

MINISTER'S LETTER

YOU ARE INVITED: Approach or Gathering for Worship

Living in our home with three of our grandchildren, is always exciting but even more exciting when their birthdays and associated parties come around. Each of the three get a birthday party once every second year. When it is their turn a lot of effort goes into: Who to invite including creating invites (this can be quite a 'political' juggling act)? What they want to do (Aquarium date with penguins, Bounce (trampolines), Children's Farms, Chocolate party, Mess party – the list is endless!) And finally, what food and gifts they want at their party (Peking Duck!!, Dumplings, Pizzas and the list of potential gifts is too long to list here – just a few -Lego, Tickets to Taylor Swift, Sketch books etc etc.)

What have kids' birthday parties got to do with Gathering for Worship!?

Last Pathfinder I offered a brief description of what the Approach or Gathering for Worship is, namely, it 'is like a letter of invitation to attend a very important event, only the invitation is from God for us to join together, in community, and ready ourselves to hear the 'guest speaker' to end all guest speakers!!!' This invitation is to something much more momentous than a birthday party!

The constituent parts of the APPROACH/GATHERING to Worship are as follows

THE GRACE: 'Bone Fide' worship is bracketed by GRACE and BENEDICTION. We and the whole Creation live by GRACE and BENEDICTION alone (more on BENEDICTION in December's Pathfinder.) And that abundant Life is pure gift (grace), love beyond measure, and eternal spiritual nourishment from God. When worship is entered into with that understanding of life and faith, we are authentically prepared to recognise and declare the ultimate and surpassing joy of God's presence in our lives, and in the life of the gathered people of God, and in the 'life' of the whole of Creation!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY: This is a new part of the gathering for most of us. Of course, it ought not have been, but maybe we are beginning to come to our senses as a nation (and church) in relationship to the original stewardship of this land. Place is important for God. Jesus died to restore and remake all things in heaven and on earth, which includes all of creation. So, as we gather, we acknowledge the earth as a precious gift from God and in so doing acknowledge those who have cared for it, as a precious gift from the Almighty, for a very long time!

PRAYER OF APPROACH: In the awesome presence of God, we humble ourselves. (Often, I incorporate the sentiment of this prayer into the Prayer of Adoration.)

CALL TO WORSHIP: This is the heart of the invitation. An invitation issued by God. God calls us into God's presence. Why? Yes, for us followers to declare the outstanding worth of God, but principally to 'formalise' God's connection to his creatures, connecting them with the source of all love. (An invitation to belong to God and therefore with each other, surrounded by the love which made and remade heaven and earth.)

PRAISE: In the presence of Almighty God, we 'fall to our knees' in wondrous praise and what better way than to sing to the praise of God with unfettered voice. This first hymn/song should be truly joyous and uplifting – full of praise for the Almighty.

PRAYERS OF ADORATION, CONFESSION and ASSURANCE OF PARDON

(FORGIVENESS): In God's presence, again we 'fall to our knees,' this time in prayers of veneration/glorification of our extraordinarily loving God. This prayer is several degrees 'up' from thanksgiving – it reflects being awestruck by the wonder, glory, majesty, love and closeness of God. And as a result of recognizing and adoring God we become acutely aware of our own insufficiency. Thus, we make confession of our sin and brokenness as humans (NB This is more about our species'

brokenness than just individual sin). But we are never left for long to wallow in our fractured relationship with God and each other. No! Again and again, God comes to our rescue with extra-ordinarily gracious love, to forgive and renew us – offering the new life Jesus achieved through his death and resurrection, to all – This the Church calls, The Assurance of Pardon (Forgiveness).

THE PEACE: The liturgist, at this point offers Christ's Peace to all because, as forgiven people, by faith, we know the peace only God can bring to us through his Son – (The Peace which passes human understanding – that is, Christ's peace comes to us as a gift of Christ's new life, offered to us all, which equips the believer to truly understand that one can be at peace even when the turmoil of the world threatens to tear you apart). What an extra-ordinary gift!

Having moved through these acts of GATHERING we are now prepared; we are now in a faithful position to 'hear the WORD from the Guest 'Speaker!' - see you next month for 'WORD.'

Blessings,

Ron