

Sunday Service ~ January 11, 2026

Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church

Welcome & Prayer

Welcome to church this week. Let me open our service with a call to worship from Psalm 51. This is a psalm that overlaps with some of the themes of our sermon this morning from Titus chapter 3. In order to bring people back to God we need to acknowledge the extent of our own sin and therefore how gracious God has been to forgive us.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.

Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.

Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.

O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.

Let's pray

Prayer.

Father God. We come before you this morning acknowledging that we have fallen short of your perfect standards. We have not loved you with all our hearts, souls mind and strength and we have not loved our neighbour as ourselves. We have not been good witnesses to your gospel and people who do not know Jesus have not seen Jesus reflected in our words and actions. Please forgive us Lord God. Renew us and change us through the power of your Holy Spirit. We pray that this morning as we hear your word read and explained, as we pray together and sing your praises that all that we do in our service would be honouring to our Lord and Saviour Jesus and we pray all these things in His name. Amen.

Before the Throne of God Above

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LULK2nZ6sCc>

1. Before the throne of God above
I have a strong and perfect plea:
A great High Priest whose name is Love,
Who ever lives and pleads for me.
My name is graven on his hands,
My name is written on his heart.
I know that while in Heav'n he stands
No tongue can bid me thence depart,
No tongue can bid me thence depart.

2. When Satan tempts me to despair
And tells me of the guilt within,
Upward I look and see him there,
Who made an end of all my sin.
Because the sinless Savior died,

My sinful soul is counted free,
For God the just is satisfied
To look on him and pardon me,
To look on him and pardon me.

3. Behold him there, the risen Lamb,
My perfect, spotless righteousness,
The great unchangeable I AM,
The King of glory and of grace.
One with himself I cannot die;
My soul is purchased by his blood.
My life is hid with Christ on high,
With Christ, my Savior and my God,
With Christ, my Savior and my God.

Bible Reading – 1 Peter 3:8-17

Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. ⁹Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. ¹⁰For,

“Whoever would love life
and see good days

must keep their tongue from evil
and their lips from deceitful speech.

¹¹They must turn from evil and do good;
they must seek peace and pursue it.

¹²For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous
and his ears are attentive to their prayer,
but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

¹³Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? ¹⁴But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.” ¹⁵But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. ¹⁷For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

Announcements

Focus for the Month - Prayer for Growth: As we begin the year, we want to be intentional about how we grow. Growth does not happen by accident, and spiritual growth is no exception. Throughout this month, our focus is prayer because prayer is how we depend on God rather than our own strength. We are encouraging everyone to make prayer a priority in January: carving out unhurried moments to meet with the Lord, learning to bring our needs and our hopes before him, and listening for his leading. Where possible, we also encourage prayer within households and friendships, and joining together as a church to seek God for deeper faith, renewed hearts, and the advance of the gospel. January often gives us a rare window to reset our habits. Let's use this time to lay strong foundations by growing together in prayer

Vanuatu As our team in Vanuatu finishes up their time, returning on Thursday, keep checking the facebook page for updates on the work that they are doing, and keep them in your prayers

Church Redevelopment. We are making great progress with the redevelopment, but there is still plenty of work to do. If we are going to make it back into our church building by February, we'll need a big effort from everyone. Thank you to all who have already given up weekends to be there. All abilities and skills welcome, as there are plenty of jobs. Please come on Saturdays any time between 8am-4pm and 8:30pm on Friday.

Camp: "Please join us for church camp from 6-8 March. A great weekend of learning and fun. Speaker Matt Vander Heiden from SMBC will join us. Rego closes Sun 1 Feb. Please note that tent camping spots are filled but cabin accommodation is still available. There's 2 easy ways to register – 1. Credit card - via <https://charlestownpresbyterian.square.site/> 2. Cash into the offering box – please insert cash into an envelope and include your contact details and what you are paying for. (6pm congregation can give cash payments to Liz Hyslop or Audric Sardjono) Please contact Liz Hyslop (registrar) with any questions or queries"

Communication. To receive our church bulletin via email, or to get the church directory/ roster App, Elvanto, please email Samuel.wilson@cpres.org.au

Pastoral Prayer

Pray for Jordan (Population: ~11.4 million | Christians: ~170,000) While Jordan allows historic Christian communities to worship with relative freedom, many believers still face pressure and restriction, especially those who have come to faith from a Muslim background. Converts often experience intense family opposition, social isolation, and discrimination, and sharing faith openly carries significant risk. Churches are monitored, evangelism is limited, and believers must be cautious in how they live out their faith. Pray for courage, wisdom, and perseverance for Christians in Jordan, for protection and support for converts, and that God would use his church to be a faithful witness of Christ in a region longing for peace and hope.

Pray for our Vanuatu Mission team As our Vanuatu mission team prepares to finish their time and return home on Thursday, let us pray that the Lord would keep them well and give them strength to work faithfully to the end. Pray that they would continue to be a real encouragement to the local church and leave behind lasting fruit from their service. Please also pray for safe and smooth travels home, with no delays, disruptions, or issues with flights, and for God's protection over every step of the journey.

Pray for the Applebys As the Applebys continue their work near the ongoing conflict between Thailand and Cambodia, we pray for peace—not only the absence of violence, but the deep and lasting peace that comes through faith in the gospel. Please sustain the Applebys as they navigate two particularly challenging pastoral situations, granting them wisdom, strength, and compassion. We also pray for the long-term missionaries in the region, and ask that you would renew and strengthen all gospel workers there, both local believers and missionaries, with fresh spiritual vitality, perseverance, and hope in Christ.

Pray for Redevelopment: Please pray that the Lord would sustain and strengthen all those who have been working hard to help us return to our church building. We ask that God would grant energy, unity, and perseverance to everyone involved. Pray also that the remaining work especially painting and other tasks would be completed promptly and smoothly, so that, God willing, we may be able to return to the building in February. We pray that the new space would be an opportunity to do good ministry and evangelism, so that Christ ultimately would be magnified through the space.

Bible Reading – Titus 3:1-8

Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good,² to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone.

³At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. ⁴But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. ⁸This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

Song – All I Have Is Christ

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ugGucoYMmKg>

VERSE 1

I once was lost in darkest night
Yet thought I knew the way
The sin that promised joy and life
Had led me to the grave
I had no hope that You would own
A rebel to Your will
And if You had not loved me first
I would refuse You still

VERSE 2

But as I ran my hell-bound race
Indifferent to the cost

You looked upon my helpless state
And led me to the cross
And I beheld God's love displayed
You suffered in my place
You bore the wrath reserved for me
Now all I know is grace

CHORUS

Hallelujah! All I have is Christ
Hallelujah! Jesus is my life

VERSE 3

Now, Lord, I would be Yours alone
And live so all might see

The strength to follow Your commands
Could never come from me
O Father, use my ransomed life
In any way You choose

And let my song forever be
My only boast is You

Sermon – Living as Christians in a non-Christian World

Musings of a grumpy old man (slide 1)

The other day while I was driving down the Pacific Highway I noticed a teenager riding on one wheel on his pushbike face on to the flow of cars. He wasn't wearing a helmet and the slightest swerve in the wrong direction could have resulted in him riding head on to fast moving traffic. You idiot I thought to myself. While driving on a public holiday I was overtaken by not just one but many people easily doing at least 30 over the speed limit. How can people be so stupid I again thought to myself? Not only is it double demerit points if you get caught speeding on a public holiday, but the road is busy and they are putting both their lives and the lives of others at risk. All these people were both foolish and disobedient.

Many years ago while in Auckland I walked through the Auckland casino. There were rows and rows of people joylessly pressing at buttons on pokie machines. People smoking and drinking heavily who from the look of them couldn't really afford to be gambling this money. People who weren't even enjoying what they were doing but were kept there fixated by the faint hope that the next press of the button would bring the big payout. People deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures.

What is my reaction to such people? Well if I am honest with myself when I considered the people in the Auckland casino there was some pity, but it was mixed in with an unhealthy dose of contempt as I'm sure many of them had families and dependents who were suffering because they were losing money they couldn't afford to lose. When I considered the teenager on the bike or the people speeding on a public holiday I know that if I were to see the police pulling them up to book them I would have said to myself an almighty "yes". I might have even been tempted to slow down and savour the moment of seeing the guy with the red P plates being busted by the police and losing his licence. In short my responses to the foolish and disobedient, to those enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures is more likely to be one of malice and hatred than one of consideration and humility.

1. In groups and out groups (slide 2)

Why is this the case? Well firstly I am a sinner and as such my natural tendency is to conform to the world's values rather than those of the kingdom of God. But this is the point that I want to draw out of looking at this passage in Titus chapter 3. In just 2 verses, verses 3 and 4, Paul describes the world that we live in. Look around you. Every where you look you see people who are foolish and disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We also live in a world that that is characterized by us and them, the in group and the out group. Each in group responds to the out groups with malice (that is wishing evil on the out group) and envy (that is coveting any good that the out group might have). Each group hates those who are not of the group and they are in turn hated right back by those in other groups. Next time you go to the beach you can usually see an example, a microcosm if you will, of what I'm talking about. Have a look at the group of teenagers sitting closely together radiating contempt towards anyone who is not part of their group. If you don't believe me then try going up to them and saying "hey do you mind if I sit with you guys?"

The danger is that when we become Christians all we are doing is forming a new in group. The Christian in group. Hopefully we are not characterized by the foolishness, disobedience, and being deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures of the non Christian out group. However, I'm afraid that too often we respond to non Christians with malice and envy. Also too easily our response to the hatred that is expressed towards us by non Christians is also one of hatred. They hate us and we hate them right back. (slide 3) How else can you explain scenes such as these? And believe me these are the edited slides that were fit to show a congregation containing children. Yes there is no doubt Christians are ignored and treated contemptuously by many politicians at all levels of government. (slide 4) Christians are hated and even reviled by those in the gay lobby. Christians are opposed and undermined by extreme Islamic groups. (slide 5) But what should our response be towards the foolish and disobedient, to those deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures, to those living in malice and envy being hated and hating one another?

2. The Christian response to malice, envy and hatred (slide 6)

Titus 3 verse 1 – Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate and to show true humility toward all men.

Let me suggest one way this might work in an Australian context. **(slide 7)** Much as this may cause us pain, Christians should not join in with what is almost an Australian pastime of bad mouthing our politicians. We may not agree with what they do or say but they are still our rulers and authorities. And lest we think that our politicians are so bad that they must be aggressively resisted, bear in mind that Paul wrote this letter during the reign of the emperor Nero, who in addition to murdering many of his rivals to the throne, was also known for having captured Christians burned in his garden at night for a source of light. This is not to say that Christians should just roll over and take it on the chin in all political discourse. It is OK to express a Christian world view and even to oppose legislation that we think is either foolish or opposed to God's law. But it is the way we oppose that makes all the difference. We are to do so in a way that doesn't seek to slander or ridicule those opposed to us. In a way that is peaceable and not aggressive and argumentative. We should be considerate and show true humility to **all** men, even the ones who hate us. You see the way we respond to opposition actually makes the gospel more or less attractive to non Christians.

If we respond to hatred with hatred, to ridicule with ridicule then we are just following the pattern of the world. But as Peter writes in chapter 3 vs 9 when we repay evil with blessing then this actually adorns the message of the gospel. The world is watching us. What makes Christianity truly different and makes the gospel profoundly attractive is not how vigorously we assert our rights but how we bear up under suffering. In short how we follow the command of Jesus himself to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us.

(slide 8)

Another application that I have been challenged to consider from this passage is my attitude to sin in other people. When I turn on the news or read the papers it is so easy to settle in to a state of self righteous indignation about all the evil in the world. When you see stories of people living in defiant opposition to God do you frown and say to yourself "that's disgraceful" or "isn't that typical" or even "how can people even think of doing things like that". In many ways the media encourages me to develop such an attitude. Think of half of the stories on shows like A Current Affair and how they try to whip the viewer into a state of moral outrage. "Tonight on a Current Affair we expose the dole bludging tax cheats who burn the Australian flag as they smoke their drugs." But Paul will not allow me to get away with such an attitude. Firstly and somewhat uncomfortably he reminds me that I too was once foolish disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of

passions and pleasures. Living in malice and envy, being hated and hating other people. Do I really believe that? Do I really believe that's what I was like before I became a Christian or do I think that deep down I was just a bit better than all that? And lest I think that I can congratulate myself for pulling myself out of that condition by my own bootstraps then Paul will have none of this either.

But when the kindness of God our Saviour appeared he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour so that having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying.

Because of his mercy. Justified by his grace. Do I really believe this? Paul certainly does. The phrase *this is a trustworthy saying* probably refers backwards to verses 3-7 and his way of emphasizing the truth of what he was been saying.

Although there is some dispute about the true origins of this phrase, the English reformer John Bradford is said to have witnessed a group of prisoners being led to their execution and remarked, "There, but for the grace of God, goes John Bradford." Bradford understood that all the events in his life that led to him **not** being executed as a criminal – a relatively well off family, a good education at a grammar school and then Cambridge University, conversion due to contact and preachings of another student were all acts of pure grace. He didn't deserve any of these things. He hadn't done anything to make these things happen. In modern English the phrase has been adapted to there but for the grace of God go I. Do I really believe this? When I am confronted with the most vile evil in other people do I allow myself to well up with self righteous anger, or do I pause and thank God for His amazing grace that has saved a wretch like me.

You see what this passage is not saying is be nice to everyone because people deep down are not that bad. People deep down really **are** that bad and possibly even worse than we imagine. What it is saying is that if it were not for the grace of God I would not be any better and therefore I should respond to sin in others with humility and consideration. Even the vilest sinner is not beyond the grace of God – the murderer, the rapist, the paedophile, all of these can be and have been changed through the power of God's Holy spirit which (verse 5) he pours out generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour. **(slide 9)** When the Bondi shooter is sent to jail for life will you also hope that he suffers horribly in prison or even join in the chorus of people wanting to reinstate the death penalty? Or will you pray that

God will bring him to repentance and faith in Jesus? This isn't to say he doesn't deserve punishment for his crimes. Of course he does but what if he repents and becomes a Christian? Will we be disappointed in some way. Do we feel that there are some people that are beyond saving?

3. Beyond response – doing what is good (slide 10)

But there is a final challenge that Paul presents to us in our passage from Titus. I have been arguing that the way we interact with, talk and even think about non Christians should be profoundly different to how they interact with, talk and think about us and each other. I guess you could say that a big focus of what I have been talking about has been to how we should respond to non Christians in what is mainly a non Christian world. Expressed negatively we are *not* to respond to non Christians as though they are an out group that must be vigorously resisted, slandered and opposed. Expressed positively we *are* to respond to non Christians by being considerate, peaceable and humble. But focusing only on how we should respond to non Christians is a very passive approach to living in a non Christian world. A focus on our response implies that the non Christian world has the all the initiative and we can only respond to it. Have a look though at the start and end of our passage. Verse 1 where Paul wants to remind the people to be ready to do whatever is good. And verse 8.

And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted themselves in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

Doing what is good. Not responding, not reacting but taking the initiative ourselves to do what? To do what is good. Matthew Henry's commentary on Titus puts it this way and please excuse the slightly archaic English he uses. "Mere harmlessness or good words and good meanings only, are not enough without good works. Not only take but seek occasion for doing good, keep fitness and readiness that way; put it not off to others, but embrace and lay hold on it thyself, delight and rejoice therein, put all in mind of this." This is not a doctrine that we are saved by good works. Rather we are saved for good works. In Ephesians 2:8-10 Paul writes:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Have a look also at Titus chapter 2 verses 11 to 14.

We are not saved by good works; we are saved so that we will do good works.

But what are these good works that I am meant to do? I think the fact that Paul and Peter do not spell this out is because it is not possible to do so. Good works could be almost anything and what they are will depend on the person involved and the resources at their disposal. It could be working tirelessly to abolish the slave trade like William Wilberforce, it could be preparing a meal for your neighbour who is sick. Good works are certainly not limited to telling people the gospel as though this is the only good work that really counts. Also it's interesting to note from our first reading in 1 Peter that the verses talking about doing good are right next to the verses about being prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. How much more attractive would the gospel be if Christians were known less for their constant opposition to things and more for their good works? More for what we are for than what we are against?

We live in a world where people are foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. Where people live in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. The way we respond to this should set us apart. We should be model citizens who engage with our society rather than just hostilely oppose it. There should be no place for a self righteous anger towards those who are lost. We need to reach out to those who are lost, to people who are just like we were before we were saved through the grace of God. An active and insatiable desire to do what is good will not only bring glory to God, it will also make the message of the gospel itself more attractive.

Slide 11

The next time I'm overtaken by a red P Plater doing 100 in a 60 zone, how will I respond? Will I recall that when I was on my P Plates I too drove dangerously and recklessly? Will I pray that God will show him the same mercy that he showed me by not letting him get killed before he can hear the gospel and respond to it? Will I actively look for opportunities to do good even if it's unlikely that we meet again? I have to confess that when I prepared this sermon I felt a lot of shame as certainly my wife will tell you I can be one of the grumpiest drivers on the road. This has not been helped when 2 years ago I spent 6 weeks in a moon boot after being knocked off my bike by a driver who didn't understand how roundabouts work. So do I just need to try harder? Notice how the first word of the Titus passage is Remind. I think the word remind carries through to all the commands in the passage. We need to remind ourselves that we were far worse than we can imagine. We need to remind ourselves of the extraordinary cost God paid to save us and therefore we need to be reminded that we have been saved by grace and

grace alone. And lets not just remind ourselves. Lets remind one another of God's amazing grace. So lets finish our service today with the song When I survey the wondrous cross.

Song – When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ErwiBz1QA4o>

1 When I survey the wondrous cross
on which the Prince of glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.

2 Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
save in the death of Christ, my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them through his blood.

3 See, from his head, his hands, his feet,
sorrow and love flow mingled down.
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown?

4 Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were a present far too small.
Love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all.

Benediction

So let's devote ourselves to good works not just individually but also corporately. In 2026 may our church be known as a place where the people who attend are humble because they know that it is by grace alone that they have become Christians. Let's reach out to people who as yet do not know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. May we appreciate the price that was paid so that we become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen