



# **AgeWell Sunday Worship Resources**

**8 October 2017**



[unitingagewell.org](http://unitingagewell.org)



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# Introduction

Seniors' Week, celebrated early in October each year, is a time to celebrate the contribution Seniors have made/continue to make in our communities, within our families, and in the church, our faith family. It is an opportunity to acknowledge ageing, affirming that it is one of the stages in life (to be embraced, not ignored). It can also be a push to consider the practicalities of our worship services: are they 'Senior friendly'? (seating, timing, hearing aids, warmth etc).

Within these resources you will find a sample service, and additional resources which include a sermon, short commentaries on the lectionary readings, suggestions for other Scripture readings, suitable hymns, possible topics and links to a number of websites. Please adapt the material to suit your congregation(s). This particular Sunday service might be the time to have a shared-lunch, invite one of the Uniting AgeWell chaplains, staff, Board or Committee members to give a brief presentation, or have an intergenerational story sharing segment; baby photos in the Church Hall with a 'guess who this is' game...there are lots of possibilities.

Within the context of faith, it is important to stress that whilst growing old can have its benefits (such as seeing great-grandchildren) it can signal much grief (death of friends, loss of particular body functions, moving into assisted care, inability to attend worship). Pastoral care should include all members of the church; look at ways to provide for the spiritual needs of the shut-ins, those unable to attend church. When visiting, ask if they would like to partake in Communion (portable Communion kits are easily available if your church does not have one). If someone is unable to attend but is still able to read, ask if they would like a copy of the sermon to read (print it in bold, using a large font size). If your congregation records the service, or has a down-load facility, see if this can be utilised. More seniors are staying in their own homes for longer, drawing on community services; this can be an opportunity for local congregations to offer pastoral care.

Seniors' Week is a time to remember and celebrate the many blessings we have received from God. Seniors are one of those blessings. Seniors' Week is also a time for us to give thanks for the many agencies that care for, and/or intervene on behalf of Seniors. We give thanks for our own Uniting Church agencies, especially Uniting AgeWell (formerly Uniting Aged Care) and UnitingCare. Seniors' Week may spur us to donate money, or time (as a volunteer) to an aged care facility, to a senior neighbour, or to start up a program at our church.

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# Order of Service

## The Call to Worship

Let us worship God:

The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.  
This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. (Ps 118:22-23)

## Opening Prayer

We join in prayer:

Almighty God,  
to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden:  
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,  
that we may perfectly love you, and worthily live for you; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

## Greeting

The Lord be with you; **And also with you.**

## Welcome and Introduction

Good morning, everyone, and welcome to worship today.

A special welcome to visitors....

In Uniting Churches, today is AgeWell Sunday. Today we are reflecting on what it means to be a faith community of people who are continually ageing. We are all together in this ageing transition process; we are all slightly older than we were at breakfast time this morning.

Some of us are experiencing faster ageing transitions than others, which can be uncomfortable, disorienting and hard to accept. This has implications in our church community for education, planning and pastoral care. As the people of Jesus Christ, we need to consider and prepare as a church community for the life-long transition called ageing.

Also today in Uniting Churches across Victoria and Tasmania, we acknowledge and pray for the work of Uniting AgeWell, the aged care agency of the Uniting Church in this Synod.

## Hymn

154 Great is your faithfulness

## Prayers of Adoration

O Lord God, Father of us all,  
you have been our dwelling place in all generations.  
Before the mountains were brought forth,  
from everlasting to everlasting, you are God.  
In your steadfast love for the world,  
you brought forth life and sustained it  
with the bounty of the earth, sign of your providential care.

Your abiding love for the world was revealed in your people Israel,  
and above all in our Saviour Jesus Christ,  
through whose Spirit  
we have access to your presence.

By his Spirit, you journey with us through all the transitions and challenges of our lives;  
you give us your grace to remain open to change,  
to experience afresh your mercy, forgiveness and love.

You call us to share in the one ministry of Christ in the world.  
Today we praise you for equipping us with gifts to care for one another,  
especially as we grow into our senior years.

We give thanks for the ministry of the Uniting Church through Uniting AgeWell,  
and through other similar church and community agencies,  
where women and men work together to build a caring living community for us  
when we are unable to live without support.

For your unfailing kindness,  
which does not tire or fade or wither,  
for the blessings of life together in Christ,  
and for the trust we have in you for all that is to come,  
we adore you and bless your name, now and always:  
through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

## Prayers of Confession

Acknowledging your boundless faithfulness to us, Lord God,  
we are conscious of our failings and shortcomings  
which daily mar our relationships with you and with one another.  
In penitent shame and sorrow, and confident of your love,  
we confess to you those times  
when we have forgotten you, and deliberately turned aside from you.

We have considered ourselves  
to be faithful deserving custodians of the earth's resources,  
without regard for generations to come:  
Lord, have mercy; **Lord, have mercy.**

We have considered ourselves more important than others  
whether they are older or younger than us,  
and so have neglected our neighbour's need:  
Christ, have mercy; **Christ, have mercy.**

We have considered ourselves to be wiser  
than those who have gone before us, or those who come after us,  
and so have not recognised your presence and wisdom in those around us:  
Lord, have mercy; **Lord, have mercy.**

Come, Lord God, in your healing grace and reconciling might.  
In mercy, forgive us our shortcomings, our failings and our deliberate faults;

renew in us the life that Christ by dying gave us,  
and set us again in the way of Jesus that leads through life to you. **Amen.**

## The Declaration of Forgiveness

Hear the gospel:

This is love, not that we loved God, but that God loved us and sent the Son. (1 Jn 4:10)

And so I declare to you: in Jesus Christ, we are forgiven people:

**Thanks be to God!**

**Praise God, the source of life and birth; praise God the Word, who came to earth;  
praise God the Spirit, holy flame; all glory, honour, to God's name.**

*(If your congregation passes the peace, this is an appropriate point to do so.)*

## The Early Word (Children)

'Honour your father and your mother.'

A participatory discussion on 'Children, obey your parents/fathers, do not provoke your children' (Eph 6:1-4) across all generations might form a fruitful connection with 'Honour your father and your mother' (Ex 20:12), while remembering that Jesus said that his one great commandment in two parts (Mt 22:34-40; c.f. Deut 6:4-5 and Lev 19:18) sums up the whole Law.

## Hymn

430 Your words to me are life and health

## Readings

*(Choose from one or more of the following lectionary readings, or use other Bible readings, as a basis for the address or sermon):*

- Ex 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20
- Psalm 19
- Phil 3:4b-14
- Mt 21:33-46

*(Some congregations prefer to have the readings printed or shown on a screen.)*

This is the word of the Lord: **Thanks be to God!**

OR

This is the gospel of our Lord: **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!**

## Opening the Word

Address or Sermon

## Hymn

432 Christ is made the sure foundation (suitable for a sermon based on Mt 21:33-46)

## **Offering**

Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have,  
for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. (Heb 13:16)  
Your offering will now be received

## **Offertory Prayer**

**We dedicate this money (and these gifts), Lord, for the work of your church, asking that you use all that we have and all that we are in your service. Amen.**

## **We share our News, Joys and Concerns (Notices)**

If possible, arrange to provide some Uniting AgeWell brochures for congregation distribution.

Brochures can be ordered from Uniting AgeWell Marketing & Community Relations,  
**(03) 9276 5712 or [mcr@unitingagewell.org](mailto:mcr@unitingagewell.org).**

## **We pray for the Church and the World**

We bring you these prayers, Lord God, offering them in Jesus' name:

Your creation declares your glory and your providential love, O God:  
We pray that all people will become responsible and just stewards of your bounty in the earth.

Your law gives wisdom to the simple, O God:  
bring your wisdom and love of justice and peace to all governments,  
together with willingness to bear the costs of justice and peace,  
that your people everywhere may live in safety, dignity and freedom.  
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You have shown us how to live as one people, O God:  
hear our prayers for this nation.  
We pray for a community where care and compassion abound,  
where the young may be nurtured and the elderly honoured,  
where difference is treasured, and all live in mutual respect and love  
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You have shown your care for those who are rejected and outcast,  
from the youngest to the oldest, O God:  
hear our prayers for the practical relief of those in need in this community and beyond.  
We pray for your healing reconciling presence among all who are in trouble or distress,  
for your blessing upon their loved ones,  
and for kindly insight, gentle care and humble support among their neighbours.  
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

In gratitude we bring before you all community services and agencies and their staff involved in caring for us as we grow older.  
For medical staff, allied health professionals, personal carers,  
administrators and others working in that field,  
we ask that they will know their kindness renewed and find fulfillment in their work.  
We especially pray for our Church's Uniting AgeWell services;

for senior staff, managers, care staff, chaplains and volunteers,  
that they will know the blessing of serving their neighbours in the name of Christ.  
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

(*Other prayers may also be offered here*)

## The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour Christ taught us, we are confident to pray:  
**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,  
your will be done on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.**

## Hymn

*A suitable closing hymn might be found in the following suggestions:*

- 213 Father, whose everlasting love
- 409 O breath of life
- 411 Filled with the spirit's power
- 439 What shall we offer our good Lord

## Word of Mission

In every stage, at every age,  
look for the Spirit's guiding grace to live humbly before God,  
and to care for your neighbours,  
to the glory of Christ.

## Blessing

The blessing of Almighty God - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit -  
be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

## Dismissal

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord: **Thanks be to God!**

## Hymn

781 Father, bless us as we go.

## Resources:

- Let us pray: intercessions following the Revised Common Lectionary, by Janet Nelson (Harper Collins, 1999).
- Together in song: Harmony edition (Harper Collins, 1999), pp. 1015-1116
- Uniting in Worship books I (1988) and II (2005) (Uniting Church Press)

- Uniting in Worship: People's Book (Uniting Church Press, 1988)
- [www.unitingagewell.org](http://www.unitingagewell.org)

# Address

*Sermon based on the lectionary gospel passage for 8 October 2017 - Matt 21:33-46:*

These days we are exposed to many differing points of view, through various media. Often, instead of careful argument, we hear bald assertions and broad brush responses.

This is done deliberately. Politicians, business leaders and representatives of organisations take media training in order to present a particular controlled image, and thus to command public opinion. Those of us in our senior years can reflect on a lifetime's exposure to a plethora of absolute political claims, few of which have stood the test of time.

We are also very aware of our multi-faith world, with many other religious communities around us, all of them making their own claims to possess the truth about life together in the world.

One result of this smorgasbord of alternative viewpoints is we become sceptical of absolute claims of any sort. We tend to guard ourselves against falling captive to the latest absolute claim with five words "That is just your perspective!" Those words turn all claims into claims of relative value, or claims to relative truth, relative to their historic, geographic and cultural time and place, and relative to the experience of the person uttering them.

As Christians, we are at risk of applying that mindset to the gospel. We are at risk of according the proclamation of the gospel its own relative place somewhere in the wide spectrum of views with which the ether is filled. Would the proclamation of a Billy Graham nowadays be accorded the enthusiastic reception he once received? Probably not.

"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes." The gospel writer used that verse from Ps 118 to make an absolute claim about Jesus. But some Christians think that the church puts too much emphasis on Jesus. Some think we would get on better with other faith communities if we gave less emphasis to the person and work of Jesus.

And sometimes that rejection of absolute claims about Jesus takes stronger critical form: the claim of the church for the absolute universal significance of Jesus violates the limits to which all claims to knowledge are vulnerable. In other words, as it is impossible to foresee every situation, so it is impossible for the church to be confident of the lasting validity of any absolute claim about anyone.

In a national and world community where we are increasingly aware of the claims of a variety of religions, the exclusive claim made for Jesus can seem to put the Christian gospel in a bad light. It fuels suspicions that religious disputes produce conflict and war, such as the tensions between Roman Catholics and Protestants in Ireland, and thus that we can afford to give little credence to such absolute claims. All of this tends to strengthen the attraction to Christians of a relativist stance.

Relativism is a kind of spiritual truth for many people in our world. It is a protective reserve, a mindset which insulates us from evidence-based argument, from appeals to reason or experience or the wisdom of those who have gone before us.

And so within the church, we are apt to try to resolve or break off theological conversations with those same five words “That is just your perspective!” Even the preaching of the Word is sometimes described in those same words - that’s just his perspective, or that’s just her opinion - without regard for the work of Christ’s Spirit in each of us. In so doing, we step away from any serious regard for the Word or its claim on us, so that the proclaimed Word becomes simply one voice among many voices vying for our attention and commitment.

In holding fast to a relativist stance, we are in danger of falling into a pseudo-courtesy of tolerance and even-handedness which resists every claim to truth we cannot immediately endorse. Relativism becomes a bold and fixed stance which cannot accept that there is a reality about which we do not already know.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is not like that at all. The gospel makes claims about Jesus before which, if true, all other claims must give way. He is called the Saviour of the world or, in our reading today, the headstone of the corner, which in building terms means he is the key element, the one who holds the whole structure together.

In making its universal and absolute claim for Jesus as Saviour of the world, should the church itself adopt an absolute position against everything that is non-church, or is there a place for humility? And what is the church’s response to all other claims to truth?

First, humility: In a spirit of absolutism without humility, Christian missionaries of past years who identified the gospel with Western culture extinguished the cultures of colonised peoples in the name of that gospel. In times past, Christians have waged deadly conflict with other Christians because their differing doctrines or sacramental practices offended religious or political self-interest. Humility is vital if our speaking about God is to avoid the errors of history.

All speaking about God begins in silence. We can speak only of what we know. And we cannot know God as we know one another, or as we know the material world. God’s being and nature, presence and purpose are not subject to objective analysis and proof. All speaking about God begins in silence.

But in sovereign grace, God speaks to us; God addresses the world. The Psalmist wrote of the mystery of the glory of God which is wordlessly heard through the universe (Ps 19:1-4):

*The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.  
Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.  
There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard;  
yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.*

There is a sublime expression of the word of God in creation.

God also has addressed the world through Israel’s history. No other God accompanied God’s people, first in shameful humiliating exile and captivity, and then in liberation from their helplessness, so that they might better identify with humble powerless and marginalised people, including the stranger, the widow and the orphan.

Above all, God has uniquely addressed this world in the risen crucified one. That was not immediately clear. His first followers, eye-witnesses to his life and work, remained stubbornly blind and obtuse throughout most of their time together. (Fortunately, that was only during their waking hours.) When the disciples, going about the work Jesus gave them, were not welcomed in a certain village (Lk 9:51-56), they wanted to call down fiery retribution from

heaven, like Elijah (2 Kings 1:9-12). (There's absolutism for you!) Later, when Jesus spoke to them of his approaching passion and death, they argued among themselves who should be his replacement!

Not until after Easter, when they knew they were addressed by God through Jesus, were they confirmed in their trust in him, and in the same moment strengthened to live the way of humility that was so characteristic of the man of Nazareth.

The church has not invented the truth it proclaims about God revealed in Jesus. Neither does any one of us, or any congregation or any denomination, possess the whole gospel. As we affirm that the knowledge of God comes from beyond us – that it is neither our invention nor our possession – the stronger are the grounds for humility and for being open to correction. Humility thus remains a pervasive enduring accompaniment to all gospel proclamation.

And second: What is the church's response before other claims to truth?

Within his religious, cultural and political context, Jesus prioritised aspects of his tradition, declaring there was one single commandment in two parts: wholehearted unreserved love for God, and love for neighbour as for oneself.

In practical terms, immediate response to human need outweighed everything else. Jesus embodied the love at the heart of God, love which affirms the dignity and worth of every individual. That compassionate response to human need which is at the centre of the gospel speaks a language in common with many other faith communities. That response has both individual dimensions – forgiveness, healing and reconciliation - and communal dimensions – inclusiveness, justice and structural change.

Our church's response to the needs in our community is an expression of this. Helping people to age well is at the core of the work of Uniting AgeWell. In our community we ...  
*(insert your own local example of compassionate response to human need)*

More broadly, we recognise that many people outside faith communities unknowingly live according to gospel values. Wherever people live together in relationships of compassion and inclusiveness, there is Christ's unrecognised energetic life-giving Spirit at work. The church in humility acknowledges that God's sovereign presence is never confined to the four walls of the church building. In the multi-faith society in which the church lives, the gospel challenge to live compassionately and inclusively is both enormous and essential.

So yes: we proclaim Jesus as Saviour of the world. Using the words of the psalmist, we dare to declare the risen crucified Jesus has universal significance: he is the headstone of the corner, the key life-giving element in our world. At the same time the church is called to embody and announce that good news through humble word and practised action. We are singers of the song of the reign of God; but we are not the song itself. We are servants of One whose Lordship is the servanthood of all; but we are not thereby lords (and ladies!).

As St Paul said, "We proclaim Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for his sake." Paul's image of the Christian life was one of treasure in earthen vessels (2 Cor 4:5-7) - that is, the absolute claim for Jesus clothed in the humility of our living.

In our years of strength and capacity, humility is one of our many options. We are tempted to use our strengths to serve ourselves, including vigorously defending ourselves from the opinions and actions of others. As we relinquish our youthful strengths, as we become less able to determine our course in life, we look for gentle insightful kindness in those around us.

But from the beginning, the gospel calls us to practise that humility and servanthood, a selfless regard for others. A lifetime's practice of compassionate humility can in later years give us keener eyes to discern our neighbour's need, and a warmer heart to meet that need without counting the cost.

None of us possess the whole gospel. An intentional humility means we remain open to correction and new insights into the way of Jesus. Learning humility and practising neighbourly care go hand in hand.

*(If you wish you might insert a story of an example of learning humility and practising neighbourly care)*

In every stage of life, as we practise humility, and set ourselves at the service of our neighbours, we draw nearer to the God who has been called the defenceless superior power. We are all better prepared for the changes life can bring when we have long lived this way.

In the congregation, in the wider community, we are sustained in loving humility towards one another by him who is the source of our life together. To the neighbour who espouses the relativist response (that is just your perspective), we respond with Jesus' humility and practical concern. What matters is not winning the argument but a new faithful response to the truth which comes from beyond us: the gospel of the God who forgives without pre-condition, who acquits the guilty, who gives life to the dead, and who brings into being what otherwise could not exist.

God's radical confronting goodness reaches out across all boundaries to reproduce itself in our lives. The best way to talk about that is to live the way of Jesus, by his Spirit. His life is nothing less than the embodiment of the loving heart of God. Thanks be to God for the gospel of Jesus Christ, this absolute treasure that we carry in these earthen vessels.

# **Readings & Resources**

## **Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20**

This passage is known as the Ten Commandments. It is part of the five books of the Law of Moses. In the Hebrew Bible, those first five books of the Bible are called “Torah;” Torah means “teaching”. Jesus took his one great commandment in two parts from Torah (Mk 12:29-31; c.f. Deut 6:4-5 and Lev 19:18).

Some churches display these Ten Commandments in the sanctuary. The words are revered by Christians, and they are especially precious to our Jewish neighbours. Godly Jews regard the law, not as a burden, but as a gift from God in which they take great joy and pride.

The first four commandments (or teaching) relate to the worship of Israel’s God, while the last six relate to personal living. The fourth commandment to observe the Sabbath forms a bridge between how we act towards God and how we act towards other people. The Sabbath is associated with honouring God, but also with regard for self, family, slaves and livestock, and also for the stranger resident among the people.

The commandments are written for an audience in the middle of society. They are directed at men who were people of property. The commandments assume that the men addressed are married; men normally married so as to preserve the family line.

With one exception (Ex 20:10, care for the resident stranger), these commandments do not express the practical concern found throughout the Law for marginalised people, typically described as the stranger, the widow and the orphan (Ex 22:21-22; Deut 24:17). In that way, these pre-eminent commandments are sometimes seen to lack the inclusiveness of the whole of the Law.

For example, Deut 23:24-25 upholds the right of the poor to not go hungry, as a supplement to the commandment against stealing; and Deuteronomy 25:5-10 includes in the explanation of levirate marriage the right of women to protest against those not fulfilling their obligations. So these pre-eminent commandments need to be read in the context of the whole of the Law. (TiS 430 Your words to me are life and health)

## **Psalm 19**

In synagogues and churches, the psalms provide words for congregational singing. This psalm is a hymn of praise, concluding with a prayer of supplication that awaits the endorsement of the singer. The last verse, sometimes prayed before the preaching of the Word, reminds us that, just a ploughed field is better prepared to receive the seed, so also a sermon needs prayerful support, first in its preparation, and then in both its delivery and its reception.

The psalm is written in three parts. Part 1 is a sublime account of the wordless universal praise of the creation for its creator. The glory of creation is the sun which tirelessly runs its daily course, and under the light of which everything is exposed and nothing is hidden. This provides a transition to a reflection on the gift of God’s law, a gift that leads to the twin responses of praise and confession.

Part 2 is a meditative panegyric on the glory of God's law that give light and guidance for right living. It is written in seven parts, reflecting the perfect creation of the world in Genesis 1:1-2:4, which thus links back to part 1. God's law is praised in six different forms. In the seventh stanza, corresponding to creation of the Sabbath, God's law is celebrated as more precious than fine gold and sweeter than honey.

Part 3 shifts to introspective humility before God's glory. It is a confession of sin, including the sin to which we are blind, with a longing for God's mercy and pardon, and a desire for cleansing and acceptability in God's sight. (TiS 154 Great is your faithfulness)

## **Philippians 3:4b-14**

This passage from the apostle Paul focuses on the change in his orientation from the past to the future. In many ways, our lives are shaped by our past. We have been born, been fed and clothed and cared for, educated and trained, have or have had paid employment, suffered conflict, loss, accident and illness, travelled, formed friendships and perhaps married and had children of our own. All such circumstances shape our life in the present moment. Thus, we treasure those things from the past which form the roots of our daily life.

Paul also has events and qualifications that he treasured in his society, which he lists, and which gave him status and authority. Then he declares to those who knew him well (and who could evaluate his declaration) that he has let all that go. Everything that once was precious to him, together with everything that constituted his life prior to the revelation of the risen Christ, he now regards as loss and rubbish (some translations call it 'dross' or 'dung'). The reason for this hugely radical turnaround is simply Christ himself.

We can look at this afresh through the concept of 'home.' People we meet sometimes ask us, "Where are you from?" By our answer, people begin to paint a mental portrait of us. Our place of origin is regarded as the influential fount of our values, our relative status in society, our direction in life. Home is also where we are accepted, in spite of our faults and foibles; it is where we can be authentically who we are and know we are welcomed and loved.

For Paul and for all Christians, 'home' is no longer where we have come from, but where we are headed. That new destination is where we are transparently understood, forgiven, reconciled and loved without reserve; it is the new influential fount of our values, status and direction in life. For Paul, that new goal of 'heading home' has reshaped his living.

Notably, in true humility, Paul does not regard his reaching that future home as guaranteed. He does not presume he will be worthy of the resurrection. Instead, using the metaphor of athletics, he presses on towards "the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ." Paul's motivation is no longer shaped by the backward glance to legalistically justify himself. Instead, he now lives a future-oriented life based on answering Christ's liberating love for him with his own love and willing obedience. (TiS 594 Fight the good fight)

## **Matthew 21:33-46**

Jesus frequently used parables in his teaching work. A parable is a particular literary form. It is not an allegory, in which this stands for that. A parable is more like a joke: a joke cannot be dissected without losing its meaning, and a joke has one punch line or denouement. So the parables are likely to have been transmitted to us more or less intact. That is why scholars reckon that we are nowhere closer to the very words of Jesus than in the parables.

However, some allegorical references should be noted. The vineyard typically symbolised the nation of Israel (Isaiah 5:1-7); the tenants to whom the vineyard was entrusted were the people with religious authority (priests and elders, scribes and Pharisees); and in the son of the owner is a clear reference to Jesus himself, who was taken out of Jerusalem and put to death.

The dynamic in the parable is straightforward; the denouement is lengthy. Jesus' listeners, the representative religious leaders of the people, condemned themselves, as part of a historical pattern of rejecting the prophets. Jesus endorsed that self-condemnation with the prophetic utterance from Psalm 118:22-23, and promised that the vineyard, now the kingdom of God, will be given to people producing the fruit of the kingdom. The cornerstone is the key element which ensures the structural integrity of the whole building; that this essential stone was unrecognised and which the builders rejected points to the new reality being established by God.

Importantly, the parable is addressed to the people of God (Mt 21:23, 43); it is the people as a whole who bear no fruit. So as much as Matthew is thinking about the transfer of the kingdom from Israel to the new people of God in Christ, his emphasis on the production of fruits always confronts the new people with the same question: are they really bearing fruit? (TiS 432 Christ is made the sure foundation)





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Uniting AgeWell is an organisation of the Uniting Church in Australia