

Liturgical and Sermon Resource

for Social Service Sunday 2016

Theme: Risk

Based on the Eucharistic Liturgy: Thanksgiving and Praise found on p. 476 of *A New Zealand Prayer Book He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa*.

LITURGY

Gathering the Community

The people may be gathered informally

The call to take up our cross and follow Christ is a risky business. It is not for the faint hearted. We see this played out in the life of Christ himself. The risks he took spending time with the outcasts; the risk to reputation, the risk to comfort, and the risk of opposition that ultimately led to the cross.

"There is no way to peace along the way of safety. For peace must be dared, it is itself the great venture and can never be safe. Peace is the opposite of security. To demand guarantees is to want to protect oneself. Peace means giving oneself completely to God's commandment, wanting no security" - Dietrich Bonhoeffer

E te whanau a te Karaiti,
Welcome to this holy table;
welcome to you *on this Social Service Sunday 2016*,
for we are Christ's body,
Christ work in the world,
called to continue his work of life, and humility
joyfully willing to take the risks he took.
reaching out to the lonely, lost and despised.

Amen.

**Christ is our light,
the joy of our salvation.**

Praise and glory to Christ,
God's new beginning for humanity
bringing love and security to our lives
so that we might take risks for the sake of others.

**Love and loyalty to Christ,
who gives us his Gospel
of good news to the poor
and freedom for the oppressed
through our hands and feet, His church**

Song of Praise

Christ is the good shepherd
who knows and cares for every one of the sheep in different folds
In Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile;
in Christ there is no discrimination
of gender, class, or race
In Christ the poor are blessed
the simple receive truth hidden from the wise.

Alleluia!

**God of justice and compassion,
you give us a work to do
and a baptism of suffering and resurrection
From you comes power to give to others
the care we have ourselves received
so that we, and all who love your world,
may live in harmony and trust.
Grant us your grace to take great risks for your calling**

Forgiveness

We come seeking forgiveness
as members of Christ's body,
for all we have failed to be and do,
when we have placed comfort above love
and security above risk in your service.

Silence

In God there is forgiveness.

**Loving and all-seeing God,
forgive us where we have failed to support one another
and to be what we claim to be.
Forgive us when we have failed to serve you;
and where our thoughts and actions have been
contrary to yours we ask your pardon.
Forgive us where we have again raised barriers
that you tore down.**

Silence

Rejoice and be glad,
for Christ is resurrection,
reconciliation for all the human race.

The minister and people say

We shall all be one in Christ.

**Praise to Christ who created us,
Praise to Christ who has accepted us,
Praise to Christ who risks sending us into the world.**

Sentence may be read.

Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you. I will uphold you with my saving right hand. *Isaiah 41:10*

A Collect of the Day shall be said here, or before or after the sermon

This collect may be used as Collect of the Day

Gracious God,
Who is both just and merciful,
Provoke us to work for justice for all,
Even to risk all,
As we seek mercy and compassion
For those who are oppressed,
So that your kingdom comes,
All receive daily bread, and
We are delivered from evil,
Through the power of the Spirit and in the love of Christ.
Amen.

The Proclamation

Readings

The readings for Social Service Sunday...

Option 1: The RCL Continuous readings for Year C are appropriate for Social Service Sunday with the theme of Risk. These readings are: Hosea 1:2-10; Ps 85; Col 2:6-15; Luke 11:1-13

Option 2: Social Service Sunday 2016 Readings: Micah 6:8-12; Ps 72:1-7, 146:5-10; James 2:14-17; Matt 25:31-45

Sermon

Affirmation of Faith (from p. 481 or 461 or 410 in NZPB)

Intercession and Thanksgiving

You may choose to do A or B or both

A. From p. 162 NZPB

For the hungry and the overfed
May we have enough

For the mourners and the mockers
May we laugh together

For the victims and the oppressors
May we share power wisely

For the peacemakers and the warmongers
May clear truth and stern love lead us to harmony.

For the silenced and the propogandists
May we speak our own words in truth

For the unemployed and the overworked
May our impress on the earth be kindly and creative

For the troubled and the sleek
May we live together as wounded healers

For the homeless and the cossetted
May our homes be simple, warm and welcoming

For the vibrant and the dying
May we all die to live

B. Prayers of the people

Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer

We pray for our social service agencies [*Name local agencies*].
May their staff and boards or committees have wisdom, compassion and courage which takes risks as they respond to needs in our community.
Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer

We pray for those who attend our social service agencies, noting that the courage to ask for help is often greater than the courage required to help.
May those seeking help take a risk for their own sakes and for the sake of their loved ones.
In their time of trouble, may they find help.
In their time of crisis, may they find a way forward.
In their time of feeling shame, may they be empowered to ask for help.
Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer

We pray for those in government and those in government agencies who make law and set policy in Aotearoa New Zealand.
May they be guided by compassion more than by cost-consciousness;
May they understand that each client is a human person with hopes and dreams for a better future;
May they have an inspiring vision for a better, more equal and less divided society.
Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer

For ourselves, we pray that we would hear the call of the last, the lost, and the least.

May we be prepared to risk our reputations, our comfort, and our security in order to act on that call.

May we risk all for the gospel, seeking to be good news for those who call to us.

Show us, we pray, one new step we can take to support social service agencies, to connect with vulnerable people and to shape the laws and policy of our nation.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

We also pray for the work of agencies working beyond our shores, for CMS, UNICEF, World Vision, and others who are offering love and service in practical ways to those in need. Bless their social service work also.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Finally, we give thanks for all the blessings we have received in this life.

We give thanks when we have received help in time of need from social service agencies.

We give thanks for laws and government policy which have enriched our lives.

And we give thanks that when we risked trusting you O God, you met us and brought us home to yourself.

Amen.

The Communion

Continue by following the prayer book p488 onwards

SERMON

Option 1: The RCL Continuous readings for Year C are appropriate for Social Service Sunday with the theme of Risk. These readings are: Hosea 1:2-10; Ps 85; Col 2:6-15; Luke 11:1-13

Option 2: Social Service Sunday 2016 Readings: Micah 6:8-12; Ps 72:1-7, 146:5-10; James 2:14-17; Matt 25:31-45

For the readings given above we offer below the following notes and links for preparing a message based on one or other set of readings

Sermon resources

Option 1:

Brief comments the Old Testament and Gospel readings for *RCL Continuous*.

Hosea 1:2-10 Hosea is asked to do something that involves a great deal of risk in a community of people that had such a strong ethic of exclusion for the unwanted and outcast. He must risk not only his reputation and his own sensibilities, but also the wrath of someone he tries to marry for purposes other than love. Gomer is objectified as she is used to illustrate a lesson for the people of Israel. (I tried that as part of a proposal to marry someone once and she hit me with a bike pump!) Is it any less risky to follow God's call on our own lives? Luke's programmatic opening declaration of the new covenant as "good news to the poor, release for the prisoners" (Luke 4:16-20) led to Christ proceeding to hang out with all the vulnerable, marginalised, excluded outcasts. He demonstrated that we can try to spiritualise his message all we like, but we just cannot totally lawyer away actual commitment to the marginalised. Although a lawyer did try that, and for his trouble he just got

schooled with the parable of the Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), so ... there's that to consider as well. Back to Hosea: Hosea marries Gomer and they have three children, the marriage to a whore and the names of the children all illustrating the rebellion and separation between Israel and Judah (Hosea 1:2-9). Yet in the same passage, God sees a transformation, God sees Israel shifting from "You are not my people" to "Children of the living God" (Hosea 1:10). Hosea's risk was worth taking. What risks are we being asked to take for the sake of transformation of people today?

Luke 11:1-13 Having a sense of control and autonomy in our lives is second nature; to feel that slipping away results in anxiety and fear. Loss of control is at the heart of a number of complaints that send people scurrying to the doctor's office. Unfortunately, although God is loving, God is notoriously no respecter of our sensibilities about personal control and autonomy. Handing over control of our lives, in terms of surrendering our lives to God's will is kind of the gig for disciples of Jesus. It is a great risk praying explicitly for that loss of control or handing over of the reins of our lives that we find in the prayer 'Your kingdom come' of Luke 11:2. The passage after the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer (11:5-13) is an assurance from Jesus that when we take the risk to genuinely pray for the kingdom to come, God responds to give us what we need to serve the kingdom. We may give up autonomy by praying 'Your kingdom come' but we can be confident that God is in control.

There is another risk in praying the Lord's Prayer, especially on Social Service Sunday. What if God asks us to help with answering the prayer "Give us each our daily bread"? Some of us have more loaves to eat each day than we know what to do with; others have less bread than our bodies' daily needs for nurture and replenishment. What is God saying to us as we pray the simple prayer that Jesus taught us?

Option 2:

The following link is to a sermon by Professor Jonathon Boston on the Micah and Matthew readings <https://wellingtoncathedral.org.nz/ministry/sermons/behind-the-mask-social-services-sunday/>

A.

Sermon resources for Micah 6:8-12 at the following link <http://bfy.tw/60qG>

Sermon resources for James 2:14-17 at <http://bfy.tw/60qL>

Sermon resources for Matthew 25:31-45 <http://bfy.tw/60qO>

B. Brief notes on the three passages, as follows:

Micah 6:8-12: For some readers, verse 8 is so familiar that it is difficult to hear it as a sharp, pointed challenge to Micah's original hearers. In a context where those hearers were well used to coming to God via the well-worn route of ritual sacrifices (verses 6-7), Micah declares that what God really wants is not the sacrifice of the finest calves and rams, topped off with rivers of oil. No, God wants lives lived which make a difference to the lives of others. "What does the Lord require of you," Micah bluntly states, "but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" That justice is a great concern in this set of requirements is brought out in the remainder of the passage, verses 9-12: the class of powerful and wealthy people in Israel have cheated, lied and bullied their way to the top. It has got to stop. God is not bought off by using ill-gotten gains to buy calves and rams to be sacrificed. What pleases God is justice and justice cannot be replaced by religious ritual. Justice is only justice when the cheating, lying and bullying stop. In NZ in 2016, amidst claims and counter-claims about housing crises, rising inequality of wealth, income and opportunity, and human contributions to destruction of the planet, what is God asking us to do which achieves justice, which enacts loving kindness with deeds not words and which expresses a humble walk with God?

James 2:14-17: This passage does not need explanation! Faith is expressed in deeds or it is not real faith (2:14, 17). Deeds are actual actions which make a difference to people at their point of need; words are not deeds (2:15-16). Enough said, now act!

Matthew 25:31-45: The starting point for this passage is the coming in glory of the Son of Man (31) with the nations gathered before him (32). By v. 34 the Son of Man has become 'the king' and thus we have a great passage for Christ the King Sunday -Christ reigns over the nations and brings judgment to them.

This passage is sometimes called the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. This is partially true because Jesus makes a comparison (or 'similitude') in vss. 32-33 between the separated people before him as king and a shepherd separating the sheep from the goats. But the greater truth is to describe the passage as a vision of the future judgment.

Jesus specifically makes the criterion for judgment between the sheep and the goats the criterion of action or inaction towards 'the least of these who are members of my family' (40, 45). An important question for each preacher on this passage to answer is whether this passage is about the world's treatment of Christians or on how Christians treat non-Christians or on how non-Christians treat other people.

Understanding this matter is vital for the standing of the whole gospel as a Christian gospel in the context of the New Testament's message that salvation comes through the grace of God and not through good works. On the face of it, overlooking verses 40 and 45, Matthew 25:31-46 looks like a straightforward endorsement of good works as a means to salvation: feed the hungry, visit the prisoners, welcomes strangers into your home and God will be pleased with you. And the converse applies: you have been warned. On this understanding, effectively Jesus is expanding on something he has already said about the treatment of his disciples being the treatment of Jesus and thus of God himself:

"Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me."

This is Matthew 10:40 (read the larger section, 10:40-42) and can be read alongside Matthew 18:1-7. In these passages Jesus begins to develop a theme which – it can be argued - comes to a climax in our present passage: how disciples of Christ are treated is extraordinarily powerful in respect of consequences. God is in Christ, Christ is in Christians, bless (or curse) a Christian and you are blessing (or cursing) God.

So, on one reading of this passage, in Matthew 25:31-46 we have the extraordinary spectacle of the nations being gathered before Christ the kingly judge and the judgment turning on how they have treated Christians. As we look around the world today we rightly think that some nations should be terrified of that future judgment because their treatment of Christians has been utterly appalling.

But, on another reading of this passage, in Matthew 25:31-46 we have the extraordinary challenge of Christ's judgement focusing carefully on how humanity has treated humanity. "The least of these who are members of my family" refers to the human family, and spotlight is put on each of us. Who has fed the hungry, offered water to the thirsty, welcomed strangers, clothed the naked, cared for the sick and visited the prisoners? On this reading, which lines up with Micah 6:8-12 and James 2:14-17, we who claim to have faith in Christ should also be able to claim that in actuality we have acted in Christ's name and met the needs of those in need.

Some Quotes (for use in a sermon on either set of readings)

Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals. - Martin Luther King, Jr.

Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God - William Carey

No man is worth his salt who is not ready at all times to risk his well-being, to risk his body, to risk his life in a great cause. - Theodore Roosevelt

With great power comes great responsibility - Spiderman

One of the most powerful, and deeply spiritual, ways to work for social change is for us to take action in the present that embodies -- right now! -- the future vision that we seek
- Rabbi Arthur Ocean Waskow