

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity



“Good Samaritan in Tibet”
Artist: Frank Wesley (1923-2002) ©

**CULTIVATING FRIENDSHIP IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF
GRATITUDE; PREVENTING FURTHER VIOLENCE: THE
CONTRIBUTION OF MEDITATION TO UNITY AND
PEACE.**

Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture.

Wednesday 15 May 2024.

As portrayed in the image above, the theme of this 2024 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity focuses on what is essential.

<https://www.ncca.org.au/faith-and-unity-resources>

The Creator's vision is that we choose to be loving friends with God and one another on this beautiful planet, always grateful for the gift of life. Contemplating this vision, within the gift of each new day, is a source of bounteous gratitude.

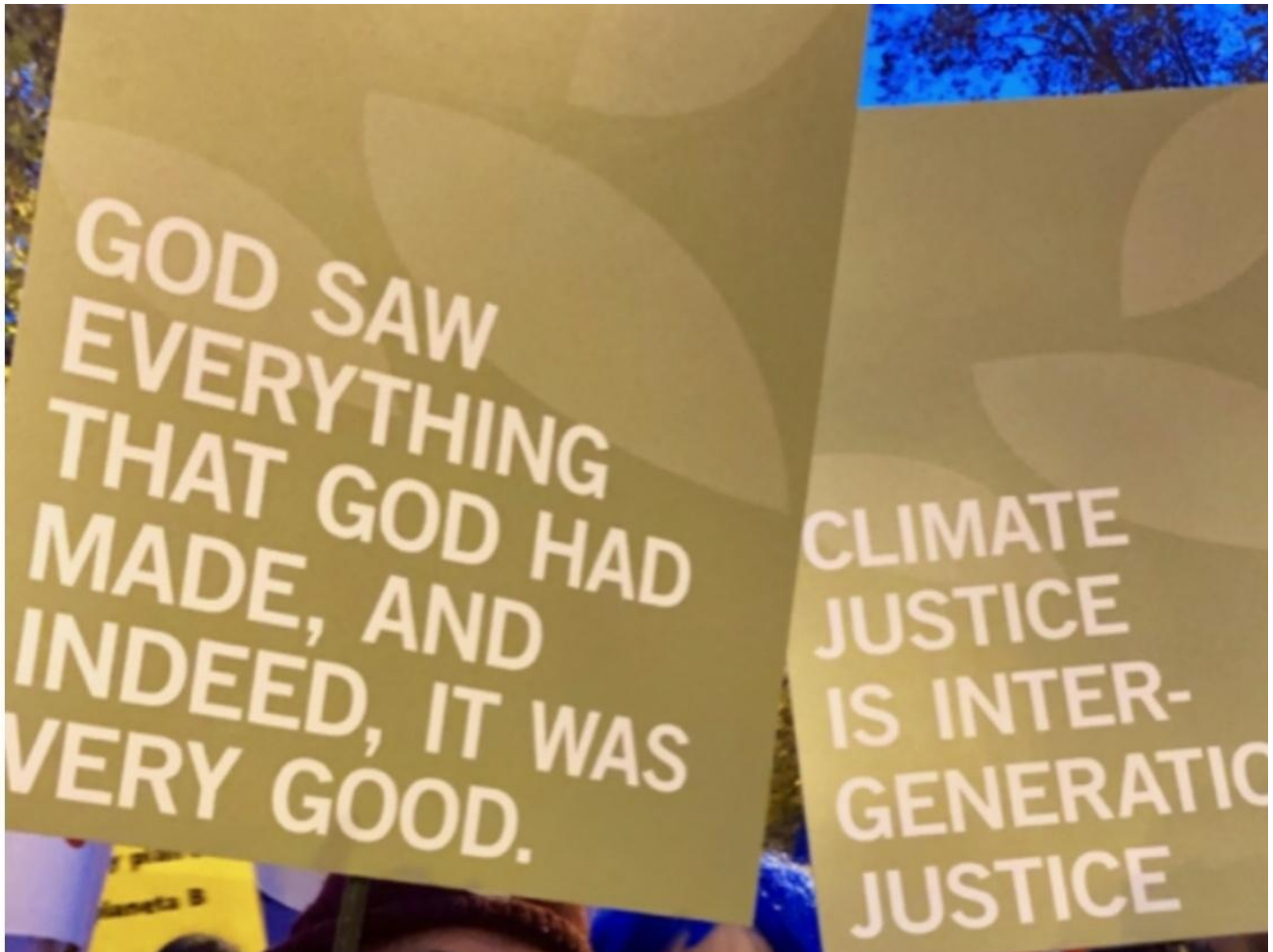
Contemplating, we then help ourselves notice the good things in our life. This accords with the knowledge we now have as regards the 'neuroscience of gratitude'.

Contemplating the good things in our life helps us overcome any 'negative bias' by which we otherwise, sadly, habituate ourselves to paying more attention to the bad. The habit of mostly noticing the negative distorts our perceptions. Life is generally not as bad as is the portrayal on Evening TV News!

Quiet contemplation helps us keep things in perspective. As we practice gratitude, we can help others to notice the good things in their lives. It is contagious and makes us all happier.

The neuroscience of gratitude accords with the Creator's vision, as conveyed in ancient texts.

<https://www.orlaithosullivan.com/superwateringpower>



[Poster quote from Genesis 1.at Climate Change Rally.]

When we are quietly grateful, we help other people to notice good things, in a friendly way.

And the more friendly our daily life ,the more hopeful we feel about the future!

Remembering these simple realities seems currently very relevant.

Here are three reasons:

Firstly, the commentary that surrounds the Federal Budget is a noise of dissatisfaction and 'negative bias'. My cousin is writing of the courage and fortitude of our farming forebears. They had no expectation that some Government would give them buckets of money that would solve all their problems.

The noise now is of rights and expectations around Government funding .It feeds a mood of endless complaint. In the process, we diminish the scope for there to be stable Government. Especially as ,it seems, patterns of relentless negativity are proving to be electorally beneficial.

<https://johnmenadue.com/dutton-rising-the-power-of-constant-attack/>

The 'power of constant attack' is and will continue to make it harder to co-operate together, in bipartisan fashion, on crucial matters. Including on how we prevent catastrophic climate change in this crucial decade for decisive action, as evidenced in the latest IPCC report: <https://www.ipcc.ch/>

Secondly, a negative bias makes social cohesion much more problematic. Public commentary as regards the

Israel/Gaza conflict has vividly strained our social cohesion. Last week I helped facilitate a time of Multifaith Prayer and Meditation for Unity, Cohesion and Peace. It was held in the Victorian State Parliament and was quite beautiful. But ,because of current tensions, this was much more difficult to organise than earlier such gatherings. And I speak as someone who has been involved in this kind of activity for decades.



Silence for meditation and for contemplative listening to each other's faithful prayers cultivated a unifying spirit and a fruit in gratefulness.

A third reason for remembering the simple realities of friendship and gratitude relates to the practice of meditation to prevent violence.

Paraphrasing, the UNESCO Constitution begins by saying that Wars[or Peace] begin in human minds. First the thought which then shapes subsequent words and actions. We are beings made with self-awareness. We are aware, at least briefly, of what we are thinking. We are free to choose what words and actions will then follow. For me, this freedom reflects the humility of our Creator who, as a matter of love, never coerces.

We cannot be free if we cannot choose, in time, what words and actions will result from our thinking.

“I don’t know what I was thinking” is a tragic lament for both the speaker and the victim of violence.

Our faith traditions encourage us to make the choices that create beauty, kindness and are carefully true.

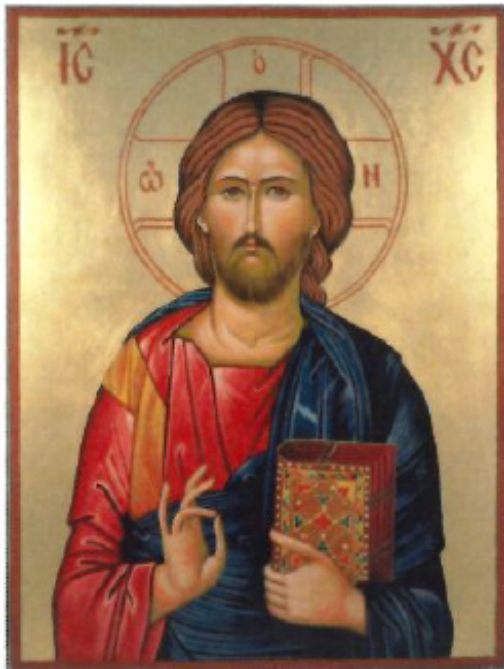
Choices that are intentionally unkind and ugly always cause sadness. Like the choice of those school boys this week at Yarra Valley Grammar School. What were they thinking?

It is in this context that I and others encourage people to meditate. It helps on the path to genuine freedom. It helps

with the integration of ‘Inner and Outer Peace.’” For me, at this stage of life, it seems the most helpful contribution I can make to the divine vision of a friendly, loving world full of grateful people!

Accordingly, this reflection concludes with a Note on what I offer in my tradition.

‘Jesus have Mercy’



We focus on saying the sacred name of Jesus.

Settle where you are comfortable.

Sitting is best. Lying down induces sleep!

Settle.

Close your eyes.

A few deep breaths to help your mind and body settle together.

Deep breaths but not to the point of strain.

When settled, simply repeat over “to Yourself” the short prayer phrase:

‘Jesus have mercy’

“Mercy“ means compassion.

Our prayer takes us into the compassionate heart of God.

The only instruction is to repeat the prayer under your breath, rather effortlessly.

When you lose the prayer, find you are thinking of other things,

gently return to praying over

“Jesus have mercy”.

Meditate this way for some 20 minutes.

Then take your time to slowly open your eyes.

Sit in silence a while.

The World Community of Christian Meditation App has a bell I use.

<https://wccm.org/>

This is an ancient technique of Christian meditation. Much is written about the Jesus Prayer or the ‘Prayer of the Heart’. You may know this already.

(There are longer versions at www.orthodoxprayer.org.)

The key is to practise the prayer.

We can pray ***‘Jesus have mercy’*** anywhere, including whilst we are walking, even swimming! It is simple, yet profound, like Holy Communion.

Over time, as a matter of grace, we may find the prayer is praying in us and has rather descended from the top of our head into our heart. Hence, sometimes the prayer is called

“The Prayer of the Heart”.

TWO REASONS FOR PRAYING ‘JESUS HAVE MERCY’

1. A Pragmatic Reason

We do become what we think. Our thoughts shape our words and actions. We therefore must be careful regarding what we think about and what we let influence our thinking.

We are blessed with the capacity of self-awareness – the capacity to be aware of what we are thinking.

When we become aware of thoughts that are not our highest – that is, are not the most true, the kindest and most beautiful – we then can insert into our thinking ***‘Jesus have Mercy’*** before we lose that self-awareness and just become absorbed in lesser and more negative thinking.

The crucial choice is to heal and not to harm...to give and forgive.

The human mind can become a closed system – rather totalitarian – unless we practice our gift of self-awareness. Destructive and self-destructive acts can follow if people get trapped in their thinking. Sometimes people look back and say, *“What was I thinking?”*

Praying inwardly ***‘Jesus have Mercy’***, is a circuit breaker that allows us to retain a greater freedom to choose what we will keep thinking about, then say and do.

At this pragmatic level, the Jesus Prayer is available for anyone and everyone to practice. No presumption of faith is required. Just a readiness, perhaps born of necessity, to follow the logic of these pragmatic statements. That many more are feeling some greater necessity to try such a practice seems an accurate reading of this period of heightened anxiety and uncertainty.

Necessity has a long track record and goes back to moments in the Gospels when desperate people called out, in varied ways ***‘Jesus have mercy’*** as Jesus passed by.

(Matthew 20:30-34; Luke 18:38-39; Matthew 15:22; Mark 10:47-48)

These folk knew they needed help and had the hope that Jesus might be able to help, which He did, as a matter of divine compassion.

2. A Second Reason to pray continually ***‘Jesus have mercy’*** pertains to divine communion

There is such power and beauty in the name of Jesus. The New Testament says this is the name above all names. (Philippians 2:9)

Mysteriously and wonderfully, because of the resurrection, there is a relationship between Name and Presence.

As we speak Jesus' name, we can become aware of the presence of the Risen Jesus, in Holy Spirit. This was and is Jesus' promise to us. (Matthew 18:20)

The Gospel of Matthew closes with the Risen Jesus saying to the disciples and to us all,
“And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20).

Accordingly, as we pray ***‘Jesus have Mercy’***, other promises of Jesus take on greater vitality.

***“Come to me all who labour and are heavy laden and
I will give you rest.”*** (Matthew 11:28)

One last suggestion in this very visual age:



I have pictures of loved ones where I pray. I look at them each as I pray

‘Jesus have mercy’.

I also do this as images appear of places, species and people in need in our global human family. Such images draw me to pray '*Jesus have Mercy*'. Each of us have matters laid on our hearts. Some we hold in common. Some are more personal.

This service of deeper, sustained prayer and meditation is what we are all requested to offer.

I have shared here what I find helpful. We are encouraged to each pray and meditate as best we can.

Bishop Philip Huggins

