



26 NOVEMBER 2023



Welcome to church this morning, we hope you enjoy being with us. A special welcome to Stephen Rafalo, Student Well-Being Officer at Holroyd High School, who will be sharing with us this morning.

Lectionary Readings

This week 26 November, 2023

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24
Psalm 100
Ephesians 1:15-23
Matthew 25:31-46

Next week 3 December, 2023

Isaiah 64:1-9
Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19
1 Corinthians 1:3-9
Mark 13:24-37

Christmas Collection

Thank you to those who have already donated Christmas food items for our Hands and Feet clients. We will be collecting these for a few more weeks, please place any items you would like to donate in the basket at the back of the church.

The last day for donations will be Sunday 10 December.

Christmas Picnic

Our Child Care Centre is having a Christmas Picnic on Friday 8th December with a sausage sizzle, items from the children and a few carols; we are hoping our puppets will also be making an appearance.

You would be most welcome to come along from 5.30—7.30pm, please let Sue know by next Sunday 3 December for catering purposes if you are planning to attend. Don't forget to byo chairs or picnic rug.

Frontier Services Christmas Cards

We have some Christmas Cards available from Frontier Services. They are \$8 for a pack of 10 cards, 2 each of 5 designs. All money raised will support the work of Frontier Services with those who live in outback Australia. Please see Sue to purchase your cards.





Greystanes Uniting Church

Cnr Cumberland & Eldridge Roads (P O Box 5064)

Greystanes NSW 2145

Minister: Rev Gail Hinton 0407 269 162

revgail@greystanesuniting.org.au

Office Phone: 9636 3245

Email: office@greystanesuniting.org.au

Website: www.greystanesuniting.org.au

A Toxic Image of God

Throughout November we have been confronted with some tough Parables. We have listened to a trifecta of stories in Matthew 25, that appear to be frightening the reader into accepting God. Last week I suggested that this kind of theology no longer holds any influence over today's more enlightened population, although I now wonder about that. I am much more certain that using fear tactics to evangelise is not only poor theology, but also ingenuine and emotionally manipulative. In the excerpt below from an article by Father Richard Rohr, the dangers of poor theological thinking are highlighted. I hope and pray that his reflection enlightens you and helps you grapple with November's difficult texts from the gospel of Matthew.

Your image of God creates you. This is why it is so important that we see God as loving and benevolent and why good theology is still important. One mistaken image of God that keeps us from receiving grace is the idea that God is a cruel tyrant. People who have been raised in an atmosphere of threats of punishment and promises of reward are programmed to operate with this cheap image of God. They need deep healing because they are actually attached to a punitive notion of God. Many experienced this foundational frame for reality as children, and it is hard to let go. It gives a kind of sick coherence to their world. Unfortunately, it's much easier to organize people around fear and hatred than around love. Most people who want to hold onto power view God as vindictive and punitive. Powerful people actually prefer this worldview because it validates their use of intimidation. Both Catholicism and Protestantism have used the threat of eternal hellfire to form Christians. I am often struck by the irrational anger of many people when they hear that someone does not believe in hell. Threat of hellfire "works" because it appeals to the lowest level of consciousness, where we all start. Much of Christian history has manifested a very different god than the one Jesus revealed and represented. Jesus tells us to love our enemies, but this "cultural" god sure doesn't. Jesus tells us to forgive "seventy times seven" times, but this god doesn't. Instead, this god burns people for all eternity. Many of us were raised to believe this, but we usually had to repress this bad theology into our unconscious because it's literally unthinkable. Most humans are more loving and forgiving than such a god. We've developed an unworkable and toxic image of God that a healthy person would never trust. The mystical, transformative journey cannot take place until that image is undone. Why would you want to spend even an hour in silence, solitude, or intimacy with such a god? It seems to me that in Matthew 25, when Jesus appears to make threats of "eternal punishment," he is making strong contrasting statements about issues of ultimate significance, calling the listener to a decision.

The trouble with this passage is that we focus on the threat more than on Jesus' positive promise of "eternal life." Jesus presents the teaching first in a dualistic manner. When pressed, he explains it in a non-dual way that encourages universal compassion: "Whatever you did for one of these least brothers [and sisters] of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40). Non-dual thinkers can see that he is creating a moral equivalence between what we do to the least of the brothers and sisters and what we do to Christ. So Matthew 25 is supreme dualism overcome by supreme non-dualism. That is what we need. First do your clearheaded, rational, logical study of all sides of the issue of concern. Then you will see that the issue deserves much more subtlety than taking one side and damning all others. Non-dual thinking allows us to calmly hear, calmly detach, and calmly see from a higher level.