

## *How High? How Deep? How Wide?*

---

### Gathering

---

*Create a space for worship - perhaps with a small table with a bible, cross and candle. This week, it would be appropriate to find a **green cloth** or scarf to signify that we are moving into a time of “growing”. And please bring some bread and wine/juice as we share in Communion together. Start by lighting the candle. The candle helps to centre us. Take some deep breaths as you gather your thoughts towards God.*

A video of this service can be found here: <https://vimeo.com/578686791/aa6a3b58c6>



### **Introduction**

We come together again, together in spirit and heart, if not in person.

Welcome to those following online or on the printed material. You are welcome here, to spend time with God and with each other.

This week's lectionary readings contains one of my favourites, Paul writing to the Ephesians telling them that despite everything they go through, his prayer is that they may grasp, together with all the saints, how wide, how long, how high and deep is the love of Christ.

May we worship together in the grace of God, the name of Jesus Christ and in fellowship through the Holy Spirit.

## **Acknowledgement of Country**

From before recorded time,  
the First Peoples (*Nations*) cared for this Land.  
We praise the Creator for the beauty of this Land  
and honour those who have offered themselves in tending it.  
We acknowledge the Elders and community of the Wodi Wodi people of Dharawal  
nation, who have told the sacred stories and nurtured faithfulness to the Creator.  
We ask God's blessing on those who continue to work for the healing and restoration of  
this Land and Her Communities.

*Light candle*

## **Call to Worship - based on Psalm 14**

The foolish say, "There is no God!  
We are alone, on our own."

**We gather to declare  
the glory of God in our lives.**

The foolish say, "It is your life;  
you are accountable to no one."  
We gather, strengthened by the Spirit,  
trusting that Christ dwells in our hearts.

The foolish say, "Everything I have is mine;  
I owe nothing to any one."

**We gather to praise the One  
who calls us to serve others in love.**

## **Prayer - The Love of Jesus**

This is love.  
That you spoke words of comfort,  
walked with the unclean and unloved,  
shared wisdom, bread and wine,  
brought healing into lives  
and challenged the status quo.

This is love.  
That you spoke the word of God,  
walked a painful road to the Cross,  
shared living water, bread of life,  
brought Salvation to the world  
and died for the sake of all.

This is love.  
It is a seed sown in the ground,  
which germinates, blossoms,  
and spreads its sweet perfume. Amen

*~ written by John Birch*

## Listen - How Deep The Father's Love For Us

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tzQj7XvKFmA>

1. How deep the Father's love for us  
How vast beyond all measure  
That He should give His only Son  
To make a wretch His treasure  
How great the pain of searing loss  
The Father turns His face away  
As wounds which mar the Chosen One  
Bring many sons to glory
  
2. Behold the man upon a cross  
My sin upon His shoulders  
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice  
Call out among the scoffers  
It was my sin that held Him there  
Until it was accomplished  
His dying breath has brought me life  
I know that it is finished
  
3. I will not boast in anything  
No gifts, no power, no wisdom  
But I will boast in Jesus Christ  
His death and resurrection  
Why should I gain from His reward?  
I cannot give an answer  
But this I know with all my heart  
His wounds have paid my ransom.

Source: [LyricFind](#) Songwriters: Stuart Townend

---

## Reading

---

### John 6:1-21

Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), <sup>2</sup> and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. <sup>3</sup> Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. <sup>4</sup> The Jewish Passover Festival was near.

<sup>5</sup> When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" <sup>6</sup> He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

<sup>7</sup> Philip answered him, "It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"

<sup>8</sup> Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, <sup>9</sup> "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"

<sup>10</sup> Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). <sup>11</sup> Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

<sup>12</sup> When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." <sup>13</sup> So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

<sup>14</sup> After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.” <sup>15</sup> Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

#### Jesus Walks on the Water

<sup>16</sup> When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, <sup>17</sup> where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. <sup>18</sup> A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. <sup>19</sup> When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were frightened. <sup>20</sup> But he said to them, “It is I; don’t be afraid.” <sup>21</sup> Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

#### **Ephesians 3:14-21**

<sup>14</sup> For this reason I kneel before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. <sup>16</sup> I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, <sup>18</sup> may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, <sup>19</sup> and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

<sup>20</sup> Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, <sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

In this we find the word of the Lord.

***Thanks be to God.***

---

### Sermon

---

The story of Jesus feeding a large number of people gathered together is told in slightly different forms all four gospels. It is a significant story and is a wonderful story of miracle upon miracle.

There are a few people to think about in this story. First, there is the boy. No one else seemed to have anything to eat but the boy who had a few loaves and a couple of pickled fish...

Then Phillip one of Jesus’ disciples, whose response was to calculate that even huge wages wouldn’t be enough to buy bread for all those who were gathered. And finally another disciple, Andrew, who found the boy, with his loaves and fish almost as some desperate measure of trying to please or problem solve.

The way the story reads in the NIV bible, it’s as though Jesus is teasing Phillip and Andrew...how will we feed all of these people? And then Andrew reply, looking at the boy’s lunch suggesting that this wouldn’t go very far. I like to think about Jesus having a bit of a wry smile to himself, while all his mates lost their heads in panic...

This story and the one which come immediately afterwards, Jesus walking on the water, are serious miracles, if true, this was amazing stuff. Multiplying food right before our eyes to feed 5000 men, as well as the women and children and then walking to the boat in the near dark, which was already a significant distance from the shore. This is the kind of example where truth is stranger than fiction.

These are the kind of stories of miracles which reinforce to me how little I really know and understand God's amazing capacity to love, to give, to forgive, to renew and to bring healing and reconciliation. These are the kind of miracle stories which remind me that I am offered the power to grasp, together with all the saints, how high, long wide and deep is the love of Christ and of God's love of the world, and everything in it, for me and for each of us. In itself, that's a miracle.

We never knew what happened to the boy, the stories he told his family about being there that day. We don't know how they responded...were they amazed or did they ignore him or punish him for being gone so long? We don't know what happened to the crowd, did they disperse and spread the news of what they saw and experienced in the miracle of feeding that multitude or was it lost in the haze of dust and clamour where the story changed as they drifted further away from where it all took place.

In not having the reactions or follow-ups about the story, we are left to image or dream about what it would have been like if we had been there, if we had been seated on that grassy plain and someone shared with us a meal when we had nothing.

Jesus walking on the water is another, we are tempted, always tempted to try, can I? Will I? It too, allows us to dream of what it may have been like. I like the way John remembers Jesus coming to the boat, through the choppy water, in the dimness of the twilight, knowing his skittish friends. And he was right, they didn't want to let him in the boat...until of course they knew it was him.

I can't prove that these stories really happened and I can't prove they didn't. For me, these are the stories about Jesus which amplify the those words in Paul's letter to the Ephesians...Paul prays that God's glorious riches will strengthen us, feed us, comfort us, forgive us, teach us, meet us where we are at and go with us ahead and beside us, no matter what. When we ask, how far will Jesus go? The answer is all the way. How deep will he dive to rescue us from darkness, the answer is as deep as we need. How high will he leap for joy with us, in our joy, the answer is beyond the clouds...

Paul's encouragement is one for us too, to be a community of people who know they are loved and confident in that understanding, to be empowered by the boundless love of Christ, given through the Father, so we are able to offer that love to those who need it most, beginning with ourselves.

The story of the loaves and fishes is the story of bringing what we have and offering to Jesus and letting him use it but then experiencing the fullness of being fed by him. It is a story of being willing to recognise that love as a part of who we are, and to understand the lengths Jesus will go to ensure we know it...walking across our troubled waters to be present with us, saying to each of us "it is I, don't be afraid".

We are experiencing troubled times as a community, as a nation and as a world. We remain in the midst of a pandemic which takes lives, which locks us in our homes, which makes us suspicious of strangers in the street when we do go out. That makes living a life of fullness difficult but as we come together, so together we will have the power to grasp how wide, and long and high and deep is the love of Christ that we may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God, that it may be shared with others. Amen.

---

## Reflection

---

### Monologue

(inspired by Matthew 14:15-21, Mark 6:35-44,  
Luke 9:12-17, John 6:1-15)

It was just an ordinary day – hot and hazy. I had got up really early, before the sun. To get to the boat. To get fishing. I love fishing. The quiet stillness of the Sea of Galilee. The time to just be on my own, to be myself - no distractions, no expectations, no one to bug you or put you down... and usually, no fish either. Out here on the water, it doesn't matter if I don't have enough – if I don't catch any fish. But today was different, I had a few nibbles to start with, and then just as the sun was rising, I caught one, and then soon after a second. These were going to be great in my lunch.

I didn't want to leave the sea. To go back home, to the chaos just before Passover as everyone is getting ready. I know, they keep saying how important that history is to remember – 'for our identity' they say – the Passover in Egypt when we marked the doorposts, the escape across the Red Sea with the unleavened bread, and the way God provided in the wilderness, sending manna from heaven every morning. There's so much of the story about bread I usually get hungry listening. I knew that today was the last day for me to get my hands on some regular warm fresh bread before the flatbread of Passover – so I grabbed 5 small loaves to put with my fish. This was going to be a good lunch.

It was then that I saw the crowd, all the people - there must have been thousands! I'd seen lots of people once in the city, but here they were – in the middle of no-where where I like to hide out and pass away the time. I finally noticed the centre of attention – a man surrounded by people edging him toward the mountain. Yet he was totally calm, and talking and praying and touching what looked like sick people. I got closer. The man smirked a bit and asked in a loud voice about how they were going to buy bread for all these people to eat. A guy near him looked a little panicky – there were a lot of people. How was he going to get enough money? You can't buy bread around here anyways. A couple of other guys took notice of my little lunch and soon they were parading my fresh fish and bread around. I was proud of my fish. The man made everyone sit down in the grass. And he prayed – said grace. It reminded me of all those Passover prayers the adults do. And do you know what, he started passing out my bread and my fish down one row and then another and pretty soon everyone was eating and laughing and sharing and having a grand old time. I kind of lost track of time and ate some food myself and then what do you know, they were gathering up leftovers – 12 baskets full. I'd never seen anything like it. I don't know what all happened that day, and who that man was, but for once in my life, it was me who had enough.

*~ written by Mark Diller Harder, St. Jacobs Mennonite Church, January 2010*

---

## Respond

---

### Prayer for Others (based on Matthew 14:13-21 and Psalm 145:15-16)

Loving God,  
You are our Creator and Sustainer.  
When You open Your hand,  
You satisfy the hunger and thirst of every living thing.  
And so we look to You whenever we are in need,  
trusting in Your love and Your abundant goodness.



As You once fed the hungry crowds with five loaves and two small fish,  
we ask that You would again fill those who are empty this day.  
Pour out Your Spirit on all who hunger and thirst.

We pray for those who are physically hungry—whose stomachs are empty.  
We think especially of the people in Somalia and Eastern Africa  
who are facing critical food shortages;  
    who are suffering the effects of malnutrition and starvation;  
    and watching helplessly as loved ones die.

**Lord, in Your mercy, open Your hand.  
Pour out Your Spirit, so that they may be filled.**

We pray for those who are empty emotionally—  
who are lonely and long for companionship and love,  
    who are caught in the grip of depression,  
    or overwhelmed with grief.

**Lord, in Your mercy, open Your hand.  
Pour out Your Spirit, so that they may be filled.**

We pray for those who are spiritually empty—  
who are troubled, but don't know where to turn;  
    who long for purpose and meaning, but don't know where to look;  
    who need You, but do not yet know You.

**Lord, in Your mercy, open Your hand.  
Pour out Your Spirit, so that they may be filled.**

God, we praise You for Your abundant gifts in our lives.  
Pour out Your Spirit on us as well.  
Fill us with Your compassion and love,  
so that we would willingly share some of our abundance  
with those who have need.

**Lord, in Your mercy, open Your hand.  
Pour out Your Spirit, so that we may be filled.**

We pray in the name of Jesus Christ,  
who came so that all of humanity might come to know  
the abundant life that comes from You. Amen.

*~ Christine Longhurst, re:Worship*

## **Offering**

In responding to what we have read and how we have heard God speak to us, we  
commit ourselves to moving with God's Spirit, breathing life in the world around us. If  
you make a regular financial contribution to the Kiama-Jamberoo Congregation,  
consider putting that amount aside now and keeping it safe.

God, our provider, we take from you and at this time we return to you out of Your generosity.  
Accept from us our offerings of time, energy, prayer and money that they may all be used to  
share Your grace and peace, mercy and goodness as we reach out into Your world. **Amen**

## Notices

*Keep an eye on the website, Facebook page and the e-news for updates. If you hear of or notice anyone needing a bit of extra support, please let Kath, Janice, or one of the Elders or Pastoral Partners know.*

Last Saturday the Uniting Church in Australia installed its new President, Rev Sharon Hollis. In her address to everyone, based on Paul's letter to the Corinthians, she spoke of God's love as a reversing love, as an action to be undertaken, not to be a skill to be mastered.

We pray for her as she embarks on her three year term. We pray also for Ms Colleen Geyer, re-appointed as the Assembly General Secretary, as together they continue to guide the Uniting Church into the margins, and where we too can act, with Christ, living out God's reversing love.

**Listen** - O The Deep, Deep Love of Jesus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EaiUT74Vshk>

1. O the deep, deep love of Jesus, vast, unmeasured, boundless, free!  
Rolling as a mighty ocean in its fullness over me!  
Underneath me, all around me, is the current of Thy love  
Leading onward, leading homeward to Thy glorious rest above!
2. O the deep, deep love of Jesus, spread His praise from shore to shore!  
How He loveth, ever loveth, changeth never, nevermore!  
How He watches o'er His loved ones, died to call them all His own;  
How for them He intercedeth, watcheth o'er them from the throne!
3. O the deep, deep love of Jesus, love of every love the best!  
'Tis an ocean full of blessing, 'tis a haven giving rest!  
O the deep, deep love of Jesus, 'tis a heav'n of heav'ns to me;  
And it lifts me up to glory, for it lifts me up to Thee!

---

## Sending Out

---

### Prayer for Sending Out

God can do anything, you know—  
far more than you could ever imagine or guess  
or request in your wildest dreams!  
Not by pushing us around  
but by working within us,  
through the power of God's Spirit.

Reach out and experience the breadth!  
Test its length!  
Plumb the depths!  
Rise to the heights!  
Live full lives—full in the fullness of God.  
All glory to the God of Creation!  
All glory to the Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ!  
And all glory to the Spirit of God, at work among us and within us!

Go in the love of God!

**Amen.**

Meredith Yabsley  
25 July 2021