerning about all the mental candyfloss that washes over us and to hear and see you at work around us. And let us be a part of that work even as we notice it. Amen.

### Where the road runs out

*Colin Gibson*

Where the road runs out and the signposts end,  
where we come to the edge of today,  
be the God of Abraham for us,  
send us out upon our way.

Lord, you were our beginning,  
the faith that gave us birth.  
We look to you, our ending,  
our hope for heaven and earth.

When the coast is left and we journey on  
to the rim of the sky and the sea,  
be the sailor's friend, be the dolphin Christ  
lead us in to eternity.

When the clouds are low and the wind is strong,  
when tomorrow's storm draws near,  
be the spirit bird hovering overhead  
who will take away our fear.

## Offering

God of redemption and new life, we focus once more this day on the greatest gift ever given – Jesus, our Saviour. As he was baptized by John in the Jordan, we were able to share in his baptism and receive the promise of sharing in Jesus' resurrection. As we leave one year behind and look with hope to the new year ahead, help us to live and give of ourselves as those who know every day what a great gift we have been given. May it move us to give our whole selves more freely! In the name of Christ, our Saviour and Redeemer, we pray! Amen.

## Prayer for Others and Ourselves

For free and fair elections in Bangladesh

For Christians living under harsh conditions around the world

For those in New Zealand who are greeting the new year with a sense of hopelessness

For the institutional church in New Zealand as it struggles to understand the change going on around and within

For ourselves, our families, our friends. The sick and the travellers.

## 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

## Great is Thy faithfulness

*Thomas Obediah Chisholm, William Marion Runyan*

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father,

There is no shadow of turning with Thee;

Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not

As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.

Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!

Morning by morning new mercies I see;

All I have needed Thy hand hath provided—

Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,

Sun, moon and stars in their courses above,

Join with all nature in manifold witness

To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,  
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;  
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,  
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

### The Grace

As we go on from here may we seek to listen, to see, and to understand what God is doing among us and beyond us...

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.

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