

Sermon on the Mount: Making a Choice – Matthew 7:13-27

Sunday 15 November 2020

Before You Begin

Our hope is that this is a resource that will help us to engage meaningfully with God's word and invite us into a sense of worship, despite being unable to meet face-to-face. Use it in a way that feels comfortable and helpful to you.

A table of contents has been added to give you a sense of what will follow and allow you to move more easily through the worship elements.

Prepare

Have your Bible close by and some food and drink prepared for 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

Be intentional. Sit somewhere. Have some visual representation of God (perhaps a small cross, your Bible, a symbol or image) or you might play some reflective music. Start with a few moments of silence and deep breathing.

Consider your environment

What will work for you in the space you have? If you have others in your house (housemates/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.



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Call to Worship

Brendan Petty

Welcome to another paper church to help guide and equip your worship this week. We're (genuinely) so glad that you're here, reading this today! As we step into a new phase of freedoms in Melbourne, I encourage you to keep thinking about what will best enable you - and anyone else in your household - to worship. Can you find one or more other people to join with, as appropriate? Can you schedule some solo time to read, pray, walk, or chat with someone on the phone?

As we draw a close to the end of our Sermon on the Mount series, it's getting close to the beginning of Advent - the journey to Christmas - a journey to hope. We'll continue to produce resources each week for use individually, in your family, with a life group, in your Geographical Care Circle, etc, until such time that we can again gather as an entire church community in Ringwood. With considerations around gathering limits, restrictions on food, shared objects and singing, limits on the length of gatherings, the necessary spacing between people, timing between groups and cleaning in between, this will probably be another month or three - but feeling excitingly closer than it has for most of the year. However, from the beginning of Advent (in two weeks) we're planning to open the church building for a small number of people to come and engage with the worship video on Sunday mornings. We'll need to arrange RSVPs to keep everyone safe and to keep within limits, with priority given to those unable to access the worship resources elsewhere. More logistics about this will come next week. Until the time that we can again throw open the doors to everyone, we also encourage you, within government restrictions and in your own pace, to join with others for worship, in appropriately small groups, when you can.

Much of our gathering to worship, now and into the future, is about sharing stories together - stories of God at work in our lives and in the world. Let's do that now - share a story with someone, something to celebrate this week. We watched a video for NAIDOC week where I learned that in Indigenous Australian culture, deceased people are never named because it "keeps them here" rather than letting them go where they need to go. Such a freeing approach to relationships and spirituality! Perhaps you can identify something you've learned, or noticed, this week?



With Advent on the horizon, you might also want to share something you're looking forward to (see if you can name something other than easing coronavirus restrictions!). For me it's a haircut for summer.

If you love to engage with worship through music, we haven't recorded any songs this week but have put together a playlist on YouTube - check it out and sing along at [rngwd.com/1511playlist](https://www.rngwd.com/1511playlist)

God, grant us patience and an appreciation for the freedoms that we have. God, grant us wisdom and courage to make choices and put them into action in our lives, today and forever. Amen.

Book: Webster the Preacher Duck

Andrew McDonough



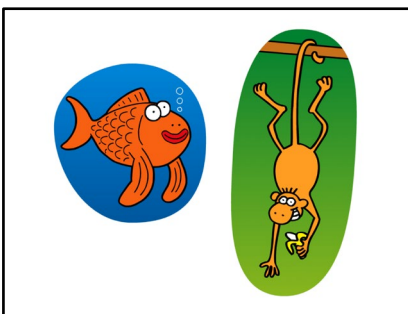
Sunday morning the ducks awake, stretch their wings and leave the lake.

Waddle *through* the reeds, waddle *up* the bank, waddle *round* the dog, under the tank, waddle *down* the hill, waddle *past* the perch, waddle, waddle, waddle and *into* church.

And there he stands, that prince of pluck, the world's greatest preacher, Webster D. Duck!

He clears his throat, shimmies his shins, takes a deep breath, and Webster begins...

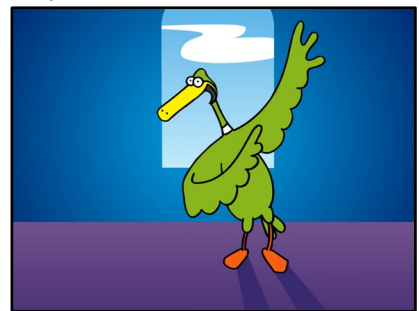
I'm the preacher duck and the sermon I bring is 'Praise the Lord who created the wing.'



Fish have fins to swim in the sea. Monkey has a tail to hang in the tree.

But the Lord wants ducks, high in the sky, so he gave us wings so we can fly!

And all the ducks began to quack: "We'll fly to the moon, then fly straight back."



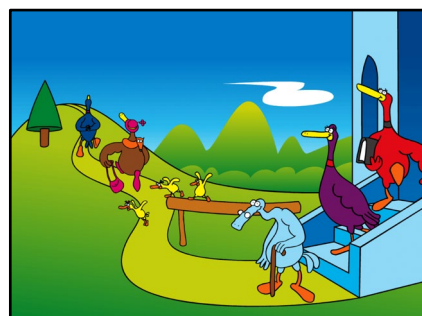
Now, ducks, use your imagination. We're not bound by gravitation.

We are made for aviation. It's the day for our migration.

And all the ducks began to shout: "Flying's in and waddling's out!"

I'm the preacher duck — when you leave your seat, you don't have to walk on those webbed feet.

You have wings! You can fly! Stretch out your wings! Reach for the sky!



And all the ducks began to sing: "Hallelujah! Praise the King! Above the mountains we will glide, V formation side by side, over deserts, over seas, through the clouds, upon the breeze. Hallelujah! King of kings! You made us ducks, you gave us wings!"

Then at the door the ducks all say: "Thank you for your sermon today. Inspiration, food for thought,



powerful message, so well taught. You made us laugh, you made us cry, you touched our hearts, you made us sigh. Well, must be off, can't stop and speak. Thank you, Rev, see you next week."

Then all the ducks, wings tucked in, stretch out their legs, and they begin...

to waddle along, down past the perch, waddle up the hill, away from church, waddle round the dog — how their feet ache — waddle, waddle, waddle, back to the lake.



Used with permission

Bible Reading: Matthew 7:13-27 (NIV)

If you are with others perhaps take turns to read different sections

"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV®
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Message

Penny Martin

How good is it to choose? Choice is the highest of riches.

I recall on a 3-day trip to Lop Buri a couple of hours north of Bangkok in rural Thailand and after a day working cutting sugar cane alongside rural workers I was struck with just how valuable choice is.

When one of our hosts was simply sharing with us around the fire about the future of her daughter - she outlined the choices available to her. She could continue to let her child work the fields and grow up as a child labourer, years of hard and harsh toil in front of her, aging and bending her body before her time... to just scrape by... or she could move to the city where opportunities to overcome poverty were more prevalent but more risky. Being a good sex worker could bring in money and potentially secure a western husband - ensuring a level of security and comfort. As I was listening, I struggled to comprehend these as the only options. Imagine if they were your only choices for your child's future?

One of the most powerful lessons that I have learned, and I teach to my students is that true poverty is not about wealth it's about choice.

Jesus teaches in this final chapter from the Sermon on the Mount the importance of choice.

The Sermon on the Mount is essentially about the way of discipleship (living an active life of faith and righteousness) – not so much about salvation. We are invited to consider how we live in these chapters and to actively pursue the life of a disciple. Salvation is implied certainly (and can be explored in the stories from today's reading) but it's about the daily choices we make – to walk in the way of Jesus not only about the final destination.

Jesus uses 3 simple stories to illustrate the vital importance it is for followers of the way of discipleship to choose and choose well.

Jesus tells the stories of choices between:

- The wide and narrow gate – Matthew 7:13-14
- The good and bad tree (and fruit) – Matthew 7:15-20
- The wise and foolish builders – Matthew 7:24-27

Today I want to home in on particularly the first story and the idea of why so few choose the narrow gate. I don't know about you but I can too easily become preoccupied with saving my own life, holding firmly to the control I have that I leave no room for God to do the saving work through us and in us.

“When we offer our lives freely to God and to our neighbours, not only do we follow Jesus down the narrow road (the one that truly leads to life—abundant life), but we also have learned that by giving our lives away, they cannot be taken from us.” (Jake Jacobson)

The narrow gate is such a good metaphor for an attitude of trusting sacrifice. I simply cannot squeeze through a narrow space if I am busy dragging in with me a whole load of baggage – the things I think I need but in fact I don't. Can we choose to let God be God? We will then find ourselves free from the eternal work of trying to save ourselves, and give God space to save us, redeem us, and give us abundant life in him.

So the question that is super important as the final word in the Sermon on the Mount is what is the path that you will choose today and in the days to come? How will you choose your everyday steps wisely and well toward life?

It's not just ONE choice - it's an everyday choice.

In the recent US election - people chose - in a severely polarised nation they exercised their choice and voice... But everyone agrees that now the real work and everyday choices begin in terms of healing, hope and wholeness in the future of the USA. And now closer to home - we have more choices than we have had in months but how do we make choices for life - for common good? rather than selfish choices - this is the responsibility now that we have. Now we can choose, how do we choose well?

If we were at church and there was an opportunity I would ask you today... after everything that this series, this past week, this year has thrown at us to MAKE A CHOICE - to choose today what it will be. Perhaps you have already in the past stepped forward and given your commitment of faith, perhaps you can map your life of faith to a point of commitment, to a choice in the past when you decided on Jesus... well I have found that just like falling in love, just like studying and working, just like being a good friend and neighbour, just like being a mum - you need to choose everyday – everyday to love well. So if you haven't made your decision for Jesus recently then today is your day.

The path to life - the path to hope and depth and purpose and meaning - yep it's a narrow path and it takes sacrifice, but it leads to LIFE.

“Excellence (or compassion or achievement etc.) is never an accident. It is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, and intelligent execution; it represents the wise choice of many alternatives - choice, not chance, determines your destiny.”

Aristotle

We stand at that sacred crossroad today. Will you choose life? Will you choose Jesus? Will you yield control and allow God to be God?

Questions for pondering and action:

1. How will you physically demonstrate your fresh choice for Jesus today?
2. What spiritual practices could you embrace to help you reflect on the kind of daily choices you make to walk in the way of Jesus?

A resource that will help you be more mindful of your daily choices:

<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/>

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](https://ringwoodchurchofchrist.com/communion) or via Facebook live [rngwd.com/fbv](https://ringwoodchurchofchrist.com/fbv)

If you are unable to join us, then please use the following reflection to take communion in your own way today and after, 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.

Connect cards online

Click this link or enter it into your web browser rngwd.com/connect.

We love to know that you have been able to connect through worship today. Please click on the link (or enter it into your web browser) to our online connect cards letting us know which ways you have been able to worship, and if you want to let us know how we can praying with you.

Thank you!