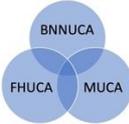




Whitehorse Uniting Cluster

The Uniting Church in Australia
Congregations of: Blackburn
North / Nunawading; Forest Hill;
and Mountview (Mitcham);
in a shared ministry together



Sunday 5th December 2021

Hymn 768 Praise God

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
praise God, all creatures here below,
praise God above, you heavenly host,
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Thomas Ken 1637-1711 alt.

Welcome

May the worship bless you

Acknowledgment

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 love be the foundation.

May God be the cornerstone.

May the Spirit be the windows—ushering light in.

May hope be the walls—holding us together.

In this hour of worship, let us work toward building that home together.

We may not know the path ahead, but God is here, even now.

Let us give thanks for a foundation of love.

Let us worship Holy God.

O Come, O Come Emmanuel – Enya

<https://youtu.be/h3M9JKmUecY>

Candle Lighting Liturgy

A: As we reflect on the foundation of our faith in our lives, we gather together around the candle of peace.

B: The home we long for is a home that knows peace—

A: peace that rests between us and our grief,

B: peace around our anxiety,

A: peace between us and our self-criticism,

B: peace amidst our relationships,

A: peace at the core of our being,

B: peace hovering through and in our world.

A: The home we long for is a home that knows peace.

B: So today we light the candle of peace—as a reminder and as a prayer.

A: Let it be so. Amen.

Prayers of Adoration

Loving God

We give you thanks and praise

For bringing about your dawn from on high in Jesus Christ our Lord

The light of the world, the morning star, our living hope
 Jesus our Lord
 We give you thanks and praise
 for beginning a good work amongst us and bringing it to completion
 through all your people through the ages and through us today,
 as we wait for your return

Response to Prayer

Come Holy Spirit
 Speak into our hearts
 Bring God's dawn and light into our lives
 Grow our faith and help us believe
 You can bring about your promises and blessings
 Into our church community and lives

Prayer of Confession

Holy God,
 When John was Born, Zechariah leaned down and whispered words of love into his ear.
 We know that you do the same for us, day in and day out, yet we fail to hear it.
 We forget that in the beginning we were made good.
 We doubt that we could possibly be enough.
 We hustle for our self-worth and wear ourselves out aiming for perfection. We deflect words of praise.
 We hide behind shiny first impressions.
 Forgive us. Trusting our worth is the hardest job.
 Open our ears as you open our hearts, so that we might rest on the foundation of goodness you have laid for us.
 Gratefully we pray, amen.
 Holy Spirit,
 We give you thanks and praise for making us strong in the Spirit where we can have confidence in God
 Where we can pray for God's will to be completed through and amongst us.

Words of Forgiveness

God continues to say to us: "You are loved; you are forgiven."
 That is the foundation of our lives. That is the truth upon which we build our home. So breathe deeply.
 There is grace and peace here. Join me in proclaiming this good news:
 We are loved. We are forgiven. We are claimed. This is our foundation. Thanks be to God. Amen.



Hymn 598: Dear Father, Lord of humankind (only V 4&5)

Drop thy still dews of quietness,
 till all our strivings cease;
 take from our souls the strain and stress,
 and let our ordered lives confess
 the beauty of thy peace,
 The beauty of thy peace.

Breathe through the heats of our desire
 thy coolness and thy balm;
 let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
 speak through the earthquake, wind and fire,
 O still small voice of calm
 O still small voice of calm

Prayer

Lord, settle our hearts.
 Quiet our minds.
 Steady our breathing.
 Help us to rest in you.
 Help us to listen for your good news.

Readings

Luke 1:57-80

⁵⁷ Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. ⁵⁸ Her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.

⁵⁹ On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. ⁶⁰ But his mother said, "No; he is to be called John." ⁶¹ They said to her, "None of your relatives has this name." ⁶² Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. ⁶³ He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And all of them were amazed. ⁶⁴ Immediately his mouth was opened, and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. ⁶⁵ Fear came over all their neighbours, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. ⁶⁶ All who heard them pondered them and said, "What then will this child become?" For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him. ⁶⁷ Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy:

⁶⁸ "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favourably on his people and redeemed them. ⁶⁹ He has raised up a mighty saviour^[a] for us in the house of his servant David, ⁷⁰ as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, ⁷¹ that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. ⁷² Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, ⁷³ the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us ⁷⁴ that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, ⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. ⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, ⁷⁷ to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. ⁷⁸ By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon^[b] us, ⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

⁸⁰ The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel.

Philippians 1:3-11

³ I thank my God every time I remember you, ⁴ constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, ⁵ because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷ It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart,^[a] for all of you share in God's grace^[b] with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸ For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. ⁹ And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight ¹⁰ to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, ¹¹ having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God. ©NRSV National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Hymn 675 Lord the light (Shine Jesus Shine) – tMt video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dVz73th6EAY&list=PL5dbbdzyKBag-mEd9qTgdyYNQLIsLD2rC&index=29>

Young at heart



What's the connection between butterflies and the nativity set?

Sermon – Confidence in God

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



I wonder what one of the main obstacles we face is, when living out God's call on our life? Could it be doubt and a lack of confidence in God? Like Zechariah's doubts and lack of confidence in God. When Zachariah was struck dumb, those who knew him realised God had touched him somehow. Perhaps Zachariah needed to be convinced and gain confidence in God over time.

Doubts and a lack of confidence in God are nothing new. Abraham and Sarah needed to be convinced too. They laughed at God's plan for their lives. They thought they were too old to be blessed by God. Like Zechariah and Elizabeth, they'd lived with the shame of barrenness for many years with people saying God had not blessed them with a son. Perhaps they had become set in their ways and accepted their hopeless situation. Yet Sarah and Abraham had a son and called him Isaac, which means laughter, and God gave them a wonderful future.

Now, the angel Gabriel came to Zechariah, and Zechariah doubted his message from God that his son would be a prophet and prepare the way for the Messiah. Zechariah was from a priestly family. He was a priest, so people would have wondered why God hadn't blessed him and Elizabeth. What God was promising was too great for his mind to comprehend and beyond his capacity to understand and control. It seemed impossible that he and Elizabeth would be offered such a blessing from God. A son who God would work through to change and bless the world. Now, everything looked like it was about to be reversed and turned upside down. He just couldn't believe it.

But Elizabeth became pregnant, and he must have watched and wondered over those months of waiting and listened to what Elizabeth said about when Mary visited, and her child leapt for joy in her womb at the coming of Jesus in Mary's womb. He would have pondered on the angel Gabriel's words about God's call on his child's life and the coming Messiah.

When Elizabeth gave birth Zechariah could hardly contain himself and with wonder and excitement, like most fathers at the birth of their child, Zechariah praised God. His heart was moved by the Spirit as he prophesied all the angel Gabriel had said and more, about the blessing God had given him and Elizabeth and the Lord's call to bring

light to those who walked in darkness. Zechariah said blessings to his son and shared what he knew about his son's call from God and the messiah's call. It was a joyful moment for his family. What seemed impossible was possible for God. And Zechariah and Elizabeth fulfilled their promises to God. Instead of calling their child son of Zechariah, as tradition demanded, they named him John and raised him as a Nazarite where he spent thirty years living in the desert until it was God's time to move his heart to embrace his call.

Years later Paul writes a letter to the church in Philippi. He is in prison and his letter begins with a prayer for the community where he consoles them by saying he is constantly praying for them with joy and is confident Jesus, who began a good work amongst them, will bring it to completion and reminded them they share in God's grace, for they faced oppression and discouragement. Paul could be speaking to every church today which faces oppression and discouragement. It comes in many forms. We face upheaval and challenges due to a rapidly changing world, every day. Paul's letter encourages us to continue praying with joy and confidence in God.

Since the days when the dawn from on high came upon all people, when our Lord Jesus came amongst us to give light to those in the darkness and in the shadow of death, Jesus has guided our feet along the way of peace. The peace only God can give. All this reveals that God's promises to us cannot be prevented. Our prayers during suffering and darkness are answered according to God's love and will for us. God blesses us with grace and mercy.

We are called to say "Yes" to God. We are called to believe and have confidence in Jesus and to keep on praying. We cannot afford to doubt. Doubt drags us into fear and darkness. We need to believe and have confidence that God gives us a future and the good work begun by Jesus amongst us will be fulfilled. God's promises are not impossible. God will bring into reality all Jesus came to offer us. The promises Zechariah came to know of brought life and hope into God's world. In the same way we receive life and hope from God who gives us a future.

The good news from today's gospel is God chooses ordinary people amongst us to bring about a future for us. Zechariah's son was chosen to prepare the way for Jesus. We are also chosen to respond to God and by the grace of God bring about God's promises into the world. All of us are chosen by God and our efforts make a difference in the world. This week I heard someone took a homeless couple into their home. That's brave. Then a man spoke to me who has a passion to help homeless when he has his own struggles and needs. He gives what he can and what he does makes a difference in the lives of those who face day to day challenges. They are not alone.

We are called to respond with confidence in God, believing without doubt, that the good work Jesus began amongst us will be completed through each one of us. What is impossible for us is possible for God. It is God's will to give us the light of the world, Jesus Christ, to guide our feet into the way of peace. This is how we find our home in God.

Moment of Quiet Reflection

Hymn - In the Bulb there is a flower (Hymn of promise)

YouTube sung by Debra Nesgoda

Hope Publishing Company 380 South Main Place, Carol Stream, IL 60188 (800-323-1049)

<https://youtu.be/8RHek8k5WoY>

Call to Offering.

Lord, remembering the joyful day of John's birth and his father's words to him, we try to make a similar impact by giving what we can. And we pray that the gifts we give now—our time, our money, our talents—will be infused by the Spirit to make a more purposeful world of love and belonging that we can be proud of.

Let this be the foundation—the very start—of a better world.

Prayer of Dedication.

Holy God, you are our home.

You and your goodness are the place we return to, the place we long to lay our head. So today as we offer you these gifts, we pray that you would take this offering and turn it into ministry. Use these gifts to transform the world we live in to better reflect the home you have envisioned for us—a home of peace, a home built on the foundation of love. Amen.

Prayers of the People

God of everlasting love, provider of all things, we pray for all people:

When money becomes a prison: When income determines worth: When economies deepen injustice: where consumption replaces compassion: *free us to choose life* that our responses and our actions will be guided by love.

Almighty God we pray for your church: we pray that your church wherever it may be, and whatever form it may take will be ready and open to confront and respond faithfully and purposefully to the many challenges before it. We pray for all of the congregations in the Whitehorse cluster of Churches. We pray for Pete, Tina and Peter. For their families and their support networks. For all those who hold office or responsibility. We pray that we might build each other up as we reach out to those around us.

We pray too Lord for other churches and agencies

Ecumenical: Anglican Church of the Holy Name, Vermont South

UCA: Richmond congregation

We pray that they too may serve you and your people with faith, compassion and courage. And we pray for the work of the Synod's Communications Unit and for 'Crosslight'. We pray that the work of this team might serve to build a sense of community within the wider Church; a sense that we are part of something bigger and we pray that it might be another means by which Your voice is heard.

Merciful Lord, we pray for your world. For victims of war and natural disaster and acts of violence, for those who do not have a job or enough to eat, for those who don't have a roof over their head, for those who live on the margins, for displaced peoples - for those who flee their place of birth, not because they want to, but because they have no choice. For aid workers as they deal with the unprecedented movement of people; - people damaged, depressed, oppressed, frightened and uncertain. We pray that nations (including ours) will open their arms to welcome those in need.

We pray that governments will be moved by suffering- and that all people be treated with compassion, respect and dignity, regardless of race, creed or means.

We pray for just access to Covid vaccines. We pray for those who rush to stay ahead of new variants. For those who treat the sick, and for those who have suffered and are suffering from, or because of the virus.

Lord we pray this morning for Myanmar and Thailand. 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.

Merciful Lord - We pray for those known to us who are in special need at this time.

For the sick, the lonely, the grieving, those recovering from surgery or who are facing challenges. We entrust these people to your care. Risen Christ. Stand with us. Grant us peace - that we might serve you in the world.

Through Jesus Christ who taught us to pray

*Our Father in Heaven, Hallowed be your name
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 607 Make me a Channel of your Peace

Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there is hatred let me bring your love;
where there is injury, your pardon, Lord;
and where there's doubt, true faith in you.

Blessing

We go in Peace
 With the Love of God
 In the Power of the Spirit
 May the Lord Bless and Guard us
 May the Lord make His face shine on us
 and be gracious unto us
 May the Lord Look kindly on us
 and give us peace. Amen

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 778 Shalom to you now – tMt video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2oqiFenWxY&list=PL5dbbdzyKBag-mEd9qTgdyYNQLIsLD2rC&index=35>

Shalom to you now, shalom, my friends.
 May God's full mercies bless you, my friends.
 In all your living and through your loving,
 Christ be your shalom,
 Christ be your shalom.
 Elise Shoemaker Eslinger 1942

Pastoral Care Tips – Rev Tina



Reflection – We are enough

Some of us may feel inadequate, from time to time, not seeing the beauty within us or knowing why we long to be valued simply for who we are rather than for what we do. Perhaps we often want to be important to others and in our need and hunger to be important in all we do, it doesn't make us feel any better and people see this neediness in us.

If only we could see how important we are to God, how loved and valued we are to God. If only we could see how when we put God first, we become a mirror reflecting the light and goodness of God and people see the light and love of God reflected in us. When we become a mirror for God, people see God in us, value us and love the God they see, know it, feel it and value this reflection of themselves.

When people see God in us they do not see cracked vessels they see beauty and light, God's Spirit in both of us. Perhaps we begin this journey when we hear God whispering: *Come home child*. We begin to wonder and come to feel safe enough to surrender into God's love for all of us. Only then do we begin to feel at home in our own skin, without the need for others' approval. We finally come to know we are enough for God, and others.



One Minute Meditation

I invite you to be still for a moment
to enter into the silence of God

Breathe out like a long sigh
then allow your lungs to fill naturally
repeat this

Empty yourself into God
receive God's love

Stay in this moment for as long as you're able
be still
rest in God's peace

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