## Opening Prayer

Dear Father, we don't presume to enter your presence, but for the gracious actions of your Son on our behalf. It is upon the privileges He brought about for us that we come to you today, and ask that you receive us, receive our worship, and hear our prayers, and for this privilege we now give you our grateful thanks, in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Amen.

## Hymn *by C Wesley (T Richmond Thomas Hawes 1734-1820)*

1) O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's [raise,
   The glories of our God and King, the triumphs of His grace!
2) Jesus! the name that charms our fears, that bids our sorrows cease,
   'tis music in the sinner's ears, 'tis life, and health, and peace.
3) He breaks the power of cancelled sin, He sets the prisoner free;
   His blood can make the foulest clean, His blood availed for me.
4) He speaks and listening to His voice, new life the dead receive,
   The mournful, broken hearts rejoice, the humble poor believe.
5) My gracious Master, and my God, assist me to proclaim,
   To spread through all the earth abroad the honours of your name.

## Readings:

- Psalm 2
- Romans 8:28-39

## Prayers:

Dear Father, we have been exhorted to pray for the world.

We pray for Ukraine and for the endurance for the people there, many of whom we believe look to you in their faith – have mercy upon them Father, and intervene in some way, to alleviate their pain. Strengthen them in faith and endurance, and enable the helps offered by so many Western countries to be effective.

We see threats and warnings between Iran and America which have great potential for harm. We remember Psalm 2, and the authority which lies in your hands, and believe in your power over the feuding and bad intentions of human kings and trouble-makers.

In the Middle East the troubles are historical and ancient, going back to the time of Ishmael and Isaac, but you have always supervened in strife between them and their descendants; do so again we pray, and let the world see again the power and justice that has always been the evidence of your presence!

We thank you for the privilege of living in Australia, far from many of these confrontations; our problem lies more with the risks of affluence and presumption! Grant that our leaders will be led into conducting our affairs in wisdom and good judgment; may they receive wisdom and apply good management as they govern our country.

And now continue to lead us in our worship: make us teachable as let us hear your voice in the remainder of our time together. For we pray in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus the Christ. Amen

## Hymn *by Horatius Bonar (T Vox dilecti J.B.Dykes 1823-76)*

1) I heard the voice of Jesus say" Come unto me and rest,
lay down, thou weary one, lay down thy head against my breast"!
I came to Jesus as I was, weary and worn and sad,
I found in Him a resting place, and He has made me glad.

2) I heard the voice of Jesus say "Behold I freely give the living water,
thirsty one, stoop down, and drink, and live"!
I came to Jesus, and I drank of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived, and now I live in Him.

3) I heard the voice of Jesus say "I am this dark world's light;
look unto Me thy morn shall rise, and all thy day be bright"!
I looked to Jesus, and I found in Him my star, my sun,
and in that light of life I'll walk till travelling days are done.

## Message: The anger of man (and God's answer)

Our 1st reading today, from the 2nd psalm, makes one issue very clear – God is sovereign! There are many within the ranks of humankind who become angry at the very idea of *that* fact – as the psalmist himself was quite aware! The psalm speaks of the leaders of humanity complaining about that fact, and planning an insurrection! And at that – the psalmist tells us – God laughs!

He "scoffs at them" the NASB puts it, and He will speak to them in His "wrath". (This contrasts with our modern church always speaking of the "love of God" as if He is more like a doting *Grandfather in heaven.*) So there is something a little alarming about the tenor of the psalm. But as the psalm continues we see it is speaking about God's Vice-regent, His King, reigning in holiness from the "hill of Zion" where the temple was built, the traditional place where God was supposed to dwell. But of course the psalm warns humanity that to fight against God is to smash yourself like "a potter's brittle clay vessel" would smash against a rock – thoroughly in pieces!

I think the truth is that anger against God is very *common*. It used to be more subtle, like a subdued murmur. The people of Israel used to *"murmur"* against Moses – whom God called to lead His people out of their slavery in Egypt. They had forgotten what God through Moses had done for them – they had been slaves, and been treated accordingly, but human memory is prone to push away the recollection of unpleasant situations.

Occasionally there had been open rebellion, as his sister Miriam, as well as Aaron, did – they grumbled against Moses, as we read in Numbers 12, and it is almost amusing – "the Lord heard it". Miriam and Aaron were appropriately disciplined! Later there was another open revolt, led by Korah, Dothan and Abiram together with 250 leaders, who set themselves against Moses and Aaron saying "Why do you exalt

yourselves above the assembly of the Lord – we are "all" holy"! Moses was alarmed and fell on his face before God, and said to them "No, it is *you* that have gone too far! In the morning, come before the Lord with your censers and incense. It is against the Lord that you and your company have gathered". And Dothan and his cronies only increased their criticism "…you have brought us out of a land flowing with "milk and honey" (Oh they had forgotten all right!), "to kill us in the wilderness! You have not brought us to a good place." God was displeased! The next morning the rebels fronted up with their censers, and God sent a fierce judgment on the rebels. (I suggest read Numbers 16 ***aloud***)

History contains many other voices raised against God, such as Thomas Jefferson, 3rd President of United States: "The Christian God is a being of terrific character – cruel, vindictive, capricious and unjust!" More recently Professor Richard Dawkins has distinguished himself by loud criticism of the Jewish and Christian God. He says: "The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sado-masochistic, capriciously malevolent, bully!" *(The God Delusion)* Is this not just *human anger*? Cardinal George Pell raised a good question in a Christian broadcast some years ago "Why is it that the new atheists get ***so angry*** about the God they say doesn't exist?"

But how could you be *certain* that God doesn't exist? And if that is not actually possible, at best they can only be agnostic, can't they? But it is my experience that those who are proud of being an "agnostic" *don't seem to search very hard for God*!

Some years ago, we had a year of major extreme weather events!

There were the biggest floods in Queensland for many years, largest cyclone in Australia ever (Yasi), 2nd deadliest tornado in N America for years, largest earthquake in NZ for years (Christchurch), largest tsunami in Japan for years, and I thought, as I think many Christians should have been asking themselves, "What is God trying to tell us?"

We have people who give us very trite explanations – "it's just la Ninya!" or "it's just climate change!", or "we must tax carbon to save the planet!" When Yasi occurred, some people wrote angry letters in the paper! "Where was God?" wrote a columnist – "these hypocritical Christians don't have an answer!" *But how many noticed*, in the biggest cyclone ever – category 5 with over 100 mile front, that Yasi didn't kill a *single person*?

That very day I had received an email from a Christian Minister in Ingham. "Pray – pray for a change of direction, or a slowing of the cyclone, and for protection of the people!" And I had! – probably among 1000s of others! And this same Minister later said "Praise our awesome God – the hurricane altered direction – not a single life was lost from the hurricane!" *(Wasn't God right there, right then, saving life?)*

So the anger of humanity has raised the subject of human suffering, because accusations have been raised against the God they claim allows or causes bad things to happen. So we should weigh their arguments carefully and see whether the arguments stack up.

1) Most suffering is caused by… *us*! The Creation story tells us that everything was "very good" in the beginning! (Gen 1:31) Then came the "fall" – *sounds* like an accident doesn't it? But it *reads* quite unlike an accident –

more like deliberate disobedience and rebellion. Many things resulted which were *not* good! Guilt….shame…anxiety…distrust, and also *pain and death* - a "Pandora's box full" of trouble.

But the story from the ancient and remarkable Scriptures, greatly abbreviated, includes – Messiah was promised and *has come*, to bring about eventually full restoration – and in the fullness of time – "death will be no more – nor will there be mourning, or sorrow, or pain". (Rev 21:4) And there will be a new heaven and a new earth. All essentially undeserved.

So why do we blame God for our troubles?

C.S Lewis points out that it was men and not God who have produced wracks, whips, prisons, slavery, guns, bayonets and bombs! And that it is not by the churlishness of nature, but by our own stupidity that we have much poverty and overwork.

2) Someone has said "God could prevent starvation if He wished." There has <u>*always*</u> been enough food in the world. Mahatma Ghandi said "The world has always had enough food for its need – but not for its greed." So how should God fix that – perhaps by removing our free will? That might stop us being selfish – but who would be the first to complain? I heard once on the ABC that ⅓ of all food that is prepared to eat in this world is thrown away. But we blame God for starvation!
3) Then there is all the avoidable and self-inflicted disease and suffering in this world e.g. AIDS is a world-wide scourge arising initially from immoral behaviour. And the world is demanding a cure – *without a change of behaviour*. In our modern Australia OBESITY now affects 1 in 2 Australians – who can we blame for that?

C.S. Lewis estimated that 80% of human suffering was produced by the wickedness of men. Almost certainly that has not changed!

I think we have some understanding of human anger – we have all manifested it from time to time. What is God's answer for it?

It is the same answer as for our lostness. <u>*He sent His Messiah to rescue us.*</u> He has given us a colossal gift! St Paul tells us in Titus 3:3-8 *"…but when the goodness and lovingkindness of God our Saviour appeared, He saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but by virtue of His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit which He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that we might be justified by His grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life. The saying is sure!"*

THAT, my friends, is the Gospel. His love melts our hearts and our anger. "It is God's <u>*kindness*</u> that leads us to repentance." (Rom 2:4)

So there is only one answer to all the questions about the anger (and the suffering) of humanity – *the Cross of Christ!* Our God is a *suffering God* – He suffered more, in His Son, on our behalf, than any other human suffering in history! And that is the measure of His love for us. And when we understand that …. our anger melts. Our reason for anger has gone.

"Paul Drake" was a public patient who strode into my outpatients one day, a tall fit American, 6' 7", 16 stone, normally proportioned, and asked "What is

it Doc?" (He was a straight talker!) He pointed to a small lump in the root of his left side of his neck. He was totally asymptomatic otherwise.

The lump was a single, firm, non-tender, sl. ovoid, mobile mass. I said "probably an enlarged lymph node!" He asked "Good news or bad?" I said "probably bad!" and mentioned 2 most likely things – (any one remember Troisier's sign, and Virchow's node?) – so I thought of metastasis of carcinoma (esp stomach) or lymphoma!

I said "We can find out this morning".

Thanks to a resident Swedish Assoc. Professor of Pathology – we called him "one cell Orell" – we were able to get an answer in 5-10 minutes. While we waited, I found out more of his story. He was an *angry man*! He hated doctors and hospitals! He had had a pain syndrome of some sort in one arm for which he had had a procedure at another hospital, but it had not helped him. So he had been "black-listed" and couldn't get a job. Also he had had a "friend" who had advised him to how to invest money in a "sure thing" investment – it had failed and he had lost the whole investment.

After a few minutes the phone rang. It was Svante Orell who said "I believe it is an adenocarcinoma probably from the upper GIT". Definitely bad news! It was a metastasis, therefore he was incurable!

I said we could give local RT to the lesion and shrink it, and this happened. After that, as his primary lesion was asymptomatic, and because he hated hospitals and doctors, we could offer no cure. I suggested he stay away (as I thought he would anyway) and that he could come back if he had any problem! And that's what he did.

I called in to see him at home afterwards. He was quite happy to see me at home. So I called a few times. I found out that his wife had early MS, and was having trouble getting around the house – I was able to put her in contact with a group who got her a motorised wheel chair. We talked about a lot of things. One day I said "You print 'In God We Trust' on your money in America – we don't do that." and he said "Oh they don't trust him too much any more". So I said "So you did, a bit, did you?"

Soon we were talking about such things. He said he was a "lapsed" Catholic. By the end of that discussion we were agreeing that God was both *good* and *just*! That surprised me.

He had been in trouble with the law. He had spent some time "detained at her Majesty's pleasure" (curious phrase). He seemed to enjoy talking and I got to know his family a bit. I visited him quite a few times and prayed for him sometimes. He seemed grateful for that.

He came back to Flinders after about 6 months due to vomiting. A laparotomy revealed he had a cancer of the stomach, and I did the least invasive procedure I could, a conservative gastrectomy, relieved his obstruction and solved his vomiting.

It was another 6 months or so before he came back again. He had lost a lot of weight and was dehydrated, so I put him into the ward for a saline drip. I introduced him to my new registrar, Don, who was also an American. Paul greeted him, then asked me in his characteristically straight manner "Am I dying Doc?" Don and I looked at each other - how to break bad news to patients! I answered "Yes, Paul. But our times are not in our hands –

you know whose hands they are in." And Paul sat up, leaned forwards, and grasped my hand and smiled. And we went on with the ward round.

It was a very busy day and I got home after 11 pm. I was tired, and slept like a log – but some time which *seemed* like the middle of the night I found myself wide awake, and wasn't sure why. I was a little dry so had a drink and lay awake for probably the best part of an hour. Paul's face was in front of me, and he was smiling so I prayed for him. This was in Crafers and it was winter, yet it seemed not to be cold! And it seemed as if there was no ceiling – heaven was open – it was so easy to hold Paul up to God: so I did, until I heard the cuckoo clock call 5, then his face faded and I fell asleep. Later that morning I headed up South Road to Flinders for the morning OP session, at the conclusion of which Don asked me "Want to make round?" (In those days I saw every patient every day). As we headed off he said "By the way, Paul Drake died at 5 o'clock this morning." Don told me that Paul had summoned the Catholic chaplain that afternoon and received the eucharist. (Funny how patients seemed to know they are dying!)

So if you asked me "what was that all about?" I would have to say "I don't know." But I *am sure* that the Good Shepherd *knew*. I think He was rounding up a "stray"! God fully dissolved the anger of Paul Drake – he understood God's kindness which had led this man to repentance, just as St Paul told us it would. Our God is very kind! Amen.

## 4th hymn: by W.Y. Fullerton (T Londonderry Air 1855)

1. I cannot tell why He who angels worship should set His love upon the heart of men,
Or why, as Shepherd he should seek the wanderers to bring them back, they know not how or when
But this I know, that He was born of Mary, when Bethl'em's manger was his only home,
And that He lived at Nazareth and laboured, and so the Saviour, Saviour of the world is come.

2. I cannot tell how silently He suffered, as with His peace He graced this place of tears,
Or how His heart upon the Cross was broken, the crown of pain for three and thirty years.
But this I know, He heals the broken-hearted, and stays our sin and calms our lurking fear,
And lifts the burden from the heavy-laden, for yet the Saviour, Saviour of the world is here.

3. I cannot tell how all the lands will worship, when at His bidding every storm is stilled,
Or who can say how great the jubilation when all the hearts of men with love are filled.
But this I know, the skies will thrill with rapture, and myriad, myriad human voices sing,
And earth to heaven, and heaven to earth will answer,
At last the Saviour, Saviour of the world is King.

## Benediction:

Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

*This service was prepared by Neil McIntosh (M.B.B.S. F.R.A.C.S.) for HopeNet SA*