**Sunday 14 May 2017**

**Easter 5**

***Prayer before worship***

*As we see the flowers worn on the women today, we thank you Lord for the nurturing we have received through our years. -The expected and the unexpected, the deserved and the undeserved. In the midst of the sometimes murky role we know of as mothering, we are grateful for the life we have been given and the opportunity to nurture those around us. Bless all who nurture us and all whom we are called to nurture, Amen.*

**Welcome**

**Call to Worship**

Christ lives, death has lost its sting

***Christ lives, the grave has lost its victory.***

Come to Christ, the living stone that was rejected,

and build on him, with yourselves as living stones,

build yourselves into a spiritual home.

***Be for me, loving Lord, a rock and a fortress.***

***Into your hands I commit my spirit,***

***for you have redeemed me, most faithful God.***

**Songs of Praise** Above all powers

Brother, sister, let me serve you

**Opening Prayer**

Holy Friend, on this autumn day, with the golden leaves falling and the crisp morning air invigorating our bodies, we come in the name of the risen Christ to worship you.

Yet we know that in one sense our efforts are doomed to failure. This world will never be big enough to contain the thanks and praise that is due for your saving deeds in Jesus of Nazareth. Nor will the church be ever joyful enough to rightly celebrate the blessings you have lavished upon your called people.

Nevertheless we approach you with sincerity, knowing that you understand our shortcomings and are not in the least put off by our inadequate love and praise. O most wonderful God, let there be at least one second when we get it right today! Through Christ Jesus our ever living Lord, Amen

**Notices**

**Birthday Basket**

**Offering and Dedication**

In deep gratitude for life and for all the blessings that come from you, we offer back to you some measure of what we have been given. Accept our offerings and use them and use us for the building up of your reign in this world, Amen.

**Bible Reading:** 1 Peter 2:2-10

**Time with the children**

Pour out the stones on to the floor...

Ask the children what they are –where they came from... what they are for...

One of Jesus’ really good friends was called Peter –otherwise known as the Rock –that is the name Jesus gave him ☺... so I suspect he really liked writing about the image of stones... and he wrote that Jesus was like a stone.

How do you think people could be like a stone???

(start building with the stones as you talk)

Well, Peter called Jesus a special kind of stone –it was called a cornerstone...

Because when they built buildings back then –when it came to the corners, they needed an extra special stone to make the building secure. But if the cornerstone was right, and the other stones were built around that, the building would be solid.

And Peter was thinking that just like you need to right stone to build around, you need the right person to build a church around.

And I really like that idea- because you can’t build something with only one stone can you? We need lots of stones –just like we need lots of people to build a church... we all become like stones building the church together. We are all really important –all the mothers who we especially celebrate today –and all the dads and grandparents and sisters and brothers and everyone...

**Prayer**

**Re-membering for the season of Easter**: 2 Cor 5:17

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*

**Song:** I can talk to God

***Children leave for their programme***

**Powerpoint Reflection:** For Mothers’ Day

**Prayers of Confession**

Lord, you tell us not to let our hearts be troubled,

not to be afraid of anything in life or death,

that we are your chosen people, called out of darkness into light...

But Lord, so often we do get anxious

We worry about endings and beginnings

We are a mixture of humanity...

Among us there are those who come here with no particular sense of sin and shame.

And others who come with painful memories of sins wilfully committed.

Among us are those who have tried hard, failed sometimes, yet refuse to be discouraged.

And there are others come who are despondent because they gave in to temptation without much struggle.

Among us are those who have surprised themselves with the wisdom they have displayed and others who come overwhelmed by the sense of their own short-sightedness and stupidity.

Yet all of us are the same before you.

Success or failure is not measured by our scales in your kingdom.

Our best efforts are veined with impurities,

yet our worst days have flecks of glory that we might not notice.

At all times and places, you are there for us, forgiving our sins and refining our virtues.

At this moment you offer us the rescuing grace which enables us to put aside our anxieties and face the new beginnings that lie before us.

Please give as the faith to accept your healing, to be embraced by it, and be uplifted by it. Through Christ our Saviour, Amen.

**Assurance of Forgiveness**

My forgiven sisters and brothers, you are blessed! Once you may have felt yourselves to be “nobodies, but now you are truly God’s people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.” Thanks be to God!

**Hymn:** Christ is made the sure foundation

**Bible Readings:** Acts 7: 55-60

John 14: 1-10

**Sermon** Beginnings and endings

**Hymn** Our life has its seasons

**Prayers of Intercession**

Let it never be said, loving God, that your church neglected to both pray for and serve the world in its multiplicity of needs.

Although we cannot do everything, enable us to do some things.

For the oppressed and forgotten people of our nation and world we pray, that the grace of Christ will, through his servants, come to their aid.

Although we cannot do everything, enable us to do some things.

For the unemployed and the unemployable, those who are grossly overworked and underpaid, and all who have seen the results of years of toil collapse around them, we pray that you will offer dignity, integrity and justice.

Although we cannot do everything, enable us to do some things.

For the disinherited indigenous people of this and all countries, for their health and education, for the fostering of their culture, and for their leaders, and for those who work with them for justice and reconciliation, we pray.

Although we cannot do everything, enable us to do some things.

For the frail and the sick in this congregation and beyond, for the disabled and those who suffer constant pain, for those dying slowly and all who care for them, for the bereaved and loving friends who reach out to console them, we ask you blessing and your gentle care.

Although we cannot do everything, enable us to do some things.

For mothers who are amazing and mothers who are appalling –and all who fall in between... bless them and their relationships, today and always –especially we ask that you will enable ever more positive relating with their children.

And we pray for all those for whom mothers’ day is fraught with broken dreams and emptiness. Bring fulfilment in the myriad of ways we as human beings discover loving relationships, the opportunity to share lives and to serve one another.

Loving God, by your adoption we are part of your family; and like children we pray to you, asking for the blessing of your hands laid upon us, that we may with courage and compassion, work with the other members of your family with humility and good humour. Through Christ Jesus our Brother and Saviour, Amen.

**Hymn:** Thine be the glory

**Benediction and sung Amen**

**Sermon** Endings and beginnings

This week Nikki commented that she was driving Amelia to uni on one of those really wet days –and knowing Nikki was preaching at St Stephens Ponsonby today, she asked Nikki what she was going to preach on –when Nikki mentioned the stoning of Stephen, Amelia was horrified -she said –Mum, you can’t do the stoning of Stephen at a church called St Stephen’s!!! Nikki hadn’t even connected those obvious dots!! So yes, Nikki is at St Stephen’s and we at Kohi are going to start by remembering who Stephen was...

What we read was the first recorded violent death of a follower of Jesus –Stephen was the first Christian martyr. We meet him in the Book of Acts at a time of tension in the early church –between those new Christians with an orthodox Jewish background and those new Christians with more liberal backgrounds. Disagreements had lead to complaining and conflict with the more liberal Greeks feeling they were getting treated unfairly in comparison to those from a more Aramaic or Hebrew custom. When it came to the sharing out of food to those in need, the accusations really began to fly.

The church leaders dealt with this issue by placing in especially elected and ordained people to oversee these issues of social welfare. And among these new deacons, was Stephen –a man full of grace and wisdom. His was a role of justice and reconciliation. As a Greek, he showed the leaders were not biased to the old Jewish ways. Stephen was also a good preacher, and so those with a Jewish background were even more annoyed by him –not only had this Greek been given a position of esteem, but he was also doing it well! So they complained to the temple authorities... that Stephen was slandering the holy Jewish faith. And Stephen was duly brought before the ecclesiastical high court for judgement. Stephen however stayed true to what he believed –and told his accusers they were resisting the Holy Spirit and continuing to persecute the prophets. It didn’t go down well and Stephen was hauled out of the city and as we have just heard, was stoned to death.

I read that and I am appalled. What a waste of life. But I also look at it, and I see not only an ending, but a beginning... here in the end of Stephen’s life was the beginning of an understanding for the early church that it would not always be smooth sailing... that they would have to sort out their differences and move forward.

Endings do get tied up with beginnings.

When I decided to follow a sense of God’s call to prison ministry, it meant the end of our lives of job sharing... and the beginning of something quite different.

The end of our job sharing form of ministry has also meant a new beginning for us –I guess more obviously for me, but for Nikki too -into fulltime ministry –with all that entails...

Goodbyes come in all different forms... and they can be difficult... but they are often really important for us as we discover the new beginnings that follow.

We all have stories of beginnings... birth stories, moving to new place stories, starting in new groups stories... we have loads of them stored away in our memories.

But there is a great quote that goes like this –

*“Every new beginning comes from some other beginning’s end”.*

Because beginnings don’t just happen out of nothing, Life is an endless cycle of comings and goings, hellos and goodbyes, beginnings and endings. They cannot exist without each other.

And one of the tasks for all of us, I think, is to learn to see the beginnings within the endings and the endings within the beginnings. We need to recognise that by embracing new stages of life, we are giving up something and that the letting go is important.

If we decide to get married, we give up a single life and all that that life meant. If we decide on a particular job, we are in a sense saying no to other jobs. If we have children, we give up being able to only think of ourselves.

And similarly, there are always beginnings within endings. Orson Welles once said that “you can always have a happy ending. It just depends on where you stop your story”. I like that –because there are times when we think we are at the end and we are not. And it seems to me that the ultimate beginning within an ending is what we have heard Jesus saying in his farewell to His disciples.

They had followed him for years, devoting their every waking minute to him and to the group He had formed among them. He had been warning them all along that He would soon be taken from them: arrested and killed in the most awful way. The New Testament scripture we read this morning gives us some of Jesus’ last words to the disciples.

It becomes important for us to learn to face what we may see as endings in life because in so doing we actually face that future.

There is an old fable that goes something like this:

A wise old Chinese woodcutter lived on the troubled Mongolian border. One day his favourite horse, a beautiful white mare, jumped the fence and was seized on the other side by the enemy. His friends came to comfort him. “We’re so sorry about your horse,” they said. “That’s bad news.”

“How do you know it’s bad news?” he asked. “It might be good news.” A week later, the man looked out his window to see his mare returning at breakneck speed— beside a beautiful stallion. He put both horses into the enclosure, and his friends came to admire the new addition. “What a beautiful horse,” they said. “That’s good news.”

“How do you know it’s good news?” replied the man. “It might be bad news.” The next day, the man’s only son decided to try the stallion. It threw him, and he landed painfully, breaking his leg. The friends made another visit, all of them sympathetic, saying, “We’re so sorry about this. It’s such bad news.”

“How do you know it’s bad news?” replied the man. “It might be good news.” Within a month, war erupted between China and Mongolia. Chinese recruiters came through the area, pressing all the young men into the army. All of them perished, except for the woodcutter’s son, who couldn’t go off to war because of his broken leg.

“You see,” said the woodcutter. “The things you considered good were actually bad, and the things that seemed bad were actually good.”

I know that is easier said than done, but that is our ongoing journey as spiritual people: to see life through the eyes of wisdom, especially those things that seem sad or seem like endings.

Each new stage is different, but each new stage also completely surprises me with things I could not even have thought to ask God for.

And when we look at John 10 we see Jesus acknowledging this reality too –he is facing his own death -he is about to leave them –this is his farewell speech if you like... telling his followers that things are going to be different... he is saying goodbye, in order for there to be a new beginning –the beginning of what we have come to call the church.

The context is the last supper... he has just washed his disciples’ feet, foretold Judas’ betrayal and told his friends that he will only be with them a little while longer. He has told them that where he is going, they cannot come. And he has spoken of Peter’s imminent denial.

The disciples are troubled. The ground seems to be shifting beneath their feet. And Jesus responds to their anxiety –saying, don’t let your hearts be troubled, believe in God, believe also in me.

He calls them back to the basics of relationship, assuring them he is not abandoning them. The ascension is not a disappearance, it is a new beginning. Ahead is a new way of dwelling together. Thomas takes him literally and gets confused... he wants a road map to this new place –and Jesus says I am the road map.

I suspect many of us will be asking such questions –about the road map to new beginnings. And this answer to Thomas may be an answer for you too... there is no set roadmap –but Jesus is the way and the truth and the life.

Then it is Philip’s query... Lord, show us the Father and we will be satisfied.

With at least a hint of exasperation, Jesus says “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father”

Jesus is the one who reveals God the Father to us. It is a central theme for John –that Jesus points to the Father –in his real humanity and in his suffering, we see the heart of God –we see something of the very nature of God. This is not a passage simply about what happens when we die –it is about the way Jesus entrusts his mission into the hands of his disciples. You will do greater works than these... we too will point people to the very heart of God.

And so we are called to see God through Jesus. As we focus on Jesus, so we gain a glimpse of God’s heart.

So although this is known as the farewell discourse –Jesus’ parting words to his disciples –his saying goodbye – it isn’t just goodbye –it is so much more than that –it is saying –you have a life ahead which is going to be different. A life in which I will still be at work -but in a different way –through you...

So yes, this text has encouragement for what lies after death –that is why it is read so often at funerals - but it also has a sense of expectation as to what is to be done right now... greater works... the work of being the presence of Jesus –not just signs and wonders, but relationship... It is about today and tomorrow... it is about how we live now.

Saying goodbye can be really painful. We all know that. When we say goodbye, things change. But relationships continue past goodbyes –for good and for bad.

As we go from endings to beginnings, as we ask, how will we know the way?... we find that the endings are part of the beginnings and the eternal story is simply continuing to unfold. Jesus’ goodbye gave his disciples permission to live and to love into the future.

Do not let your hearts be troubled.

We remain in the hand of God who loves us.