

PAPER CHURCH

Where Faith and Life Intersect: Human Rights & Dignity

Sunday 31 May 2020

Some Tips

Our hope is that this is a resource that will help us all to engage meaningfully with God's word for us and invite an open and experimental sense of worship today. Use it in a way that feels comfortable and helpful to you. Here are a couple of suggestions that might help the process.

Get prepared for worship

Have your Bible close by, perhaps set up some favourite music to listen to, find some food and drink to have during communion. It doesn't have to be bread and grape juice; it could be whatever is available (tea and a biscuit) to use in this symbolic time.

Get into a 'sacred' space

When we are not physically in a dedicated worship space (like a church building), it is important to mentally and spiritually shift into a sense of worship.

Be intentional. Sit somewhere where you feel receptive and responsive to God (e.g. a cosy chair or outside in the garden). Have some visual representation of God (perhaps a small cross, your Bible, a symbol or image). Start with a few moments of silence and deep breathing.

Consider your environment

Consider your environment and what will work for you. If you have others in your house (house-mates/family), consider sharing this time with them, each reading or participating as appropriate. You might simply reflect individually, in your own time and space. Afterwards, you might connect with others through technology to share your reflections, or an encouragement, with them.

As we begin

Kaye Reid

During this time of isolation and now during the easing of some restrictions church has not stopped. We are able to worship from home. We are able to grow spiritually and be transformed. We are able to be active in mission. We are able to ensure that we and others are experiencing community. We are still the church. A great reminder that we are called to *be* the church. Church has not stopped although we are unable to gather to worship together and the church facilities haven't been in use. This disruption breaks our habits or assumptions, and is a great reminder that we are so much more than our facilities or the programs that we run or the worship gatherings that build us up together, good as these things are. We are the body of Christ, we don't need to be able to gather face-to-face to be so, because our ultimate calling is to gather around the central figure of Jesus Christ, and we have been and are able to do this from our own homes, in our neighbourhoods, utilising technology, in connection with our families and friends and colleagues, refining our focus and activity and outlook for a period of time.

We want to encourage you to be patient and thoughtful as restrictions are being eased. In Galatians 5:13 it says *We've been called to live in freedom...so let's use it to serve one another in love*. We are all looking forward to seeing each other and being able to be together again when the time is right for our congregation and for our wider community. In the meantime, let's try out different ways of being the body of Christ as we build up each other through growing in formation, being active in mission, and experiencing community.

The State Government has indicated that we are now permitted to have up to 20 people in our homes and for small private religious gatherings in our churches with strict social distancing and hygiene. You may wish to invite some people or accept the invitation of others to gather in homes with other people to worship together and enjoy some in-person social connection. We are encouraging people to be thoughtful about this and consider limiting this to a small number of people or the same or similar people, if frequent, to reduce the risk of greater transmission. It has been lovely to hear over the last week of people inviting one or two others over to their home to watch the worship video together and support each other. This has included some people who haven't been able to access the worship videos on their own. We encourage you to consider who you could gather with to worship together and who might not yet have had this opportunity. It is important that each person considers carefully what is appropriate for their own circumstances and we note that the government continues to ask that people stay home when they are able, including working from home where possible, and the continuing recommendation that people in high-risk categories minimise their contact with others. We don't want anyone to feel pressured to resume face-to-face contact if this is not appropriate for them and we are all mindful to continue to reach out to each other through various means to keep connected.

On the other hand, we know that there are significant benefits for our mental health and emotional wellbeing in being able to be with other people face-to-face. So please keep these aspects in mind as you make decisions that balance both physical and emotional good health for yourself and for the community.

Our church staff have been wonderful and we are so grateful for the ways they have adapted, been flexible, worked so hard, and been creative and courageous. Staff will continue to work remotely

from home throughout June. We will begin to open the church office for a few hours a few days a week from this week onwards to facilitate meal drop offs and other necessities but continue to be available by phone and email as the preferred way to communicate safely.

During June some bible studies and similar gathering which usually meet at the church will be able to consider resuming. There will be limitations including no hospitality and requirements relating to tracing, cleaning, time gaps between use and social distancing and hygiene. Any use of the church facilities must be by prior arrangement with the office and after briefing with the requirements and limitations. There are some activities that will continue to be high risk that we will need to avoid or mitigate the risks. This includes singing with others, sharing of communion elements, passing of shared objects, and the provision of hospitality. Please contact the office for further guidance regarding these aspects and any others that you are considering.

This is a great time to be the people of God, a people of hope, who are seeking the wellbeing and flourishing of everyone. We hope that you are able to embrace the opportunity to be the church in different ways and can make the most of this experience. We are seeking to learn from this time, both in what we are experiencing right now but also what opportunities it opens up for our future, and to see the possibilities that God is showing us, and to disrupt us from what we have always known allowing us to discover new and energising ways: *To be a movement of the people of God gathering in and around the central figure of Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, living out his Way in our neighbourhoods and inviting others to do the same (CCVT common mission).*

This weekend our focus for worship is relating to the point in which our faith and life intersects with human rights and dignity. It is unlikely that the gospel has seeped deep down within us and opened our eyes fully and done the necessary transformative work within us if we are unable to recognise the inherent created equality and dignity of each and every human being *and* live our lives in a way that fully reflects this.

The Image of God

Andrew McDonough, *Lost Sheep*

Adults are funny. When they see a baby they say things like, "Isn't she cute! She looks just like her dad!"



This is silly because dads are boys and baby girls are girls. Some dads have beards. Babies do not have beards. Not even baby boys.



It is true that often dads and babies are both baldies. Maybe people should say, "Isn't she cute! She's a baldy just like her dad!"

WARNING: It is not wise to point out a baby is a baldy in front of her mum. Mums get a bit funny about that sort of thing.

While it may sound silly to say a baby looks like her dad, if you look closely you might notice they have the same shaped ears or the same smile.

What about you? Who are you like?

People may say, "You are the image of Auntie Helen!"

They might mean you are tall like Auntie Helen,

or have snazzy hair like Auntie Helen,

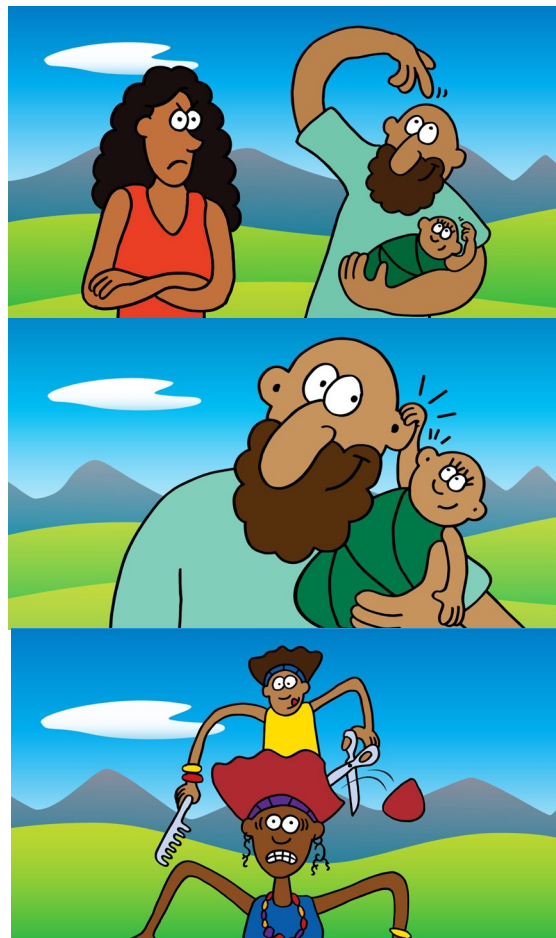
or wear nifty clothes

like Auntie Helen.

Or laugh like Auntie Helen.

Or dance like Auntie Helen.

Or maybe you love snails just like Auntie Helen.

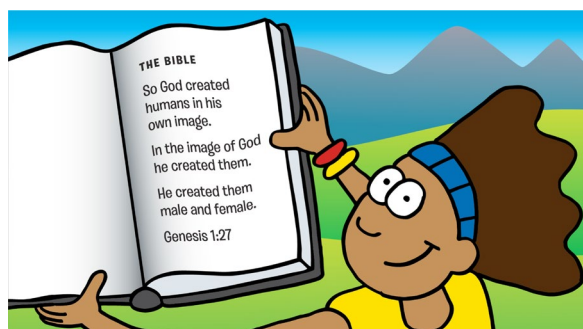


So when people meet you they may say, "You are the image of Auntie Helen!"

While a baby can be the image of her dad and you can be the image of Auntie Helen, did you know you are made in the image of God?



This is so important it is on page one of the Bible.



So if you are a human, if you are a girl
 or a boy
 or a woman
 or a man
 or a baby,
 you are made in the image of God.
 Does that mean that because you have
 snazzy hair and a funny laugh that God has
 snazzy hair and a funny laugh?
 No! That would be silly like the dad baby
 beard thing!
 But there are things about you that reflect
 the image of God.
 Do you like to make things?
 God likes to make things.
 When you make things you reflect the
 image of God.
 Do you like frogs, trees and koalas? God
 does too.
 He says they are good. When you enjoy
 frogs, trees and koalas, you reflect the
 likeness of God.
 Do you like to put things in order?
 God likes to put things in order.
 When you put things in order you reflect
 the image of God.
 Do you feel angry or upset when you see
 someone picking on another person?
 So does God.
 Do you care about people who have been
 hurt?
 That reflects the image of God.



So, while people may see a baby and say,
 "Isn't she cute! She looks just like her dad!",
 and people may say, "You are the image of
 Aunty Helen",
 the most important thing of all is that
 you are made in the image of God!

Message

Kaye Reid



It started with a T-shirt that said “Always be yourself unless you can be Batman then always be Batman”. We all have our favourite superheroes, and there were other superhero T-shirts that were worn too, but Batman is Batman - the only superhero that doesn’t have superpowers and yet is still a superhero. The T-shirt became so faded that it



wasn’t even visible anymore, just a suggestion of what it might have said. The answer to any question that asks anything like “who are you?” or “how did you do that?” was “I’m Batman”.

Then it became a new T-shirt that simply said “I’m Batman”.

You have to believe in something. That good will prevail over evil. That the good people of Gotham will be protected from the dark evil forces among them. And that belief can become contagious, it can spread, and others can believe in it too and depend on it. That the battle for justice matters. That there is dignity in a life lived for justice not vengeance.

Then there were more T-shirts. I was given a T-shirt. It says “I think my husband is Batman”. Our kids were each given a T-shirt. It says “I think my Dad is Batman”. Their partners were given a T-shirt. It says “I think my Father-in-law is Batman.”



It’s hardly a secret now.

When you believe in something that is good and just and true, it just can’t be contained. Then just recently Karen Trease received a T-shirt for her birthday. It says “I think my friend is Batman”.

It’s spreading.



So, (on our video recording) I’m wearing my Batman T-shirt today because I believe in justice (and because I think my husband is a bit funny). And I’m standing here in our chapel able to preach from this platform and able to be a leader of this wonderful church because human rights recognise that, whether male or female, we are all free and equal in dignity and rights. And I am here on my own because our rights for freedom of movement and association have been set aside for a time in a State of Emergency for the sake of the common good.

“Created in the image of God” – this familiar statement, this concept, is the essence of all human dignity, and the emergence of what we now would refer to as human rights.

When we deal with each other, we should do so with the sense of awe that arises in the presence of something holy and sacred. For that is what human beings are: we are created in the image of God. (Gen 1:27) Economic Justice for All #28

Grab your bible and turn to the very start, Genesis, chapter 1.

Verse 26 - Then God said “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness...”

Verse 27 - So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Verse 31 - God saw everything that he had made and indeed, it was *very* good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Genesis reflects God’s continuing commitment to sustain and bless God’s good creation, including humans, in spite of disobedience and wrongdoing that leads to broken relationships.

- We see this between humans and God in Genesis 3 in the garden of Eden.
- We see this between humans and one another in Genesis 4 Cain and Abel, and in Genesis 6 leading up to the time of Noah.
- We see this between humans and non-humans in Genesis 3 where there are predictions of enmity and toil and pain, and then in Genesis 9 following the flood there is a call to be fruitful and multiply, and to honour life.

The first section of Genesis, chapters 1-11, uses mythic characters and elements to explore profound and enduring truths about reality and the interactions of God, people and the world. It does this by including a dialogue of voices which renders a fuller but complementary truth.

There are two creation stories, side by side, Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 from different times in Israel’s history. The first creation story, found in Genesis 1, is the second one. Confusing enough. It is referred to as the Priestly version, from after the Babylonian exile, around 600 BCE.

You can do a comparison later between Genesis 1 and 2, but these are some of the defining elements of the Genesis 1 creation story.

The name of the creator is God.

The state of the world is a watery chaos.

The order or sequence is of six days, man and woman created together, the last of all creatures.

The mode of creating is divine words of command.

The arena of creation is cosmic; heavens and earth.

The portrayal of God is in full control, orderly, transcendent.

The literary style is a carefully ordered framework, using repetition.

Genesis 1, the first but later creation story, begins with a dark and formless void over primeval watery chaos. Divine words of command are rapidly spoken into being over days 1-5. Then it slows down and spends some time on the creation of humanity with important insights into the nature and vocation of humanity within God's creation, and we want to pay attention to these.

God is spoken as community. We hear the plural forms. "Let us" and "our likeness". Reflecting a heavenly community of divine beings. God didn't create because God is lonely, God is already in community. Creation reflects God's desire for deepening and broadening the community of relationships that already exist, in this until now divine realm. God's pre-existing experience of community spills out, it overflows into time (light/dark, night/day) and space (regions of sky, sea, land).

Created in God's image or likeness. Ancient Near Eastern Kings erected stone statues or images throughout their realm as an extension and a reminder of the King's dominion over the region. We are called to be living images or likenesses of God and extending and reminding of God's dominion. We do this by reflecting God's care and concern for all creation, including its most vulnerable, not just subscribing to a survival of the fittest. This was illustrated in Psalm 72:8-14 describing a good Israelite King. Verses 8-11 talk about the dominion of the king, followed by the actions and posture of the good king in verses 12-14.

For he delivers the needy when they call,
the poor and those who have no helper,
He has pity on the weak and the needy,
and saves the lives of the needy.
From oppression and violence he redeems their life;
and precious is their blood in his sight.

The image of God is inclusive and communal. Humans are created together in community from the very beginning with both genders reflecting the image of God "in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." The image of God is neither exclusively male or female but encompasses both masculinity and femininity as a reflection of God; made in the image of (the community) of God.

Creation is good, or very good, but not perfect. Chaos, disorder and brokenness threaten. Humanity is last in a series of creating including spaces/realms and creatures, all of which are summed up *together* as *very good*. Pronounced 'good' during each step of creation, it is only when each interdependent creature and element of community work together that life is fostered and there is blessing pronounced – it is *very good*.

Being made in the image of God is to rest and honour the sabbath. The sabbath is anchored in this creation story: a balance of work and rest, care of creation, and worship of the Creator. In this first practice of Sabbath it is God graciously entering into self-limitation for the sake of God's creation. God who has been outside of time and space, creates into God's creation time and space, therefore limitation, and enters into this. God's example promotes a healthy balance when being in God's image.

Our life and faith intersects at the point of human rights and dignity, and we have something to say.

Last week Stephen Barrington shared about the awesome work that the team at Foothills Community Care is doing in the Dandenong Ranges area providing meals and connection as part of an inclusive community helping us to reflect on where life and faith intersects with hospitality and welcome. The profound beauty of hospitality is in creating space for others; creating space for flourishing for all. Genesis 1 is a radical narrative of divine hospitality, of creating space for others, which contrasts the pagan creation stories from that time that were fraught with power struggles, wars, family feuds and the degrading of humanity. The Genesis 1 creation narrative's spaciousness and inclusion challenges us to live out our vocation of imaging the likeness of our Creator God.

The invitation to this calling has been there all along, right from the start, yet when we look over the history of humanity it has taken a long, slow process of society recognising that all people have an inherent dignity and the right to freedom and equality, and to live into this understanding. As societies we have struggled to honour the dignity of all people, we have extended this as though a privilege to some people but not to all, creating categories and drawing lines, sometimes based on gender, ethnicity, class, affluence, nationality. As a society we scapegoat, we demonise, we generalise, we exclude.

In the past few hundred years we have seen long painful battles for equality and justice, for true dignity – slavery, civil rights issues particularly for people of colour, apartheid, lack of recognition of the full humanity of indigenous Australians, and a justification for Terra Nullius. Each of these injustices were based on the appalling notion that some people are not as fully human. It is even more shocking that this was a view that was held and perpetuated by people who read the same scriptures we are reading and professed to follow the same creating and redeeming God that we do. In fact, at times these abominable positions were justified by our scriptures. I recognise that we need to be careful of critiquing a time and system of understanding outside of our own, however, not upholding the dignity and rights of anyone is still unacceptable in any time. And this should also make us question what we ourselves are not able to see right now in our own time and space.

There has also been a struggle for all people to be given equal rights such as voting for indigenous people or for women and for the recognition and protection of children's rights. And there has been the lack of dignity and spacious hospitality for people who may be in a minority or different from our own experiences including people who are gender diverse or have a different sexual orientation than the majority.

In the last few years some of the significant human rights issues in Australia included asylum seekers, indigenous rights (prison rates and deaths in custody), children's right (detaining), care of elderly people, freedom of expression (journalism, protests), gender diversity and sexual orientation (discrimination and marriage rights), and disability rights.

What can we be aiming for as our life and faith intersects?

- Awareness of our faith basis for dignity and human rights (doing some of this today)
- Awareness of human rights issues and where dignity is being undermined or limited (pay attention to human rights organisations and UN and Government reports)

- Ability to critique what is happening in our world through this lens (this can be helped along by reading and listening to others who share this capacity)
- Willingness to name and act on violations of this and applaud upholding of rights and dignity

Today is Pentecost Sunday, representing 50 days since Easter when the Spirit of Christ was received and the early church established. This same continuing outpouring of the Spirit is desperately needed across our world, our country, our community, and in our own spirit, to break down where we are not upholding the dignity and human rights of others and are blind to this. It is the spirit of Christ that does the work of uniting all people. This is the liberation that is celebrated at Pentecost – we can live full, free, joyful and courageous lives, and create space for others to do the same.

Let's shift our focus to asking ourselves what is the next step for me to take in the upholding of dignity and human rights for everyone? What is God leading me towards?

- Read, listen and watch more diverse voices
- Explore a particular issue in greater depth
- Share in ways that invite others into a greater awareness or a positive response
- Take action on an issue
- Get the T-shirt, believe in justice for all, spread the word, make it contagious.



Ben has written a song called Justice, and in it you will recognise some of these issues being picked up in the lyrics. But first let's be in prayer together.

Take a moment to centre yourself being aware of God's spirit with you.

Spirit of God

We recognise that we are created in the image of you God, and our vocation is to image your likeness. We have heard your call to share in building up your Kingdom.

Fill us with the desire to change ourselves and to change the world through your Spirit.

Fuel our passion for justice into a commitment to address unjust situations and structures.

Deepen our concern for our sisters and brothers around the world who endure the burdens of discrimination and a lack of basic human rights and dignities.

Let us enthusiastically play our part in the mission of the Church in our world.

Remove any complacency in our hearts and minds.

Teach us to recognize the lack of justice and may we always act with your Spirit of justice.

May we have a vision for, pray about and create a different sort of world in which injustice is replaced with a renewed sense of solidarity and care.

Animated by your Spirit, may we go forth in the peace of the Holy Spirit to love and serve the Lord.

Amen

Adapted from the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council

Song: Justice

I've heard about the justice of your name
How at the sound of it, all evil fades
I've heard about the love that you proclaim
that covers all the same

As a child I learned stories of your life
Easter time and the first Christmas night
I've been told that you died just for me.
And in your church I've worshipped comfortably.
Maybe it's time to open up my eyes and see.

I pray for justice
For the lost
I pray for peace
For those who count the cost
Of being different
From who I usually see
I pray for justice
For those you love just as much as me

I've seen a church stand against the lost
Say they are different, not worthy of the cross
I've seen the bible
used as a weapon
to control

I've seen your people ignore the one commandant that stands above them all
To love the lord our God above all else
And love our neighbour as ourselves
To love the lord our God above all else
And love our neighbour as ourselves

I pray for justice
For the first people of my nation
For the lonely ones

locked up in detention
For the one
Who loves differently to me
I pray for Justice
For those you love just as much as me

We pray for justice
We pray for light
We pray grace
We pray for joy
We pray for love
We pray for peace
We pray for healing
And forgiveness
We pray for wisdom
We pray for strength
We pray for change
And for your kingdom
We pray for acceptance
In diversity
We pray for justice
For those in need.

We pray for justice
For the lost
we pray for peace
For those who count the cost
Of being different
From who we usually see
We pray for justice
For those you love just as much

We pray for justice
For the first people of our nation
For the lonely ones
locked up in Detention
For the one
Who loves differently to me
We pray for Justice
For those you love just as much as me

By Ben Graham-Nellor

Communion

Have some food and drink prepared for this time

If you're able, join us at 11am Sunday through Zoom to share in communion together at rngwd.com/communion or after you have shared in communion below, consider who you can call to have a chat as you would on a Sunday morning after a church service.

One of the things that we can be actively doing to embrace the idea of spiritual formation is to press into spiritual practices. Communion is a dedicated practice that we do week to week – to set aside time to pause and remember Jesus' death on a cross and the loving sacrifice that he made for each of us. As we pause for a few minutes and take simple food and drink – we remember Jesus meeting with his followers:

*Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it saying,
"Take, eat, this is my body".*

*Then he took the cup gave thanks and offered it to them,
and they all drank from it.*

Please share in your version of communion.

Communion is usually a time of being *in* community, breaking bread together as a symbolic remembering of Jesus' last supper with his disciples and followers. If we are not in our normal community it might feel strange to do this alone, as a couple or with only a small group of people.

Intentionally consider who you are communing with:

- Think of the people in close proximity to you e.g. neighbours. Give thanks for them.
- Consider and visually bring to mind friends in our church community who would normally be sitting close by at this time. Give thanks for them.
- Consider the community of the Trinity – God the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit – a divine community into which you are embraced today as a beloved child of God.

Sending forth

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
In the name of Christ.
Amen

Connect with us

We really would like to know what you're thinking and how you're feeling, as well as how you have used this worship resource and whether you would like some changes. To do that you can fill in an online form by clicking this link rngwd.com/connect or entering the words into your web browser and completing the short form. You can always email the office too at office@ringwoodchurch.org.au or call 9870 8169.

Resources to check out:

Common Grace

Join the movement of Australian Christians seeking to live, speak and act more graciously, more compassionately, more like Jesus in today's world.

<https://www.commongrace.org.au/>

National Reconciliation Week

National Reconciliation Week is from 27 May – 3 June 2020

#NRW2020 #InThisTogether2020

<https://www.reconciliation.org.au/national-reconciliation-week/>

Indigenous acknowledgement

Indigenous acknowledgement plaques for your home or workplace

<https://antarvictoria.org.au/acknowledgement-plaques/acknowledgement-products-wurundjeri>

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was a milestone document in the history of human rights. Drafted by representatives with different legal and cultural backgrounds from all regions of the world, the Declaration was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948 as a common standard of achievements for all peoples and all nations. It sets out fundamental human rights to be universally protected.

The Preamble recognises that “inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.”

It includes 30 brief articles or statements.

Check it out at: <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>