

# Service at Ashburton 20 October 2002

Theme: looking at food, but using the lectionary

Exodus 33:12-23

Psalm 99

or

Isaiah 45:1-7

Psalm 96:1-9, (10-13)

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Matthew 22:15-22

**Introduction** – Graeme

## **Call to worship - Cath**

Let us now worship God our Creator

Who created us intimately and intricately

The centre and source of the web of life

Who calls us into loving connection with the whole creation

The Christ candle is lit

We are the sisters and brothers of all that is,

Cherishing the earth, embracing its life.

We are the people of God.

*Let us worship God*

## **Opening statements to introduce the theme of the service - Ashburton**

*(to be read slowly by different people in four corners of the church, as they finish their stanza they bring forward an item of food and place in a central space, or on the altar)*

### **Person 1**

Where have we come from?

How do we come to be here in Australia, a land of affluence?

How do we come to have enough to eat, to have a surplus of food?

Does what we eat impact on others?

How do our lives affect the web of life?

*(brings forward a bunch of asparagus – in abundance and in season at the moment)*

### **Person 2**

Where have we come from?

Why do we no longer have to hunt for our food?

How does the food get to the supermarket?

Does it matter where we buy our food from?

How do our lives affect the web of life?

*(brings forward a tin of soup or instant noodles, a symbol of our desire for instant food)*

### **Person 3**

Where have we come from?

Why do we not go hungry even though we have floods and droughts?

Where is the food stored, how is it transported?

Does it matter how our food is processed?

How do our lives affect the web of life?

*(Brings forward an apple, a symbol of our ability to coldstore food)*

#### **Person 4**

Where have we come from?

How is our food grown, where is our food grown?

Will herbicides and pesticides affect the food we eat?

Does it matter how we grow our food?

How do our lives affect the web of life?

*(brings forward an organic kiwi fruit and a non organic kiwi fruit with identifying stickers)*

#### **Bit about the Earth Team - Cath**

#### **Song: Ashburton**

#### **Prayers of adoration and confession - Cath**

L: In the silence that follows spend some time thinking about the last week. What has happened in your life? What has happened in the world? What have you been thankful for?

Loving God,

We come to you now with our prayers of adoration and thanksgiving.

*Time of silence*

Invitation for people to share one thing that they are thankful for

In the silence that follows spend some time thinking about the last week. What has happened in your life? What has happened in the world? What have you been sorry about and need to confess to God?

Loving God,

We come to you now with our prayers of confession.

*Time of silence*

L: Our creator God knows us intimately and intricately and hears our confession. God's love and forgiveness is never ending and by this we know that our sins are forgiven.

***R: Thanks be to God***

#### **Kids talk – is this needed? - Cath**

#### **The story of soil – (to be told whilst holding the bowl of soil)**

A long time ago, the people in Australia knew how precious this soil was. In fact they knew it was so precious that they treated it as we might treat a special friend or our parents or even God. And they thought of the soil as their mother. We might think it strange to think of this bowl of soil as our mother, but the people knew. They knew that just like they were reliant on their mothers to feed them, they relied on the soil to feed them and house them and keep them warm because without the good soil, nothing would be able to grow and without the trees they wouldn't have wood and without the wood to build with, they wouldn't have houses and they wouldn't have fires to keep them warm. All the plants that gave them food relied on good soil. The rivers where they went to for water relied on good soil, the animals that they men killed for meat relied on good soil. And because they knew this, they knew it was precious.

Times have changed since then, we no longer think of this bowl of soil as so precious, and we think we can live without it. Because humans have done such amazing things, we think we are now beyond needing the soil, sometimes we think we don't even need God. In fact most of the time we

think soil is a nuisance so we cover it up with concrete or asphalt or buildings or things we think we need more than soil, we don't give it a chance to grow things for us. We forget that the soil is growing our food for us, that it is growing our houses for us, that it contains things like coal that we use just to keep us warm. And because we have forgotten, we have got ourselves into an awful mess.

So, how do we get out of this mess that we've made? Perhaps one place to start is to remember to look at the soil like the people here before us, to remember that it is precious. And if we look at it really closely we might even be able to see something else. For in just this bowl of soil there are millions of tiny tiny living organisms most of which we don't even know exist, we're just beginning to learn that it is these small little microbes in this soil that sustains most of life here on earth.

Jesus says to us, 'Whatever you do to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you also do it to me.' (NRSV) Matthew 25:40

*Offer the kids a seed and ask them to plant it and share something that they hope for.*

**Bible readings:** Ashburton

Ex 33:12-23, 1 Thess 2:1-8, Matt 22:15-22

**Sermon / Activity – Cath and Sean (incorporating the symbols we brought in earlier)**

In the readings today there's a common theme about worship and faith. Who do we worship, and what do we have faith in ?

In Exodus we hear the Lord proclaim his name – He makes it clear that He is God. Moses, however seems to be rather nervous, and is always after reassurance from God that he will be there. It seems that Moses has more faith in his fears and worries than he does in God's love, but God reassures him.

In the Gospel of Matthew, the Pharisees tried to trap Jesus by asking him a tricky question about Caesar and taxes. Jesus, being the Son of God and a generally clever chap, knew what they were up to and made it clear that his loyalty was to God alone.

And although we didn't hear them today, there were other readings from Isaiah and Thessalonians that covered the same theme about worship and faith – worshipping who, and faith in what?

I'm going to ask you to stop and reflect on what are the things that you put your energy into. Where does your time and effort go? What do you strive for? What ideals do you hold strongly, and what do you speak out about? Just spend a few moments in silence and reflect on this.

Slide 1

QUIET REFLECTION

What do you put your energy into?

Where does your time and energy go?

What do you strive for?

What ideals do you hold?

What do you speak out about?

OK. These are the things you worship. These are your Gods and your idols.

Now I'm going to ask you to stop and reflect on what things you don't put energy into. What worthy causes do you not support? How do you make the decision about what things you put your energy into and what things you don't?

Again I'd like you to spend a few moments in silence and think about this. I'll give you a bit longer coz this one's a bit harder.

Slide 2

### QUIET REFLECTION

What don't you put your energy into?

What are you silent about?

What worthy causes do you neglect?

How do you make decisions like this?

OK. That's good, I can hear lots of thoughts humming out there.

These are the things you ignore and neglect. You might say these are your blind spots.

Just keep those things in your heart and ponder on them sometimes.

Of course, we can't put time into everything. And the circumstances of our lives often determine what we end up doing with our time and energy.

Sometimes we just lack information, we only operate and make decisions based on what we know.

So what are our idols, and what are our blind spots?

A very common place for us all to have idols and blind spots is in the area of food and agriculture.

Now I hear you saying – what has agriculture got to do with God and idols and all that? I'll try to explain.

In the first part of our worship today we have brought forward some symbols to represent our food choices. The choices we make do matter, they do have an impact on things like poverty, employment, and environment. I think God is concerned about the choices we make.

So. Let's begin with some stories.

Back in the early days, when agriculture first started, I think human beings were absolutely overjoyed and thrilled with themselves, that they could create their own food security. Before agriculture, there was no food security. You had to follow the game and gather the seasonal berries & fruits, find and dig the tubers.

I think when agriculture was invented, we human beings were just over the moon about it. The early farmers would have thought – “Wow, we're brilliant. We can have food whenever we want it. We don't have to be dependant on nature's erratic variations anymore. This technology is fantastic.”

When I look at this, I think I can see the beginnings of some idol worship developing here.

From this point on, more and more efficient methods of agriculture were developed.

There was never any questioning that clearing land and sowing crops was anything but a “good thing”. The only question was how to do it more efficiently, to produce the most food from the least land and the least effort.

No attempt was made to consider the impacts on ecosystems or biodiversity, or future uses of the land.

And.... I think I can see the beginnings of some blind spots developing here, too.

Nowadays there is a clear separation between the farmers and the consumers. The farmers know a great deal about the land, the consumers know very little.

Farmers are even starting to think about addressing some of those blind spots, by getting involved in Landcare, and planting trees on areas that had been cleared.

But us consumers, we are still very much in the dark.

OK. Now it's time for some fun. Pair up with the person next to you. See if you can remember what was the last food item you purchased (perhaps the last thing you picked up and put in the supermarket trolley). Explain to your partner why you chose it.

### Slide 3

#### WITH A PARTNER...

What was the last food item you bought in a food shop or supermarket?

Why did you choose it?

Thanks everyone. Can someone tell me what their item was? Why did you choose it?  
Great.

As an environmentalist, when I walk into a supermarket, I find I'm absolutely horrified at what people do in there.

People are buying and selling products that are horrendously overpackaged. Food is processed and reprocessed, with lots of sugar and fat thrown in. Huge amounts of energy is used in refrigeration. Fruits and vegetables are grown with a cocktail of chemical sprays, then packed into polystyrene trays and covered with glad wrap.

There is fruit that is far too cheap because it's come from way across the country, and when you include all the transport costs and all the people who are paid in between, the farmer was probably not paid much at all.

What I see, in a supermarket, is one blind spot after another. I don't see the red-spot specials, I see blind spots, people walking around with blinkers on. Most of us just don't know what damage is done by the production and sale of these products.

And when I look at the producers and sellers, I see they are very clearly worshipping the idols of money and profit. Because the process has become so large and in many cases multi-national, the decisions are not made by the farmers on the ground, they are made by the marketing companies, the banks, and the global traders.

Last year I spent some time researching the issue of global agriculture, and I found some shocking facts. For example, in some places, you can't get a bank loan to set up a farm, unless you agree to buy a lot of pesticides from one of the big companies like Monsanto.

If you are a poor farmer in Africa or South America, you are more than likely to have your local seed taken away by a foreign company, repackaged and sold back to you as a patented seed. If you then try to save some seed after the harvest and re-sow, you can be taken to court and jailed for breach of the plant variety rights legislation. You are forced to buy the company's seed every year.

If you are an agriculture worker in a poor country, you are likely to be using highly toxic pesticides that are no longer used in first world countries. You can't afford to buy the newer pesticides so you are stuck with the old ones. Statistics produced by the World Health Organisation show that 25 million agriculture workers in poor countries are seriously poisoned each year by the use of pesticides, leading to 220000 deaths. Many of these pesticides are produced in first world countries, but are we don't use them ourselves, because we know how poisonous they are. We still produce them because we can make a profit.

In Australia, the biggest problem we face is continued land clearing. It has been proven beyond a doubt that the numerous extinctions of plants and animals that have happened in the past 200 years in Australia have been directly related to the clearing of land, which removes habitat. But we're still doing it.

In my prayer and reflections, I often question God about why all this has happened. I ask God – "Why did you let all that land be cleared, all those plants and animals become extinct. Why did you let all those poisons be used on the

fields, why have you let people build supermarkets where the real food is hidden behind plastic and paper and tins, where people can't see what is going on?"

I guess in a way it's no different from any of our human history, where God has given us the freedom to choose to follow His way, or not.

In Jesus' time, worshipping idols would have involved such things as sticking to religious rules, or obeying the Roman rulers, or making money. Jesus insightful comment "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's", forces us to confront what it is that we do with our lives, who or what we worship.

It's an extraordinary statement made by Jesus. It cuts through our normal concepts of ownership. The Pharisees may have thought they possessed their roman coins, but Jesus makes it clear that these coins belong not to them but to the Roman empire. We think we own the money and possessions we have, but do we really?

Then comes the interesting bit. Give to God what is God's. What can we give to God? Normally we find ourselves praying for God to give things to us. What do we have that God might want? Well, love perhaps. Since God is love, and we all carry a piece of God in our hearts, perhaps every time we love we are giving to God.

In my prayer I ask God for guidance, and I ask what can I do to help the world.  
And what I find God calls me to is a life of simplicity.

Simplicity for me means using less energy, buying locally produced products, buying fresh rather than processed food, and cooking at home. When I get time I also try to grow my own food at home in the back yard, and when I can't grow something myself, I try to buy from an organic grower.

Simplicity means appreciating the beauty of something that is fresh from the earth. Simplicity can be found by walking or cycling to the shop, instead of driving a car, it can be found in saying a short prayer of thanks before eating. Simplicity is about relationship rather than consumption, it's about getting to know creation rather than simply eating it.

In the reading from Exodus we hear the interesting story of Moses wanting to see God's face. God says to him "No-one may see my face". It's not surprising really. I think of it like a bacteria saying to it's mum - "Mum, I want to go to the zoo and see a giraffe." And the mum says, "Well, it's a bit difficult. You see, we live inside the giraffe's stomach."

Our eyes are too small to see God. We can only catch glimpses, fleeting feelings of grace, and see and appreciate the works of God. We ourselves are one of those works of God. When we give our energy and attention to living simply, and living relationship with God and God's creation, then we avoid the trap of idol worship, and we will start to have our eyes open to things we have been blind to before.

Amen.

### **Song: Ashburton**

### **Prayers for others**

Ashburton: First ask if there are people or situations that are in need of prayer.

Ashburton: Prayers for these people/situations (use tapers ).

Sean to collect prayers together:

God  
We have come together today  
To be in your presence.

God you are in all things,  
You are in the Earth, and the grain,  
You are in the sunlight, the clouds and the rain.

When we eat with thoughtfulness,  
And when we eat with carelessness  
You are there

Watching and waiting with love,  
Inviting us to deeper connections  
Deeper nourishment.

You are there  
Inviting us to ask questions -  
Like "Where has our food come from?"  
Inviting us into mystery  
How is it that we are energised and healed  
Amused and satisfied by food

Thirst quenched and mind revived by water,  
As if we are returned to the sea  
A homecoming to the waters from whence we were born

Hunger for nourishment and energy  
So strong that sometimes we forget ourselves  
And eat too much  
As if .... the food eats us and we are devoured by our need  
But all along we only wanted love  
And kindness.

God  
Why is it that so many go hungry  
Why is there land laid to waste  
Or growing crops for cash sales  
Quick returns  
Soil degraded and dried out  
Blown away by the wind,  
Until all we have left is rocks,  
And our memory fades.

God show how us to plant the seed  
Of a better relationship with food  
A seed that will grow to nourish us  
With vitamins and love  
Protein and wisdom  
Fibre and faith

Give us the strength to share with others  
Help us to question our impact, our footprint,  
Help us to eat with joy and be connected to what we eat  
Remind us to seek the bread of life  
The truth about being human  
Is that we must love one another  
And receive love in abundance

Creator God we thank you for your love  
And we thank you for life, food, and friends.  
Amen.

### **Offering and song - Ashburton**

#### **Closing prayer / Sending out - Cath**

We are God's seeds of hope  
Rain soaked and lovingly planted  
Let us grow together to provide the fruits of justice  
Soil that offers new life  
And reconcile the whole creation.