



Order of Service

4th December 2022

Thanksgiving Service – Advent 2 Peace

HYMN – Be Still for the Presence of the Lord

Music & Words David J Evans 2011, Northern Baptist Association

<https://youtu.be/ZugvUQ4m90U>

Welcome

Welcome to this very special thanksgiving service celebrating the marriage of our three congregations. We will be giving thanks to all members for bringing us to this place, especially our leaders. Those who have served faithfully on church council over the years, for members of the Regional Council who have worked so hard over the past twelve months, for those willing to step forward to join the new church council. We give thanks for those who have encouraged and prayed for us along the way, who have been willing to share and contribute to surveys and meetings. We give thanks to Presbytery, Phil McCredden from Ecclesia, to our ministers and most of all we give thanks to all members of our congregations who are willing to embrace this new beginning.

Acknowledgement

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

Call to Worship

May the God of Hope fill us with peace in believing
May we abound in hope and peace by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let us become the voice of one crying in the wilderness
Let us prepare the way for the Lord

Prayers of Adoration

God of new beginnings, mysteries, and love
You shape your creation as you shape us
We give thanks to you for all you have done amongst us and through us
For calling us to unite as one people, Your people on the way
You call us to stand firm in our faith and be the change that transforms our church for future generations
You call us to celebrate and give thanks for yesterday and today and to look forward to tomorrow,
to a future you will provide through us

O Lord our God
We give you our thanks and praise

Jesus our Lord, you call us to follow you wherever you lead us
You teach us how to love our brothers and sisters in Christ, your body, your church, and our spiritual home
You show us how to be peacemakers who bring love and peace to your church
You are always with us
You are always blessing us

Jesus Our Lord
We give you our thanks and praise

Holy Spirit, life bearer, who fills us with God's love, You lead us forward
 As we pray, step by step, we journey into a future provided by God
 You help us reach out to one another, to bring peace and unity

Spirit of the Living God
We give you our thanks and praise

Prayer of Invocation

Come Holy Spirit, Come
 Inspire and equip us for future ministry
Come Holy Spirit, Come

Prayer of Confession

Loving God, forgive us for any words that have created division or have hurt another
 Forgive us for any actions that caused pain or hurt to another
 Lord, help us leave behind the words and actions of yesterday that have not been life-giving to others, ourselves, or
 our church community

Help us embrace words that build up others
 Transform our hearts and help us make a fresh start and new beginning
 Lord, in this moment of silence we come before you with all that's on our hearts
 Seeking forgiveness and the grace to forgive others and ourselves

Silence

Hear then Christ's words of grace to us
 "Your sins are forgiven"
THANKS BE TO GOD

Advent Wreath – Peace – Daryl Hawkey

On this Sunday we light the candle of hope again to remind us that Jesus brings light into world. We long for God to be with us as we prepare our hearts for our celebration of the birth of Jesus amongst us.

*We light the candle of Hope
 (The candle of Hope is lit.)*

**Today we light the second candle and call it peace. This candle reminds us of our dreams for peace in the world, peace amongst us and peace within us.
 This candle reminds us Jesus is the prince of peace and he is coming amongst us.**

*We light the candle of Peace
 (The candle of peace is lit)*

**O God, come, travel with us through advent and, as we begin a new journey together,
 give us courage to bring your peace to others**

Hymn 286 Light one Candle (V 1,2)

Light one candle for hope,
 one bright candle for hope.
 He brings hope to every heart.
 He comes! He comes!

Light one candle for peace,
 one bright candle for peace.
 He brings peace to every heart.
 He comes! He comes!
Natalie Sleeth 1930-92

Readings

Romans 15: 4-13

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The writings that we have received from times past were written to teach us what we need to know. The unchanging and inspiring message of the scriptures fills us with courage and hope. I pray that God — rock-solid and inspirational — will unite you and enable you to get along with one another, showing each other the same sort of trust and respect that Christ Jesus shows to everyone. That sort of peaceful shared life will ring out a message, as clear as a bell, giving all the glory to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. So welcome and accept one another as openly as Christ has welcomed and accepted you and may all the credit go to God!
 You can be sure of this: Christ accepted both insiders and outsiders.

It is true that he came to serve the people of Israel, who had always had inside access to the truth of God, so as to make good on the promises made to their ancestors. But it is also true that he came so that the outsiders might encounter the mercy of God and get into the swing of giving credit and thanks to God too. The scriptures spoke of it in these words:

“I will speak the truth about you among the outsiders, I will sing your praises and honour your name.”

In another place it is written: “You outsiders, come and celebrate with God’s people.”

Similarly, another piece of scripture says: “All you outsiders, sing the praises of God; let all peoples everywhere honour the Lord.”

And the prophet Isaiah wrote: “The root of David’s family will sprout again, producing the one who will give the outsiders hope; the one who will rule over all people everywhere.”

I pray that God, the hope-giver, will see to it that your faith produces a flood of joy and peace that fills your lives and spills over into an unshakeable confidence energised by the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 3: 1-12

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While Jesus was living at home in Galilee, John the baptiser showed up in the Judean desert preaching to the people. This was the guts of his message: “Turn your lives around, for the realm of heaven has drawn near.” The prophet Isaiah had spoken about John when he said, “In the desert a voice is shouting: ‘The Lord is coming! Get the road ready. Clear the track, straighten it out for him.’”

John was dressed in rough clothes made of camel hair and animal skins. He lived on bush tucker — grasshoppers and wild honey. People came flocking to John from Jerusalem, from all the rural districts of Judea, and from up and down the Jordan valley. They owned up to their wrongdoing and were baptised by John in the Jordan River, promising to mend their ways.

But when John saw that members of the religious groups known as the Pharisees and the Sadducees were coming to him for baptism, he bellowed, “You slippery bunch of snakes! What makes you think that running down here for a quick bath will get you off scot free when the judgment comes? You’ve got to walk the walk. Show by your actions that you’ve turned your lives around as you say you have. And don’t presume you’ve got the inside running just because you can trace your family tree back to Abraham. I’m telling you straight, descendants of Abraham are thick on the ground and, at the snap of a finger, God could turn these rocks into a few more. Family trees count for nothing; it is what sort of fruit the tree bears that matters. If the fruit is rubbish, God will have no hesitation sending the chain saws in to cut the tree off at the ground and toss it on the fire.”

“I’m only baptising you with water. After me comes the One who is way out of my league — I’d be honoured just to carry his boots. It won’t be just water that he’ll be immersing you in. He’ll baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

He's ready to start with his flame thrower in hand. He'll release an uncontrollable fire into the dry bushland of your lives, completely incinerating the rubbish and germinating the good seeds that lie in wait for that day."

Reflection – Rev Tina

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, amen



*"A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots."*

When I ponder about the stump of Jesse and a new shoot coming out of the stump of an old tree, it reminds me not to give up and it's not time to hand over things.

There may be no young people in some of our churches. It seems as if we've lost a generation or two of people who believe in Jesus, in some places. Perhaps our call is to hold fast to our faith and keep on praying to find a way to witness to others where we plant seeds in their hearts.

We know the story about the grandmothers who kept faith alive in Russia during the time when the communists enforced atheism. The efforts to crush people's faith failed and millions believe today. Today in Australian society the census for most suburbs reveals forty percent or more say they do not have a faith, in any religion. There may be many reasons why people declare they have no faith. Perhaps they do believe or have a spirituality. We do not know.

For an aging church there is some grief in the fact there's no one to hand things over to. But that means it's up to us. I remember the surveys we had recently and a voice that spoke out from all the others, saying: *Why can't old people have a vibrant faith?*

Well, yes, we can

With God's help even the impossible happens. So why can't we make a difference and contribute? Why listen to the prophets of doom? Why listen to society who thinks elderly belong out of sight, a society that often takes our voice from us?

Soon we will be the majority and it will be up to us to pave the way and to be the change we want to see. Of course, we do it at our pace. All of us know the story of the tortoise and the hare. The tortoise gets there! From sheer perseverance.

Be tortoises
Stick in there
Don't give up
Be stubborn

Don't lose your voice
 Be troublemakers
 Remember the grandparents who kept the faith alive in Russia

We can make the road straight for Jesus. We can be the ones making the future. We are the voice in the wilderness.
 A voice of love
 A voice that brings comfort to the lonely
 A voice that brings peace
 A voice that brings people together
 A voice that inspires
 A calm voice that helps people have hope
 The voice of many prayers

Stay faithful and remember Christ welcomes all people and there are no favourites. He welcomes and calls people of all ages to follow him and to keep on following him. We have the excitement, privilege, and joy of a new beginning in front of us. Embrace it with enthusiasm. We are blessed to have this opportunity to serve God in new ways.

Hymn Make me a channel of your peace – Susan Boyle (Guilia Zarantonello 2015)

<https://youtu.be/gUI2EyYIEKs>

Litany of thanksgiving

This litany gives thanks for the life and ministry of the three congregations and celebrates our coming together as the Whitehorse Congregation.

The leader (Presbytery minister, Rev Ray McCluskey) says:

We are a pilgrim people, always on the way towards a promised goal; we have the gift of the Spirit in order that we may not lose the way.

The congregations says:

We will live and work within the faith and unity of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church, bearing witness to that unity which is both Christ's gift and his will.

The leader says:

In your journey as the congregations of
 Blackburn North Nunawading
 Forest Hill
 and Mountview

you have witnessed faithfully to the mission and ministry of God in the world in both words and deeds.

Now, after much prayer and discernment, you have decided to come together as one, to be the Whitehorse congregation of the Uniting Church in Australia.

You prayerfully prepared for this journey in developing a MOU, calling ministers to work among you as a cluster and by appointing a consultant, Rev Phil McCredden of Ecclesia Ministries, to guide you through the process of coming together.

The congregations says:

We acknowledge the hard work and wisdom of those who have guided us in this process. We thank God for their openness to the possibilities and moving of God's Spirit. We now look forward in hope towards where God will lead us in the future.

The leader invites the members of the Regional Council to stand.

The congregations says:

We acknowledge the work, prayerfulness, and wisdom of the members of the Regional Council who have led us over the years.

The leader invites the members of each Church Council to stand.

The congregations says:

We acknowledge the work, prayerfulness, and wisdom of the members of our Church Councils who have led us over many years.

The leader offers a brief extemporary prayer of thanksgiving for the leadership of the church councillors and regional councillors.

The members of the Regional and Church Councils sit.

The leader says:

You now begin an exciting phase of your journey, as the Whitehorse congregation of the Uniting Church. It is like a new birth, a new beginning as you seek to build your relationships and confidence in each other. Patience, good will, generosity of spirit and a commitment to building this new community is required from all.

The congregations says:

We will continue to move forward in our journey, for we have heard the call of God to walk together in faithfulness. Through the empowerment of the Spirit we will build a shared future.

The leader says:

All have a part to play in this journey. You all have a ministry to exercise. For there are different gifts.

but it is the same Spirit who gives them.

There are different ways of serving God:

but it is the same Lord who is served.

God works through people in different ways:

but it is the same God whose purpose is achieved through them all.

Each one of us is given a gift by the Spirit:

and there is no gift without its corresponding service.

There is one ministry of Christ:

and in this ministry, we all share.

Together we are the body of Christ:

and individually members of it.

The leader invites the people to pray in silence for each other, the new congregation and themselves as they journey together.

The leader then offers a brief extemporary prayer for the new congregation and its future on behalf of the Presbytery of Yarra Yarra.

The leader then says:

I invite you to now greet each other with the peace, in a COVID safe way, as a sign of your coming together and the birth of your new congregation.

The peace of God be with you.

And also with you.

The ministry team invite the newly elected church councillors to stand to be recognised. The team indicate that their commissioning will be early in the new year. The team will then say prayers for the new congregation and its leadership.

TIS 776 The Aaronic Blessing

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you,
and be gracious unto you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you,
and give you peace.

Offering prayer

Lord and giver of every good thing we bring to you our lives and gifts for your kingdom all for transformation through your grace and love made known in Jesus Christ our Saviour, amen

Prayers of the People -Tim Joyce

Almighty God. We pray in gratitude and praise. You were there at the beginning of all things, shaping our world and preparing it for us. You have provided the mountains and the trees, the waters and the earth. Help us to be caretakers of your gifts, protecting the land from abuse, and ready to share with all in need. Deepen our awareness of our connectedness with all your creation, so that future generations will also enjoy every blessing.

Lord, we pray for your church

We pray for the Whitehorse cluster, soon to be known as the Whitehorse Congregation. For Peter and Tina as they minister to us and with us. For those who lead us. Give us strength to face the challenges ahead of us. May your guiding spirit be with us in all that we undertake.

We pray too, O Lord, as part of our prayer cycles for the work and witness of other churches and agencies. In particular for St Luke's Catholic, Blackburn South, the Uniting Church congregation in Whittlesea and Uniting Agewell in Box Hill. We pray that they too will serve you and their communities with faith, compassion, and courage. Bless their people, their work, their staff and their ministries.

Merciful Lord we pray for the world. God of peace and reconciliation break through the fears and insecurities which mar our relationships. Bring to our homes renewed understanding and love and to our troubled world fresh visions of peace. Transform our greed and selfishness and give us hearts for you alone.

We pray this morning for Thailand and Myanmar. We Pray for:

- minority ethnic and religious groups who continue to experience discrimination, persecution or even genocide (such as the Rohingyas), and for greater interfaith understanding and tolerance for ethnic and religious diversity.
- those victimized by sex tourism and exploitation, and those who perpetuate such acts
- political stability and progress toward democratic rule
- economic justice for all people, and environmental protection, as these countries undergo development.

Loving Lord, we bring before you those whose lives are without dignity and peace. We pray for the hungry. For the homeless. For victims of war. For the oppressed. For refugees and asylum seekers. For those who suffer from mental illness. For those on the margins of our society. Give leaders, communities, individuals everywhere the vision and compassion to labour tirelessly to heal those who are broken in body or spirit, to turn their sorrow into joy, and to stand for justice and peace.

Merciful Lord, we pray for those in special need at this time. We entrust these people to your care. We pray that you will provide comfort and support. Risen Christ, stand with us. Grant us peace - that we might serve you in the world, through Jesus Christ - Our crucified and risen Lord who taught us to pray.....

Our Father in heaven

Hallowed be Your name

Your kingdom come

Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven

Give us today our daily bread and 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 for ever. Amen.

Hymn 106 Now thank we all our God

Martin Rinkart 1586-1649. (HIMaachen 2012)

<https://youtu.be/s99dNPKYtHk>

Holy Communion



Prayer of Preparation

Blessed are you, God of all creation.
 You are the giver of life, we are the fruit of the womb, formed by your love.
 We will become your people for the world.

Blessed be God for ever.

Thanksgiving Prayer

The eternal God be with you.
And also with you.
 Lift up your hearts.

We lift our hearts to God.

Let us give thanks to God who is Wisdom and Love.
It is right to give our thanks and praise.

.....when we failed to honour your work and your being,
 your Word of Wisdom entered creation as Jesus
 to share with us the joy and pain of our humanity.

Through Christ, life rises from despair.
In Christ, all things are made new.
Because of Christ, your Spirit remains with us.

.....with all the works of your hands with everything visible and invisible,
 imagined and unimaginable, we sing in thanks and praise:

Holy, holy, holy God,
wisdom, strength, and hope,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is the One
who comes in the name of our God.
Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is Jesus, Wisdom embodied,
 who feasted with sinners, disciples, friends
 and now shares this meal in our midst.

As we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the coming of God's new creation
 in and through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and finally,
 in the completion of all things when Christ comes again:

Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.

Send your Holy Spirit, O God,
that these gifts in creation may also be for us
the gift of re-creation in Christ.

Shape us into one body; press us into one wine;
bake us into one bread – the Bread of Life
and Cup of Liberation – for the feeding of all your children
and the nurture of creation.

**Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ
in the power of the Spirit of Love,
all glory be to you, O God,
Source of All Being, Eternal Wisdom and Holy Spirit
as it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be. Amen**

Christ is the bread of promise,
for whom the prophets hoped.

Christ is the cup of peace,
the justice of God.

Prayer after communion

Hymn 687 God Gives Us a Future – tMt video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=64lXkcwZ06M&list=PL5dbbdzyKBag-mEd9qTgdyYNQLIsLD2rC&index=16>

Dismissal

Go forth into the world in peace
Be of good courage
Hold fast to that which is good
Render no one evil for evil
Strengthen the faint-hearted
Support the weak
Help the afflicted
Honour all people
Love and serve the Lord
Rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit, Amen

Blessing

We go in Peace in the love of God
in the Power of the Spirit
May the Lord Bless and Guard us
May the Lord make His face shine upon us and be gracious unto us
As we bring Christ's love and peace to the world. Amen

Hymn You shall go out with Joy

Chet Valley Churches 2020

<https://youtu.be/ivfUKd6AFXw>

Pastoral Care tips – Rev Tina

Appreciation can come at any age to anyone. That gift of finding joy in the simple things of life. When we begin to age one of the greatest gifts we discover is appreciation.

Joan Chittister in her book: *The gift of the years* wrote the following, “When we can no longer walk as fast as we once did, we come to see all the individual flowers, the cracks in the footpath, the children along the way, all more clearly, all more consciously than we ever have in the past. It seems as if one of the functions of aging is to give us the capacity to see what we’ve missed all the years before.”

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Practice the art of gratefulness. It's good for the soul.

A Prayer of gratefulness

Lord my God,
 I'm so grateful for my life,
 My loved ones,
 For the beauty of the earth,
 For butterflies, dragonflies, and seahorses
 For enough to eat each day and a warm home to retreat into,
 For laughter with friends and
 Music to move the heart
 For my church family and being able to contribute, even in my autumn years.
 Lord, thank you for blessing me.

O Come O Come Emmanuel

Piano/Cello The Piano Guys 2013

<https://youtu.be/iO7ySn-Swwc>