

Our Union with Christ.

Grace and peace to you, from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Do you remember the Play School Bus? ‘We are all on the bus together’.

The playschool bus has many different faces, children of all colours, all on the bus.

As we gather today in worship with a particular focus on both the bus with which St Paul’s at Ferryden Park has been blessed, and on NAIDOC week; we are reminded that we are all on God’s bus together: That bus, the church, that carries us towards life with Jesus in eternity.

Early Christian theologians often referred to the church as a boat; carrying people safely towards a destination. In those days they did not have buses; today we have boats, buses, trains and aeroplanes, all capable of carrying large numbers of people.

So perhaps we can use the bus as a model of the church: it can carry a mob of us along.

Ephesians 1 tells us of God’s lavish blessings – blessings that have come first to Jewish Christians and now to Gentile ones too.

AS Paul writes:

Even before the world was made, God had already chosen us to be his through our union with Christ, so that we would be holy and without fault before him. Because of his love God had already decided that through Jesus Christ he would make us his children—this was his pleasure and purpose. This plan, which God will complete when the time is right, is to bring **ALL** creation together, **everything** in heaven and on earth, with Christ as head. We are living actively as heirs, enjoying our inheritance toward redemption. Our inheritance is a gift from God.

We are reminded of Saint Augustine’s watchword: “What do we have that we have not received?”

God’s grace establishes a dynamic, a living, bodily, history-shaping movement of God toward the world through and in the church.

God has a stake in us, making us participants in his gracious purpose to **reunite everything** in Christ. We are the community of faith, as a place of reconciliation, living out God’s divine plan.

Martin Luther wrote in his essay ‘The Bondage of the Will’:

“The kingdom is not in the process of preparation, but was prepared before, and the children of the kingdom do not prepare the kingdom, but are in the process of being themselves prepared; that is, **the kingdom merits the children**, not the children the kingdom.” SO, We are being made right by God to enter and live in HIS kingdom, that has already come because of Jesus.

The pressure is off, we can be bold to pray and praise. That is quite an inheritance.

Isn’t this wonderful? We, you, I, all of us, Jew and Gentile, Australian and European and Islander and Asian people, everyone, all of God’s created people, are the ones who inherit his kingdom. Given to us by him. All equally deserving. None better than another.

We are all, if you like, ‘people of the bus’. We cannot carry ourselves to heaven to be with Jesus, that is HIS work via the bus of HIS church which brings us the good news of God’s grace, through his word and his sacraments. This is what brings us together, ONE people under Christ. This is worth celebrating, and the church has been celebrating that for 2000 years; **God the Father adopting us as his children**, granting us pardon for our sins and made right with God through Jesus.

For this God deserves glory and praise and honour forever!

BUT, a word of warning to us all. It is ever so easy for us to get this the wrong way around. We, ever since the day of Adam and Eve, have wanted to drive the bus. We still do. In this NAIDOC week we might be reminded of the recorded superior attitude of the English when they came to Australia, and the desire to make Aboriginal people think and act as they did. And the influence they wielded in the Imperial British Empire.

You might think of the Nazis in the 1930s and 1940s who believed that they were the Master Race and had a right to Rule the World. Or the Japanese, who in the 30s and 40s wanted to dominate all of Australasia, or the Marxists, Leninists and Stalinists, who believed that everyone should be forced to be equal through Communism. We, as sinful people, are inclined to always want our own way. Sometimes this is seen on the world stage, but always it is present in our hearts when we refuse to acknowledge Jesus as Lord. We tend to value pride over humility.

Some of you might feel a bit uncomfortable when you hear the Acknowledgement of Country, which acknowledges Elders and Ancestors but not the God who created and redeemed them. I glad that our St Paul’s newsletter states it this way:

‘The ministry of St Paul’s Lutheran Church and the Aboriginal Lutheran Fellowship, Ferryden Park, acknowledges our almighty Father as God and creator of all. We acknowledge that In His sovereignty, God entrusted the care and the protection of the lands on which we worship today to the Kurna peoples, the Traditional Custodians. We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present.’

You see, it is God’s doing. The world is his creation, Australia is his country, which he entrusted to Aboriginal and Islander people to care for many thousands of years ago. Since Europeans and Asians and Africans and others have come to make their home here, some a century or two ago, others more recently, he expects them also to care for, and show love and respect for all of his creation, the people, the animals, the hills and rivers, the lakes and mountains and plains. All his, and all a gift of God to us. **To us all, equally.**

As we today gather to give thanks for the gift of the bus to the people of St Paul’s, we acknowledge that God is the giver of all good things. And that he has called us to travel on **his** ‘bus’, in **his** Church, together. We travel to a common destination, one people in Christ, under the Fatherhood of God. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. **Amen**