

“Woven Together in Christ: A Cord That Cannot Be Broken”
“Lalanga Fakataha ‘ia Kalaisi: Ko ha Afo ‘Oku ‘Ikai Fa‘a Motuhi”

CHORAL SERVICE OF THANKSGIVING
To Commemorate
55 Years of Diplomatic Relations between
Tonga and Australia and
The Golden Jubilee of the Tongan Consulate General in
Australia
In the presence of
Their Majesties King Tupou VI and Queen Nanasipau’u
2:00pm, 21st September 2025
St Stephen’s Uniting Church

Preacher: President Rev Charissa Suli

“Woven Together in Christ:
A Cord That Cannot Be Broken”

“Lalanga Fakataha ‘ia Kalaisi: Ko ha Afo ‘Oku ‘Ikai Fa‘a Motuhi”

Bible Readings: Ecclesiastes 4:9–12, Philippians 1:3–6, John 15:12–17

“Woven Together in Christ: A Cord That Cannot Be Broken”
“Lalanga Fakataha ‘ia Kalaisi: Ko ha Afo ‘Oku ‘Ikai Fa’a Motuhi”

Fakatapu, Acknowledgment & Word of Thanks

Tapu ki he afio ‘ae Otua Mafimafi

Otua koe Tamai, Otua koe Alo moe Laumalie Ma’oni’oni.

Tapu ki he ‘ene a’fifio, King Tupou Ono, koe Tu’i ‘o Tonga,

Tapu kia Kuini Nanasipau’u,

Tapu kia Pilinisesi Salote Mafile’o, Pilolevu Tui-ta,

Pea moe fale ‘o ha’a moeoyo

Tapu mo tuita mo hou’eiki

Fakatapu pea moe Koavana ‘o Niusauele

Fakatapu kihe Tokoni Palemia ‘o Tonga moe kau taki ‘oe Pule’anga Tonga oku tau kau fakataha

Faka**Tapu** ki he Moderator NSW/ACT Synod, Moderator VIC/TAS Synod,

FakaTapu ki he Faifekau Pule Siasi Uesiliana Tauataina ‘o Tonga, Faifekau Sea Siasi ‘o Tonga
Tau’atana moe Tokaikolo ‘ia Kalaisi moe kau taula’eiki kotoa pe moe ngaahi fungavaka kehekehe
‘oe Lotu oku tau kau fakataha.

Tapu atu ki he kau fai hiva moe koe kau hiva ‘ae Siasi Uesiliana Tauataina ‘o Tonga moe Uniting
in Sene mo Brisbane.

We acknowledge with gratitude the presence of Their Majesties. We also recognise representatives
of the Australian Government, the diplomatic corps, church leaders and ecumenical partners,
leaders in education, and members of the wider community.

On behalf of the whole Uniting Church in Australia, I extend warm greetings to you all— especially
to Her Excellency the Governor of NSW, Their Excellencies High Commissioner of Australia, the
High Commissioner of Tonga, and Louise Waterhouse and Heads of the Consulate General offices
represented here today. We pray God’s blessing upon you all as you continue in the important roles
entrusted to you.

We gather today on the sacred land of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, cared for since time
immemorial. We honour the First Peoples, their custodianship, and we give thanks to God.

“Woven Together in Christ: A Cord That Cannot Be Broken”
“Lalanga Fakataha ‘ia Kalaisi: Ko ha Afo ‘Oku ‘Ikai Fa’a Motuhi”

I also wish to acknowledge all who have travelled near and far from all over Australia, those of you who are tuning in online and the people who are in the hall downstairs in the overflow area — we are deeply grateful for your presence.

A special word of thanks to the choirs, including those who have travelled from Brisbane and across Sydney. (*Louise you hoped for choirs*). Your voices have lifted our hearts and, for a moment, allowed us to feel heaven touch earth.

It is a great honour for the Uniting Church in Australia to host today’s Choral Thanksgiving Service, and to give thanks to God for the Jubilee of the Consulate General in Australia and for 55 years of enduring partnership between Tonga and Australia. May God bless every nation with peace, justice, and compassion.

Address to the King

E ho’o afio King Tupou Ono mo Queen Nanasipau’u,
Tau fakafeta’i ki he Otua Mafimafi he’ene ‘omi e aho fakakoloa ko eni kihe Pule’anga Tonga moe Pule’anga Aostelesia, ke tau fakamanatu ‘ae taimi loloa ‘oe **fengaue’aki fakakaume’a, faka-tipi-lome-tika** ‘ae ongo fonua.

Pea ko ‘etau lotu pea mo ‘etau amanaki e tu’uloa ‘ae feongo’i’aki, fakakaume’a, fakatokoua, fakavaha’a pule’anga ‘oku fai ‘ehe Pule’anga Aostelesia moe Pule’anga Tonga.

Pea ‘oku mau fakamalo atu, ho’o finangalo lelei ke fakahoko ‘ae houa lotu fakafeta’i’ni. ‘Oku hounga kiate kimaautolu, ‘ae kakai Tonga ‘i Aostelesia’ni, ‘i he kei lakoelele lelei ‘ae feitu’una ki ho’o kakai oku nau kumi fonua mai ki Aostelesia’ni. He ‘oku kei tu’u loa pe ‘ae Tonga ‘i homau ngaahi loto.

Opening Prayer

Let us pray.
E Laumalie hifo mai ki ho kakai!
Speak to us now through your Word,

and open the eyes of our hearts,

so that we may hear you and see you — that your truth is woven into our lives

as friends of Jesus Christ. ‘Amen.

Opening Line

As I look around this church today- I am drawn to the theme of my sermon: Woven Together in Christ: A Cord that cannot be Broken, Lalanga fakataha ‘ia Kalaisi: ko ha afo oku ikai fa’a motuhi. I see the joy and anticipation of our people, and I know that today we are part of something bigger

“Woven Together in Christ: A Cord That Cannot Be Broken”
“Lalanga Fakataha ‘ia Kalaisi: Ko ha Afo ‘Oku ‘Ikai Fa‘a Motuhi”

than ourselves — a story God has been weaving for generations. And the Scriptures remind us that such a story is never woven alone, but always with God at the centre, as King Solomon declares: *“A cord of three strands is not quickly broken”*.¹

Ecclesiastes 4: Solomon’s Wisdom – Woven Strength

Ecclesiastes reminds us: *“Two are better than one... a cord of three strands is not quickly broken”*.²

Solomon’s wisdom is honest: life lived for ourselves alone is fragile, its lonely. Work, knowledge, and relationships all have value — but they lose their meaning if we make them only about ourselves. Their true meaning is found when they are part of God’s greater purpose, something that lasts beyond our own lifetime. What we build has value not because it makes us powerful, rich or popular, but because it serves God’s kingdom and blesses others.

This truth echoes in King George Tupou I. When he visited New South Wales in 1853, he saw both promise and pain. He returned to Tonga determined that his people would never lose their inheritance. In 1875 he gave his nation a constitution³ — shaped in part by what he had seen here in Australia — to ensure that land and dignity would be protected for every Tongan under God. And with these words he set Tonga’s foundation: *“Ko e ‘Otua mo Tonga ko hoku tofi ‘a”* — God and Tonga are my inheritance.

That same truth — that life and nation find their strength in God — echoes again in the writings of Paul.

Transition From Solomon’s wisdom, we turn to Paul, who shows us the joy that flows from true partnership rooted in Christ.

Philippians 1: Joy in Partnership

Paul writes: *“I thank my God every time I remember you... because of your partnership in the Gospel”*.⁴

Paul’s joy was not based on comfort — he wrote these words from prison. His joy was rooted in Christ, who gave meaning to his suffering and hope for the future. True joy is not dependent on our circumstances, but on knowing that Christ holds us and will complete the good work he has begun.⁵ This is the joy of partnership in the Gospel.

Today we echo Paul’s words. We thank God for 55 years of partnership between Tonga and Australia — not only diplomatic, but Gospel partnership. Missionaries with deep Methodist roots once carried the Gospel to Tonga; and today the ties between our nations are lived out in many ways.

¹ The Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), Ecclesiastes 4:12

² The Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), Ecclesiastes 4:9, 12

³ George Tupou I, *Constitution of Tonga*, 1875.

⁴ The Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), Philippians 1:3, 5

⁵ The Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), Philippians 1:6

“Woven Together in Christ: A Cord That Cannot Be Broken”
“Lalanga Fakataha ‘ia Kalaisi: Ko ha Afo ‘Oku ‘Ikai Fa’a Motuhi”

Our church schools in Australia stand alongside church schools in Tonga, exchanging knowledge, faith, and service. Across Australia, the Tongan diaspora — in education, government, music, business and community life — continues to enrich this partnership, showing that it is not only between nations, but between peoples.

We also give thanks for the Consulate General in Sydney. For fifty years, it has been more than an office — it has been a fala of generosity, a bridge of belonging, a golden thread woven into the life of Tongans in this land. For many, it has been a door that never closed, a place where families found help, and where new arrivals found identity and belonging.

And among these many bonds, the Uniting Church in Australia continues to walk closely with the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga — the monarch’s church and a vital thread in Tonga’s identity — as significant partners in mission, worship, and friendship.

The late Queen Sālote, during her visit to Australia in 1937, said:

...”I would ask you, each one, as you return to your homes, to make known the fact that we love you and your people, every one...”⁶

Her words remind us that this partnership (Paul talks about) is never abstract. It is carried in relationships — in schools, in congregations, in families, and in communities where love is lived and shared.

And Paul assures us: “*The one who began a good work in you will bring it to completion in Christ Jesus*”.⁷

Transition

Paul shows us the joy of partnership, but Jesus shows us its foundation.

John 15: Love and Friendship in Christ

In John’s Gospel, Jesus is with his disciples. They are anxious and uncertain. And he brings them together and leaves them with the most important command for how they will endure their friendship and live together:

Jesus says:

**“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.
I no longer call you servants; I have called you friends”.**⁸

Here is the heart of the Gospel. Love is not a suggestion — it is the **mark of discipleship of how we are to live our lives**. This is not a love reserved for when it is easy or convenient.

It is the **cord that holds us together**. As a minister of the Church, I believe that when Christ is the third strand, our friendships and partnerships are made strong enough to endure across generations.

⁶ Queen Sālote Tupou III, “Address of Her Majesty Queen Sālote, D.B.E., of Tonga,” *The Methodist* (Sydney, NSW), July 3, 1937, 11. Accessed via Trove: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/155283888>.

⁷ The Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), Philippians 1:6

⁸ The Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), John 15:12, 15

“Woven Together in Christ: A Cord That Cannot Be Broken”
“Lalanga Fakataha ‘ia Kalaisi: Ko ha Afo ‘Oku ‘Ikai Fa’a Motuhi”

And this is what today is about. Not only fifty years of the **Consulate**. Not only fifty-five years of ties between **Tonga and Australia**. But the God who has been weaving us together all along, now calling us to carry the weaving forward — with justice, with mercy, with a love that does not quit.

This Jubilee reminds us that such milestones are not only moments to celebrate, but to recommit ourselves to weaving forward the ties of friendship and faith.

This week our nations have renewed their promise of friendship through “Kaume‘a Ofi — close friends”.⁹ How fitting that we hear Christ’s own words:

“I have called you friends.”

For in him, friendship is more than agreement on paper; it becomes fruit that lasts. When nations choose to be friends, when churches choose to walk as friends, when leaders choose to lead with love—then the fruit of that love blesses generations to come.”

There are cords that can be broken — cords of hate of division, of self-interest. But the cord woven in Christ cannot be broken. *‘Oku ‘i ai ‘a e ngaahi afo ‘e lava ke motuhi — ka ko e afo ‘oku lalanga ‘ia Kalaisi, ‘e ‘ikai lava ia ke motuhi neongo ‘ae faingata’a ‘ae fononga’anga.*

Our friendship between our two nations must continue to bear fruit: responding to the cries of the poor, addressing the challenges of climate change, working for peace, building communities where every person belongs and raising up the next generation in faith and hope.

So, love one another, work together, build bridges where there are divides, and carry Christ’s friendship into the world.

And let us go forward as **kaume‘a ‘ofi — close friends in Christ** — loving one another as he has loved us.

For Christ himself is the cord that will never break. And in him, our friendship will endure forever.

To God be the glory, now and forever. ‘Amen.

⁹ Government of Australia and Government of Tonga, *Kaume‘a Ofi: Statement of Intent*, 2025.

“Woven Together in Christ: A Cord That Cannot Be Broken”
“Lalanga Fakataha ‘ia Kalaisi: Ko ha Afo ‘Oku ‘Ikai Fa‘a Motuhi”

Bibliography

The Holy Bible. New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

George Tupou I. *Constitution of Tonga*. 1875.

Government of Australia and Government of Tonga. *Kaume‘a Ofi: Statement of Intent*. 2025.

Latukefu, Sione. *Church and State in Tonga: The Wesleyan Methodist Missionaries and Political Development, 1822–1875*. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1974.

Morton, Helen. *Becoming Tongan: An Ethnography of Childhood*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996.

Pacific Conference of Churches. *Statements on Climate Justice and Ecumenical Partnership*. Suva: PCC, various years.

Queen Sālote Tupou III. “Address of Her Majesty Queen Sālote, D.B.E., of Tonga.” *The Methodist* (Sydney, NSW), July 3, 1937, 11. Accessed via Trove: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/155283888>.