

*Sunday 1 April 2021*

*Pentecost 10*

***+ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.***

Today we meet to again worship together in the flesh, albeit cautiously, having all been shellshocked by the events of the last week and a half. Things are getting better, but there is still a long way to go. Every time we go out and enter a shop or go inside somewhere we are reminded of our state's brush with disaster, even as we might grumble about the itchy mask we have to wear and fumble to find our phones to check in. It is a small price to pay however, when we consider the alternatives and recall where our friends and family are in New South Wales, or elsewhere overseas. It is good to be reminded today of God who sustains us and nourishes us with the living bread, who is faithful to us no matter that we yearn for things material and temporal, the short-lived food like the crowd that followed Jesus across to the other side of the lake because he had given them the miracle of bread and fish, that we forget the deeper things of God. We forget until we are faced with things beyond our control. Then we, like the wandering people of Israel looking for the manna in the wilderness, turn to God and remember whose we are and how far we have come since that terrible journey from slavery into the freedom of Christ.

The themes for today, this tenth Sunday since the event of Pentecost, are sin, redemption, gifts and grace. Sin is clear in the character of David. He has fallen so very short of the gifts and responsibility that God gave him. He has made life a misery for the wife and family of Uriah, and he turned his face from God to shamefully act out the desires of the flesh. It was only when the Lord's messenger Nathan called him to account and God rained punishment upon him that David saw his sin and recognised the extent of his departure from grace. Perhaps the words of Psalm 51 were on his lips: make me hear of joy and gladness, let the bones which you have broken rejoice. Let them rejoice with understanding and the hope of redemption.

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Sometimes we all need a wake-up call, to be given the opportunity to stop and turn back to God. This process of turning around again to God is repentance. The turning around is part of the process of forgiveness. David just managed to do it, and from him great things happened. It is in his line that Jesus is born to Mary and Joseph, centuries later in Palestine.

Psalm 51 is one of the penitential psalms, calling on us to be witness to our faults, both personal and corporate. Sin is our burden and suffering. We have sinned in thought word and deed against God who is our maker, against Earth which is our nurturer and home, and against each other in so many ways, large and small. God knows each sin, and so we are called to repentance, to acknowledge sin before God, God who longs for us to return in the innermost parts, to learn the deep wisdom of the divine hand in creation, redemption and salvation. In the monastic communities this psalm has been read in Lent for generations.

With the reality of sin as the burden of human existence, God sent the Son into the world to take the suffering of sin to death. In the Letter to the Ephesians, we learn of the cost of sin to God. The Son descended to Earth and the Son descended beyond Earth into the realm of the dead. In the letter it says that he descended to the lower parts of the earth. The cost of sin for God was the life of the Son, life that brought human beings the release from sin and the gift of redemption. We are healed from sin when we recognise sin for what it is and turn to God. Healing comes as forgiveness, and we are set free.

Not only are we released from sin, but we are given gifts. The gifts are free, but they require the responsibility of using them for the benefit of Christ's community and the well being of all humanity and the created world. The responsibility makes some fail to use the gifts. Sometimes people don't want to fail, or they fear what will happen when the gift is activated. Fear of failure and resistance to the responsibilities of gifts within the body of Christ is the stuff of Psalm 51: create in

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me a clean heart, O God; renew a right spirit within me. Let that renewed spirit take up the calling of the gifts.

What are your gifts? Who are you in your gifts? To whom do you belong? Or will you turn away?

Redemption in Christ, the release of sin, the gifts that are given freely by the love of God are all bound up in grace. The language of grace is beyond the capacity of human beings to utter. Grace belongs to God and is given as gift. No longer need we hunger for mere food. He is the bread of life. The bread of life belongs to the eternal, and it animates, it gives life to the world. The crowds which followed Jesus wanting a miraculous source of food had missed the mark of grace. They were seeking in human terms, like the hungry Israelites angry at Moses for bringing them out of Egypt. They want the bread of life, but they do not understand it is a gift of grace and they are being called to turn to God and begin again.

Consider then, sin, redemption, gifts and grace. Recall the words of Psalm 51 and may a right spirit be renewed in you as you take up the calling of your gifts, as you take in the bread of life and receive the unutterable word of grace. May it touch you, hold you, change you, make you into God's own. Amen.