



# Kaurihohore Historic Church

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## Kaurihohore / Kamo Co-operating Parish

**Sunday 15 May 2022 – Easter 5**

*Our service today is led Mike Nielsen, one of our Lay Preachers*

We are saddened that we are unable to welcome those into our midst who do not have Vaccine Passes. We will continue to provide emailed, posted or hand-delivered service outlines for those unable to participate in person, and also to find creative ways of doing Church so all are included in some way.

### **Welcome**

### **Call to Worship:**

As the sun rises in the morning,

**let all creation worship God.**

From the highest mountains to the deepest seas,

**let all creation proclaim the name of the Lord,  
for God alone is worthy to be praised.**

God alone makes all things new.

**All praise, glory, and honour be yours, forever.**

### **Opening prayer**

Gracious and loving God,  
you meet us where we are.

We gather together from many walks of life,  
but we are unified as one heart in the body of Christ.

In our time of worship,  
open our ears to hear your voice;  
open our eyes to see your glory;  
open our minds to receive your word;  
open our hearts to perceive your presence.

Amen.

[Scripture reading: Psalm 148](#)

[Hymn HFTC 13: \*All creatures of our God and king\*](#)

### **Prayer for the Strength to Include:**

Living God, when we find ourselves judging or comparing, ranking or criticising, show us the way of Jesus.

**Jesus gave women an equal place in a male-dominated society.**

**Jesus showed the worth of poor people where the rich were powerful leaders.**

**Jesus showed compassion to foreigners.**

**Jesus showed the importance of children.**

**Jesus showed the value of those who were ready to forgive.**

Are we ready to do the same?

**Amen**

**Scripture readings:** [Acts 11: 1-18](#)  
[Revelation 21: 1-6](#)

[Hymn: \*Sing a new world into being\*](#)

[Gospel reading: John 13: 33-35](#)

### **Reflection**

If you were here two weeks ago you saw the Bible Project video that Kimberley shared explaining the second part of the book of Acts, which is where we still find ourselves in today's reading.

The early movement of Jesus is expanding out into Judea and Samaria, just like Jesus said it would.

Peter has travelled from Jerusalem to visit some of these new Jesus followers, and is in Joppa, staying with a tanner called Simon in a house beside the Mediterranean Sea.

One morning, Peter goes up onto the roof of Simon's house to pray. As it's getting close to midday Peter, like most of us, is starting to get hungry, so he asks for something to eat.

While others are preparing lunch, God surprises Peter with a vision. Peter sees heaven opening up and a large sheet being lowered to earth – as it gets closer to him Peter sees the sheet is filled with all kinds of wild animals, reptiles, birds... and God tells Peter to get up, kill, and eat them.

Peter is shocked – he can't eat these animals – as a devout Jew, to eat such an animal would make him unclean, impure. Surely God can't be asking him to do that? He says as much to God, and God responds by saying "Never consider unclean what God has made pure."

This happens three times, then the sheet is pulled back into the sky, and Peter is left scratching his head.

Unbeknownst to Peter, a day or so earlier in Caesarea, a port town 40 kilometres up the coast from Joppa, a Roman centurion named Cornelius has also had a vision. An angel from God appears to Cornelius, who Luke, the author of Acts, says is a pious God-worshipper who always gave generously to the Jewish people. The angel tells Cornelius that his prayers and compassionate acts have been noticed, and that he should send messengers at once to Joppa to summon Peter, then gives him the address of where he's staying (Simon the tanner's house).

Cornelius immediately sends two of his servants and a loyal soldier to Joppa, and it's just as Peter emerges from his vision and is scratching his head that these men arrive, asking for Peter.

The spirit prompts Peter to go with the men, so he does.

When they get to Caesarea Peter finds that Cornelius has invited everyone, all his friends and family, everyone, and they're all there waiting for Peter.

Now Jewish law means that Peter's forbidden to enter a non-Jewish home in order to avoid ritual impurity, becoming unclean. However, he is here because his vision from God has shown them that in this new world, where Jesus is King, this is no longer the case. This was scandalous, especially considering this was the home of a Roman soldier – Cornelius would have represented everything the Jewish people hated about the Roman occupation – however it really shouldn't have been a surprise for Peter, given he'd been following Jesus for the last few years, and we all know Jesus was a frequent breaker of that rule.

So, Peter shares the good news about Jesus with Cornelius and his friends and family and, as he is doing so, the holy spirit shows up, just as it did at Pentecost for Peter and the other early disciples of Jesus, and Peter baptises them all, and then stays a few days.

Today's passage from Acts 11 picks up at this point. Peter has arrived back in Jerusalem. The scandalous story about what Peter has been up to in Caesarea has got back to the Jerusalem church, and there's a group within the church who are not happy. Now remember that the earliest disciples of Jesus were all Jewish men and women. There's what New Testament scholar Tom Wright calls a hard-line group of men within these Jewish believers who are worried that Peter has broken the Jewish law by entering the home of Cornelius, and that surely this Roman centurion and his friends and family couldn't become followers of Jesus until they'd become Jews too.

It's a real **us** and **them** situation for this hard-line group. They demand that Peter explain himself.

So, Peter does, starting with his vision of the sheet coming down from heaven filled with all these wild animals, reptiles, and birds. Peter explains that the spirit told him to make no distinction between **them** and **us**. He continues to recount what happened, then says: if God gave **them** the same gift that he gave **us** when we believed in Jesus, then who was I that I could hinder God?

The group are stunned, silenced. You could hear a pin drop.

Then suddenly, there's uproar – but they're not furious – they're praising God. The spirit has compelled Peter to radical, inclusive, love, and this group of Jewish believers realises that this is incredible! The good news really is for all!

They realise that there is no more **us** and **them** in this new topsy turvy kingdom Jesus has established. Peter's vision is proof that this is an inclusive kingdom – one where all can fully participate. And that is good news for everyone!

It was good news then, and it remains good news now. Doing away with boundaries and borders, **us** and **them**, when it comes to who's in and who's out of God's church is just as important now as it was 2000 years ago.

While this idea of an inclusive church is clearly what God has in mind, history has shown us that it's very rarely what the church has actually been. Since the time of the earliest disciples, the church has unfortunately excelled at continuing to put up boundaries, perpetuating an **us** and **them** mindset.

However, that's not what God's vision for the church is.

American pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber says: Whenever we draw lines, and we separate ourselves on this side of the line from the bad people over there, Jesus simply goes and stands on the other side of the line. Jesus always associates himself with the outcast, the ones labelled sinners, the ones the good religious people look down on and reject. And so, the only way not to be on the other side of the line from Jesus, is to stop drawing lines in the first place.

That brings me back to us, to our church, the Kaurihohore / Kamo Co-operating Parish. That term inclusive at the bottom of our service sheet means something, and is such a strong reason why our family worships here.

This congregation decided, a long time ago as I understand it, to not be line drawers. To be inclusive, including of those the wider church has unfortunately often drawn lines to exclude, such as the LGBTQ (or the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, queer) community. To be affirming of their worth and their ability to fully participate in God's kingdom. I thank God and all those who were involved in those decisions for that. I'm not sure if you know, but it is only a small minority of churches in New Zealand who have taken this stance. Such an inclusive church is not easily found.

I love our church's desire to not be line drawers. But (and there's always a but!) it's tempting to draw lines, knowingly or unknowingly, that exclude other types of people. We always have to be aware of this, it's not just a matter of making a decision to not draw lines in the past and then resting on our laurels, it's something we need to be constantly aware of, something that is at the forefront of our minds and hearts each and every day.

This inclusive vision for the church is just as relevant and radical today as it was 2000 years ago. The only way we begin to put an end to drawing lines between them and us is to learn to recognise and admit our biases and their impact on human relationships. Racism, sexism, classism, ableism, ageism, and other biased behaviours and thinking are not godly; they are motivated by fear of the other and not by love of humanity.

And it is love that Jesus, in our gospel reading today, is calling us to have for one another.

Our passage from John occurs during the last supper. Jesus has just washed his disciples' feet and predicted Judas' impending betrayal of him. It is into this situation that Jesus gives his disciples a new commandment: to love one another, just as he has loved us.

I think this is the key to continuing to be an inclusive church. This is what an inclusive church looks like. Radical, self-giving love for one another.

Scot McKnight, a New Testament scholar, says love is a great idea until the one you are called to love happens to be unlike you. Love is a great idea until you discover who your neighbours actually are. Love is a great idea until you see who actually attends your church...

He then goes on to describe what this type of love Jesus is commanding us to have for one another actually looks like: he says love is a series of prepositions. That love is a rugged commitment to be with, to be for, and unto.

To unpack what he means by that: love is a rugged commitment, it's often hard work. And it's a rugged commitment to be with people, to be there, present with them through life's joys and challenges. And it's a rugged commitment to be for people, to be their advocate, to be on their side. And it's a rugged commitment unto – we love because God loves us, and God's love transforms us into loving and holy, God-glorifying and other-oriented people.

This is what being an inclusive church is all about: following Jesus' new commandment by imitating his faithfulness in voluntarily setting aside privilege and practicing self-giving love.

That is how we make sure we do not fall into the trap of becoming a church that draws lines between us and them.

Our passage from Revelation this morning presents us within another vision, this time of the future, where once again, the lines between them and us have been done away with. In this vision the author of Revelation refers to all of humanity and creation as **them**, and God, the Trinity, are implicitly the **us**.

We see a vision of the future where God comes down from heaven to dwell with humanity and all creation, wiping every tear from every eye, death being no more, everything being made new. A future where there are no lines drawn, no borders, no **us** and **them**. God, humanity, creation, together.

Freddy quoted Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff in his service a few weeks ago: Boff says the resurrection is a process that began with Jesus and that will go on until it embraces all of creation. That's the vision that is being painted in Revelation 21. A perfect world that awaits us; a new heaven and new earth.

A creation that is not replaced, but transformed, with God dwelling amongst it. A reason for all creation to praise God, just like we heard in our psalm this morning.

That is certainly good news and something to look forward to, and in the meantime, we must strive for radical love; radical inclusion in the here and now. We must continue to strive for our church, Kaurihohore / Kamo Co-operating Parish, to truly be a church that does not draw lines, a church that breaks down any barriers to inclusion, by practicing the new commandment that Jesus has given us: to love one another as he loved us. A selfless, humble love that will see no one excluded. That is what excites me about our church, and I hope that is what excites you too.

### **Prayer of Inclusion:**

No one will be excluded.

**Those who are black or white, or any rainbow shade, we include you in.**

No one will be excluded.

**Those who are gay or straight, lesbian or transgendered or queer, we include you in.**

No one will be excluded.

**Those who are rich or poor, able bodied or disabled, we include you in.**

No one will be excluded.

**Christian or Jew, Muslim or Hindu, Sikh or Buddhist, we include all faiths in.**

In our places of worship, in our cultural centres, in our community centres, in our centres of government,

**you call us, living God, to be advocates for inclusion, and confronters of prejudice, as Jesus was.**

*Time for silent reflection*

### **[Song: Reckless Love](#)**

### **Offering prayer:**

Our gifts are lovingly given; accept them, O God.

**With these gifts, we can worship Sunday by Sunday.**

**With these gifts, we can play with and teach children and young people.**

**With these gifts, we can support the sick and struggling ones.**

**With these gifts, we can promote justice.**

Our gifts are lovingly given to support our local community and the mission life of our church.

**With these gifts, we can help the Girl's Brigade,  
With these gifts, we can provide space for Mums and Bubs to meet,  
With these gifts, we can hold our local community markets**  
You give lovingly, and in return you receive God's Spirit joyfully.  
**We give thanks. Amen.**

### **Prayers of Intercession**

God of compassion, you have proclaimed  
that your home is here among us mortals.  
You desire to dwell here among your people,  
to be with us and wipe away our tears.  
Today we cry out to you  
because there is much in this world to mourn.  
Today we pray that you might come  
to help us in our struggles.

We pray for those who mourn the loss of loved ones ...  
Come and make your home with them.  
Let new life grow in place of death.  
Give comfort, grace, and holy assurance.

We pray for those who suffer pain and illness ...  
Come and make your home with them.  
Grant healing and recovery.  
Share strength and hope.

We pray for those who live with violence and war ...  
Come and make your home with them.  
Protect them.  
Work for reconciliation, justice, and peace.

We pray for those who have lost their homes ...  
Come and make your home with them.  
Guide them toward sanctuary and shelter.  
Surround them with community and compassion.

Come into this world  
and make your home with your beloved.  
Abide with us and be our God.  
Hear our prayers and respond,  
until your heavenly kingdom comes. **Amen.**

**Hymn HFTC 217: Love divine, all loves excelling**

**Benediction:**

Share generously the love that God has given you. It is a powerful, relevant love.  
**Where self-serving rules, love will speak of giving, not receiving.**  
**Where people are hurting, love will stand patiently beside them.**  
**Where injustice is reality, love will call out for a different response.**  
**Where discrimination is found, love will insist on acceptance.**  
**Where death or loss is present, love will listen and direct towards new life.**  
Love is powerful. Share generously the love that God has given you.

**Closing karakia:**

Kia tau ki a tātou katoa  
Te atawhai o tō tātou Ariki, a Ihu Karaiti  
Me te aroha o te Atua  
Me te whiwhingatahitanga  
Ki te wairua tapu  
Ake, ake, ake  
Amine

**Translation**

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,  
and the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all  
Forever and ever  
Amen*

**Whatever happens,  
those who have learned  
to love one another  
have made their way  
into the lasting world  
and will not leave,  
whatever happens.**

**Wendell Berry**