

**An Order for Lay Preachers' Sunday
5 August 2018**



Call to Worship

There are diverse gifts:

but it is the same Spirit who gives them.

There are different ways of serving God:

but it is the same Lord who is served.

God works through people in different ways:

**but it is the same God whose purpose is
achieved through us all.**

Each one of us is given a gift by the Spirit:

**and there is no gift without its corresponding
service.**

There is one ministry of Christ:

and in this ministry we all share.

Together we are the body of Christ:

and individually members of it.

Based on 1 Corinthians 12:4ff
and Basis of Union, para 13.

Opening hymn / song of praise

Australian songs from recent years include:

TiS 179 Praise with joy the world's creator

TiS 188 Where wide sky rolls down

Relatively recent but not Australian include:

TiS 181 Come, O God of all the earth

TiS 182 Bring many names

TiS 183 Sing of the Lord's goodness

TiS 187 Let all creation dance

The "Altogether" series and the book "Here's a New Day" also offer many contemporary Australian songs

Prayers

If themes for the prayers are being drawn from the lectionary readings, then Paul's injunction ***Live a life worthy of your calling*** would be a good starting point.

The prayer of ***adoration*** might include:

- God's grace at work in creation
- Jesus bread of life, faithful to his calling
- Biblical and later historical figures who were faithful to the Call of God and have become part of our heritage in the church
- God's grace at work in us, even us, as we respond to God's Call on our life.

The prayer of ***confession*** might acknowledge:

- How easy it is for us to ignore the call of God on our lives, and/or live in ways that are quite inconsistent with the faith into which God has called us.

For the ***assurance of forgiveness***: God gives us the freedom to choose, and despite our periodic failings, God continues to call us anyway: every time we fall, God stands beside us, a hand held out to help us get back up and choose again. This is how we know our sin is forgiven.

A kids' spot or not? One "sermon" or two?

**** For intergenerational resources** go to the **UCA website** > Education & Discipleship: select Intergenerational Ministry / All Age – Intergenerational worship / in left-hand box select Church resources / Engage Together: scroll down to Overview.

Kids' spot (if you have one)

None of today's readings are particularly easy to adapt for children, so some options might include:

- Ephesians: the unity of the body and how all the parts work together (noting how this reading is different from the way Paul uses the image in 1 Cor ch 12 and 14);
- John: "Jesus as the bread of life that leaves us never hungry" might be a bit of a difficult concept for kids, but we could talk about other times when "bread" was made available – either in the account of the feeding of 5000 (just before our passage in John) or the story of the manna in the desert.

A long sermon or two shorter ones?

If you don't have a kids' spot: many places and/or preachers either have a longish sermon delivered in 2 parts with a song or prayer in between, or have an "early word" and a "later word" which are different in style and focus, either on different readings or on different aspects of the same reading. The early word might be something kids can relate to more easily, or a teaching time that puts the selected scripture reading in its context. The later word can then be a more traditional "sermon", perhaps shorter.

In any case, the text notes below don't offer a sermon draft; but they do suggest a number of topics, all related to the same theme: a life, as in whole of life, a lifestyle, that is consistent with the faith we claim and the gospel we say we believe. And there are many, many, many songs on such a theme.

Praying for Lay Preachers on Lay Preachers' Sunday

In the structure of the Uniting Church, Lay Preaching is a *Specified Ministry*, that is, it is of such importance that it is considered that people should undergo a period of suitable training and formation before being authorised to act in the name of the church in this way.

But there's more to it than that, of course. We know that in all areas of human "performance", training enables people to do it better. In the crafts and trades, of course, it's obvious – who would want an untrained pilot or electrician in charge of their welfare? It's actually no different in the humanities and the arts. Yes, we know there are gifted preachers or teachers who have a natural talent that shines even without formal education; but we also know, if we're honest, that those people are exceptionally rare, and that for the rest of us, we are enriched beyond measure by the education that we undertake as our preparation for lay preaching in areas such as Bible knowledge and interpretation, in the heritage of our faith, and in the craft of preaching itself.

And those most gifted "performers" know it too – they know that performance is made even better by careful and researched preparation.

So on this Lay Preachers' Sunday, we encourage all the people who bring the word to our churches each week to plug into that enormous richness that we can tap into through even a little planned reading or organised study of the faith. We know that without you there would be many churches on any given Sunday with nobody to preach the Gospel – how much better to bring a deeper understanding and richer engagement with the Scriptures along the way!

So pray today for all Lay Preachers, for those who continue to learn, and for those who teach them as they deepen their faith.

Lay Preachers' Sunday, 2018 – August 5th

or a convenient nearby alternative.

Introductory notes: Year B, Week 18

Old Testament 2 Samuel 11:26 – 12:13a

Bathsheba mourns her dead husband, is taken to King David's palace, bears a son (who later dies).

[This passage is part of the long story of David's out-of-control desire for Bathsheba – and all its consequences.]

Psalm 51:1-12

Be merciful to me ... create a clean heart within me

New Testament Eph 4:1-16

The unity of the body ... one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one baptism, one God; Christ the head of the body.

[This passage follows on from the celebration of how high / deep / wide / etc is the love of God.]

Gospel John 6:24-35

“I AM the bread of life.

[This passage follows John's account of the feeding of the 5000 and comes before Jesus' words “I am the bread that leaves (you) never hungry”]

Sources

Texts for Preaching, Year B

Eugene Petersen. *First and Second Samuel*. (Westminster Bible Companion)

Provoking the Gospel of John

An umbrella theme for these readings might be the words of Paul: *Live a life worthy of your calling*. We are all called to a purpose other than our own that is being worked through and in our life.

The **Old Testament** reading exposes Israel's greatest king as just another thug, clearly not worthy. It is a devastatingly blunt portrayal of life as it really is.

1 We get no hint about what Bathsheba was feeling or thinking – she appears not to matter to the writer. But there's no ambiguity about God's reaction. Nathan the Prophet is sent [propelled?] on a mission of great danger – as Amos and Jeremiah were to find out at later times. The parable works as the perfect trap – David, God's anointed, is called to account by the very same God who anointed him; his guilt is all the more grave because of the enormous privileges extended to him by God.

Contemporary application – we who live in Australia have privileges just like David's, when compared with the rest of the world. But what do we do with our privileges and economic power? Do we not further abuse our privileges in just the same way as David did? We make specific choices every day about, eg, purchasing clothes made in sweat-shop conditions, or how to respond to refugees and asylum seekers: how do "my" choices enhance life for the world's poorest?

2 David is told that there will be consequences from his actions; and soon enough we read about Absalom, Sheba and Adonijah, and also Amnon and Tamar. We in the 21st century may or may not share Nathan's (ie, the writer's) theological interpretation of history, but there's no doubting the dysfunction that would consume David's descendants over subsequent years.

The key message is in 12:12 – people may look on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart; and will expose to public gaze the secret evil things we do.

And we in our time – how often have we observed that the most gifted of people – in sport, music, literature, politics, the church, anywhere – are sometimes also the most flawed.

The **Psalm**, #51, is attributed to David, and certainly sits well alongside his story. But it's the story of all of us. We may see this portrayal only as grovelling guilt, but in truth it is also a song of hope.

It begins with a series of pleas to God for help – even at this low point in his life, David is not condemned to silence. Indeed the confession of guilt only comes after the plea for help. David's plea is based on well-established Jewish beliefs about the character of God – steadfast love and mercy, even within the context of shattered

relationship. David knows his struggle is with his God – but he knows his hope is with his God as well.

The set passage ends with the language of creation: create in me a clean heart. It's the same word as is used in Gen 1:1 – David's life has been reduced to the same disordered chaos of the pre-creation era, and just as it took God's creative power to bring order out of primordial chaos, so it will take God's power to restore order to David's life, and generate the new creation that Paul spoke of in 2 Cor 5:17-18.

The **New Testament** lesson calls us to a life worthy of our calling. For the writer [probably a follower of Paul striving to keep Paul's heritage alive in the years following his death], "worthy" means maximising one's gifts for the sake of the community, its unity and its mission. That is, it is a call to ALL of them, just as it is a call to ALL of us to be engaged in ministry. In this letter, all believers are believers in the first place only because they have been called. But note the order: verses 12-13 show that calling comes first – the specified *roles* exist only to enable the work of ministry to which the whole community is called.

Unity is essential for this, hence the reminder of One God etc. Verse 13 asserts that unity is to be seen as a barometer of the people's maturity – disunity is an unambiguous indicator of immaturity. (Note, by the way, that the way the image of the community as a body is different here from the way Paul uses it in 1 Cor 12 and 14.)

The **Gospel** focusses on the symbolic meaning of bread, leading to Jesus' words, "I AM the bread of life". We see how comprehension and incomprehension alternate – that's John's way of telling stories.

1 – *when did you come here?* Jesus accuses them of wanting him for all the wrong reasons – just to satisfy their physical hunger – when he is offering a far deeper sustenance.

But perhaps we should remember that many of these people lived with near-perpetual hunger, so the advent of someone who would provide a reliable supply of food was life-saving, not just a no-cost bonus. How could they not be excited?

2 – *what must we do to perform the works of God?* It's a valid question – they know what their Torah says: what will this man say? In Mark, Matthew and Luke, Jesus tells people to test new teachers and prophets, not swallow every latest fad. But in John, they are told the opposite: set Torah aside and believe in Jesus as the one sent by God, trust what he says life is really about, and act on it.

In Australia and other countries, we have seen the problems that arise when a charismatic person sets himself / herself up as the saviour of the nation – we sometimes call it megalomania, and it usually ends badly. So what was Jesus playing at?

3 – *give us a sign.* That is, feed us again; keep on feeding us, as God did with the manna. A Jewish tradition is that, in the desert, the fleeing Israelites each found the manna to be just what they needed: soft food for elderly people lacking teeth, energy food for active young men, and so on. The key re-interpretation here is: the people are still being fed by God, but what God gives now is Jesus. The people can't cope, though; the religious leaders dig their heels in – because it involves setting aside established patterns of religious, social, political, racial and cultural life.

So how is that different from how we are now, when exposed to, for example, an alternative, non-traditional interpretation of our faith?

One Jewish commentary is that for unbelievers, the manna tasted bitter. With Jesus, it is so bitter that previously-faithful Jewish people abandon him, driven away by his aggressive rejection of them. What was he up to?

What is Jesus up to now, as we try to make sense of this story? What do we do, as good and faithful believers [we think], that might cause Jesus aggressively to dismiss us?

Another reflection – like the manna for the Israelites, that could not be stored up but had to be collected anew every day, so spiritual nourishment – the “food that endures to eternal life” [v27] – needs us to work at its constant replenishment – it's not a one-off; we cannot say, “Got it, now I'm set”.

Lay Preachers' Sunday: 5th August, 2018

Songs / Hymns are suggestions only – not least because of the great variety of music used in our churches.

Congregations are also free to add or delete specific elements of this order as required or according to local custom.

There are several ways in which Lay Preachers' Sunday could be celebrated: your congregation may for example, choose to have the service taken in its entirety that day by a Lay Preacher, or you may elect to use just the special liturgy offered for the day. We leave that choice to you.

Thank you for your support.

Max Howland, for Lay Preachers' Committee