



Sunday 28 November 2021 Whitehorse Cluster Worship

Introit 699 - A New Commandment

A new commandment I give unto you
that you love one another as I have loved you,
that you love one another as I have loved you.
By this will others know that you are my disciples
if you have love one for another;
by this will others know that you are my disciples
if you have love one for another.

Welcome - Rev Peter and Rev Tina



Acknowledgment

We Acknowledge those who were here before us, the first inhabitants of this place
We honor them for their custodianship of the land on which we gather today.

Call to Worship

Can one be homesick for something you've never known?
**We are homesick for a just world, for peace like rivers,
for the end of suffering.**
Yes, we are homesick—
**for joy that is contagious,
for nations that feel like neighbours, and for hospitals that run empty.**
We are homesick for the world God promises.
We are homesick, but we are on our way.
God is here. God is still creating.
Let us worship Holy God.

Candle Lighting Liturgy – Julie and Daryl Hawkey - Forest Hill Uniting

A: We hope for a world where all are fed.
B: We hope for a world with more bridges than walls.
A: We hope for a world with wide open doors.
B: We hope for a world with contagious laughter.

A: We hope for a world where trees grow tall and creeks run clean.

B: We hope for a world where all people feel at home—in their bodies, in the church, in their physical homes.

A: We hope for that world.

B: We long for that world.

A: We are homesick for that world.

B: So today we light the candle of hope, because hope keeps our hearts alive as we wait.

A: May this light be a reminder that the wait is always worth it.

B: We are close to home. May we carry hope with us. Amen.

Prayers of Adoration

Let us come before the Lord in Prayer and Praise
 Lord our God, we adore you and give you Praise
 We give thanks to you for loving us
 Jesus our Lord, we adore you and give you praise
 We give thanks to you for teaching us how to love
 Holy Spirit, we adore you and give you praise
 We give thanks to you for filling our hearts with God's love
 Father, Son and Holy Spirit we adore you and give you thanks and praise, amen

Prayer of Invocation

Come Now O Holy Spirit and bless us today with new insights. Increase our faith.

Prayer of Confession

Gracious God, we find ourselves with two choices everyday
 To stay homesick for the world you promise us or to allow cynicism to win
 We can choose to hope against hope or give up
 We can insist on a better world or assume it's impossible and too big a problem
 Lord, forgive us for the days when we doubt your power in this world
 Forgive us for ignoring our feelings of homesickness and not using them to make the world a better place. Kindle in
 our hearts a hope that will not let us go
 We pray this with gratefulness and love for you, Lord, amen

Response to Prayer of Confession

**Lord, even when we give up or lose hope, you do not give up on us.
 You love us with an everlasting love. You invite us to come closer to your home.
 Nothing can separate us from your love for us. We are a forgiven people.
 We are welcomed home. Thanks be to you
 O Lord our God, amen**

Hymn 647 Comfort, Comfort. tMt video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P1x7V9N583Q&list=PL5dbbdzyKBag-mEd9qTgdyYNQLIsLD2rC&index=34>



Readings – Blackburn North Nunawading

Luke 21:25-36 NLT

²⁵ “And there will be strange signs in the sun, moon, and stars. And here on earth the nations will be in turmoil, perplexed by the roaring seas and strange tides. ²⁶ People will be terrified at what they see coming upon the earth, for the powers in the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ Then everyone will see the Son of Man^[a] coming on a cloud with power and great glory.^[b] ²⁸ So when all these things begin to happen, stand and look up, for your salvation is near!”

²⁹ Then he gave them this illustration: “Notice the fig tree, or any other tree. ³⁰ When the leaves come out, you know without being told that summer is near. ³¹ In the same way, when you see all these things taking place, you can know that the Kingdom of God is near. ³² I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass from the scene until all these things have taken place. ³³ Heaven and earth will disappear, but my words will never disappear.

³⁴ “Watch out! Don’t let your hearts be dulled by carousing and drunkenness, and by the worries of this life. Don’t let that day catch you unaware, ³⁵ like a trap. For that day will come upon everyone living on the earth. ³⁶ Keep alert at all times. And pray that you might be strong enough to escape these coming horrors and stand before the Son of Man.”

Thessalonians 3:9-13

⁹ How we thank God for you! Because of you we have great joy as we enter God’s presence. ¹⁰ Night and day we pray earnestly for you, asking God to let us see you again to fill the gaps in your faith.

¹¹ May God our Father and our Lord Jesus bring us to you very soon. ¹² And may the Lord make your love for one another and for all people grow and overflow, just as our love for you overflows. ¹³ May he, as a result, make your hearts strong, blameless, and holy as you stand before God our Father when our Lord Jesus comes again with all his holy people. Amen.

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Young at Heart – Rev Tina

Have you ever felt homesick? Have you ever missed your family and your own bed and home? I used to ride on an elephant at Melbourne Zoo when I was kid and again, in Nepal as an adult. Elephants can remind us God is strength and this gives us hope as a child and adult. Often there are times when we are far from home and feel homesick and miss our family and our home. But there is no love stronger than God’s love for us. God loves us with gentleness and reassures us we are never alone and comforts us when we feel homesick. God has a face in Jesus who came to be amongst us and reveal God’s love to us. When we come to know Jesus in our hearts we no longer feel alone. We feel strong in the Lord.

Hymn 272 – Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WBGx_4PxO3g

Sermon – Rev Peter

Homesick for coming into God’s home

I wonder what makes a home? What makes the difference between a house and a home? Just what makes you feel at home? Have you ever felt homesick? What is it you really missed?

I wonder if we can feel homesick or grief for something we have never had? I wonder if we can feel homesick for a home we have never known? Why would that be? Have you felt like that? I wonder what Paul was feeling when he wrote his letter to the Thessalonians. I wonder if you’ve ever felt those feelings, too.

We have begun to emerge from the struggle and isolation of COVID. At the heart of being human is our connectedness with each other. We belong together in community. Paradoxically in order to care for each other, during the COVID emergency we needed to distance from each other. This was counter intuitive as many

communities found out to their dismay. Grief, anxiety, the pain of separation, the struggle to care yet the need to do so from a distance – we have all experienced this in our different ways.

It is often said that home is where the heart is but when our heart cannot be home, it breaks. We experience homesickness. We seek a coming together again. The relief was palpable as many of us were able to reconnect physically with our loved ones, family and friends. Prior to the relaxation of restrictions, we were constantly encouraged to stay the course and ultimately get vaccinated. The hope of relaxed restrictions was held out as a motivation. Such hope mapped out a way forward to be together again. We are now on the journey towards restoring community and in a sense coming home. We have work to do to make it happen but we are on the way.

The dream and hope of Advent arises at its most intense in a time of struggle, conflict and isolation from what matters. The other day I had to buy something at a Christian bookshop. Out the front a couple of people were ardently pressing the manager to allow them in. They were refused access as they did not have the required evidence of vaccination status. We too have in our churches policies limiting access to worship for those who do not have the required vaccination status and evidence of such.

I am in a quandary as we are now in a situation where our services are limited in number and open to anyone or unlimited numerically but restricted to the vaccinated. I am used to encouraging us to be open to all and left with questions such as “how is hospitality, home and the reign of God lived in a post-pandemic world?” “How can we care for the vulnerable while providing a welcome to those who do not agree with me?”

When something hits close to home, *such as the isolation associated with the pandemic*, it affects us deeply. During the Advent and Christmas season, we journey through scriptures and rituals that are tender, heavy with emotion, and vulnerable. We carry the memories and truths of this season close to our hearts. *Our Close to Home* theme acknowledges the “already but not yet” tension of our faith: Emmanuel is with us, and yet, God’s promised day—our everlasting home—is not fully realized. It names our deep longing for God to come close to us.

The Advent and Christmas scriptures are rich with home metaphors and imagery. In these scriptures, home is both physical and metaphorical, something we seek and something we are called to build. In many ways, these scriptures are like blueprints—detailing the dreams of a God who makes a home with us. Ultimately, God is our home and resting place. God draws near and makes a home on earth; sacred ground is all around us.

The pandemic has taught us much. It has reminded us that there is more than one way to worship, to build community, to connect and to grow in our faith. The good news is that wherever we are, in whatever situation, we are close to home when we are close to God. God draws us close in the midst of struggle. This Advent, may we be comforted by the One who dwells intimately with us. May we expand safety and sanctuary for everyone wandering far from home. May we come home—wherever home is found—to live fully with joy, hope, and courage.”

Song – A Home for all

Light the can-dles, deck the halls.
 We are mak-ing room for all.
 Prac-tice hos-pi-tal-i-ty.
 Give in Chris-tain char-i-ty
 But to cre-ate las-ting change.
 A trans-ac-tion-al ex-change
 Won’t make straight our crook-ed ways.
 Or lift val-leys in-to plains
 Pro-phets of the ag-es call: “We must build a home for all!”

Stack the gifts be-neath the tree.
 Hang the lights where all can see.
 Send cards full of Christ-mas cheer.
 To the fam-ily far and near.
 But the great-est gift we share.
 Is a world that’s just and fair.
 Though it feels so far a-way.
 We will work for God’s promised day.
 Pro-phets of the ag-es call: “We must build a home for all”

Set the ta-ble for a feast.
 Crys-tal, chi-na, sil-ver gleam.
 Once the ban-quet has been blessed.
 Ga-ther round in Christmas best.
 But Christ's table has been set
 With the sim-plest meal of bread.
 Of-fer-ing a-bun-dant grace.
 Here all people have a place.
 Pro-phets of the ag-es call: "We must build a home for all!"

Offering Prayer

In a world where we are not home yet, there are people who are hungry, oceans that are polluted, churches that are fading, walls that are growing. Until we reach that promised day, when we make it home, let us give what we can to make a better world. Let us help build God's home here. With hopeful hearts, let us give.

Prayer of Dedication

Holy God, we are homesick and long for the day that you spoke of when swords will be beaten into plowshares, the lion will lie down with the lamb, and justice will roll like waters. Until that holy day comes, take these gifts and use them to build that world here. We are hopeful. Amen.

Prayer

God of the weary and waiting, scripture tells us that where two or more are gathered, you are there. We trust that you are here listening to these words, drawing us close, stirring hope awake in us. And for that we are grateful. We are so grateful.

Prayers of the People

Written by Trevor de Run, read by Lynne Rosenthal, Mountview Uniting

God of everlasting love, we praise you for your creation and for all that you richly provide. As we come to you in prayer, we thank you for all that you have blessed us with. We pray to you for one another in our need, and for all in our world at this most difficult of times, as the countries throughout the world continue with their efforts to contain the incidence of the coronavirus pandemic and provide the roll out of the covid vaccination programme. We thank you Lord for the improved situation in our own country, with the uptake of the covid vaccinations by the people, which has allowed for the restrictions to be lifted and everyday living to return to some normality in workplaces and for the school children who are now able to return to their classes.

In the ecumenical prayer cycle for the world, we pray for the Southeast Asian countries of Brunei, Malaysia, and Singapore. We pray for the people of these countries, where the majority of whom are Muslims in Brunei and Malaysia. Give wisdom for the leaders of these countries and for all the frontline workers, as they continue to work tirelessly to contain the spread of the coronavirus, in particular, Malaysia, where the number of daily new cases and the loss of lives continue to be high.

Heavenly Father, in the presbytery of the Uniting Churches here in the City of Whitehorse, we pray for the worshippers gathered today for the combined service in Blackburn North/Nunawading Uniting Church. Bless the Ministers of the Whitehorse Uniting Cluster, Rev. Tina Lyndon, Rev. Peter Cannon and Rev. Pete Rivett. Guide them as they provide the ministry for the congregations of Blackburn North/Nunawading, Forest Hill and Mountview Uniting Churches.

We pray for the other churches in our region, and in particular for the Anglican Church of the Ascension in Burwood East. In the presbytery, for the Preston Uniting Church and the Preston Macedonian community. Give their leaders the wisdom and guidance to provide Your will for them and their respective communities. We offer our prayers for Rev. Denise Liersch, the Moderator of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania.

Compassionate God, we pray for the members of our congregations, as we bring our concerns for those who are ill and for those who are in hospital and rehabilitation; for those who are grieving, distressed, depressed or afraid, that

they may be comforted. We name them silently now. We trust these people to Your care O Lord, that they may also know the power of Your presence. We pray that you will provide for them, comfort and support them. Let the light of Your peace shine on them, and upon us as we seek to be Your will. Inspire us to provide care for others in Your name. Keep us safe during the coming week and be with us in all that we do. Accept our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord, amen.

Candle Prayers – Rev Tina



Communion – Rev Peter

Invitation

...Here is a place where you can rest in the heart of love.

We come to this table, knowing our need for it.

May the grace and peace of Christ be with you.

And also with you.

God be with you

And also with you!

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to God.

Let us give thanks to our loving God.

It is right to give thanks and praise.

With voices gentle, and loud, timid, and strong, we declare to the universe:

Holy, Holy, Holy, God of power and might.

Heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is the one who comes in God's name.

Hosanna in the Highest.

The Lord's Prayer

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 265 – O Come O Come Emmanuel

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xtpJ4Q_Q-4

Benediction

As you leave *this* service, *your* service begins: Comfort the homesick.

Open your doors to others.

Seek sanctuary.

Be brave enough to go home by another way.

And remember that here in God's house, all are welcomed—so come back soon.

In the name of our Foundation—God, Spirit, and Son—

go in peace.

Hymn 779: May the Feet of God tMt video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YhiG-Vj8CGU&list=PL5dbbdzyKBag-mEd9qTgdyYNQLsLD2rC&index=40>

Pastoral Care Tips – Rev Tina



Changing Perspectives

I used to consider paperbark trees as unattractive until a friend told me they are called Snow in Summer and it changed my perspective. Now I think they are beautiful. I wonder whether something someone has said to you, or something has happened to you, that has changed your perspective. A simple comment, a near death experience or seeing someone suffer deeply. We experience many shifts in perspective during our lifetime. Perhaps they are ways that God breaks in and makes us more open to the divine within us. Perhaps the pandemic has changed our perspectives and helped us get in touch with deeper longings within us or reset our priorities or helped us come to know what we value most in life.

Walk don't Run

I saw a sign on a café along the Camino in Spain. It said: *Walk don't run*. It made me change my perspective. I'd spent a lot of time rushing through life when I was younger but as I aged, I learnt to go at God's pace and a pace that worked for me. I had read a quote from one of Tennyson's poems that changed my perspective. It said: *Adopt the pace of nature*. I realised we do not need to travel at the same pace as machines or technology. We are humans with human bodies, and we need to care for our body. It's the only one we are going to get and is a gift from God. It's our home.

Sanctified Art.

Close to Home – Creative Resources for Advent – Epiphany, Year C – A sanctified Art

This advent, as a team, we are using Advent materials from Sanctified Art. I hope that they bless you and change your perspective. Rev Peter will share his reflections on the materials for Advent 1 in his sermon. These are Rev Pete's and my thoughts for Week one.

Rev Pete

My understanding of this week's theme, Homesick, is longing for the kingdom of God. There is a wonderful apocalyptic theme of renewing of creation in a world that has/is descending in chaos, or pre-creation. Can we long for the kingdom of God, even though we struggle to articulate it? "

Rev Tina

My understanding of the theme of home is that it's not about houses or church buildings. It's about our hearts and coming home to God. It's about making God our home and at home in our heart. It's about being happy dwelling within God and God dwelling within us, where we are happy within our body and with our lives and faith journey

An Invitation

If you feel comfortable with sharing, please send your weekly reflections or insights on the advent themes and materials to me for inclusion in the written materials. (Just a sentence or short paragraph will do).

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**God, lead us to the slow path, to the joyous insights of the pilgrim.
Another way of knowing: another way of being. Amen**

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