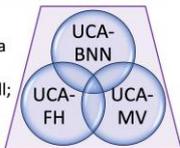




Whitehorse Uniting Cluster

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



Together at 10 Worship

At Mountview

Sunday 24th April 2022

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the First Nations People, the Traditional Owners of this land and their many unique cultures and languages. We respect the knowledge and wisdom of Elders past and present. They have never ceded their sovereignty and we commit to walking with them in their quest for truth, justice and treaties.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Today belongs to God. It is a day to celebrate a surprising thing that has turned the world on its head. Many of us are used to hearing the story of Jesus so many times we can miss the revolution at its heart. It is not a revolution which destroys and kills but one that renews and transforms with life.

Come; celebrate; rejoice for:

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed! Hallelujah!

PRAYER OF PRAISE

(Psalm 150 ©2001 Nathan Nettleton www.laughingbird.net used with permission.)

All praise to you, Lord!

We sing your praises in the house of worship;

we sing your praises out in the open air!

We give you all the credit for the amazing things you have done;

we openly declare that your greatness

is in a league of its own!

The bands strike up with songs dedicated to you,

making every kind of music in your honour.

For you, the haunting sounds of the didgeridoo!

For you, the jazz band's wailing horns!

For you, a funky bass riff!

For you, the fieriest fiddles!

For you, screaming guitars!

For you, drums and cymbals!

For you, a polished solo!

For you, a full-blooded orchestra!

All who can breathe, sing,

all who can stand, dance;

and all to sound your praises, LORD!

All praise to you, LORD of all!

HYMN: TIS 228 CROWN HIM WITH MANY CROWNS (VV1 – 4)

READING: JOHN 20:19 – 31

New Revised Standard Version

19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

26 A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31 But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

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PRAYER OF CONFESSION AND ASSURANCE OF GRACE

There are times when fear, shame, anger and hurt can touch us Lord.

Times of desolation and doubt when we resort to familiar ways to cope; withdrawal or lashing out.

The way of the cross you lead us on turns all this on its head.

You break into such places of despair and show us a new pathway.

It is hard to reimagine life in the light of the resurrection.

Forgive us when we allow circumstances to overwhelm our vision and living.

Risen one, you take away fear and doubt.

You fill us instead with your Spirit of life

All: Inviting us into your mission and ministry of grace and abundant living.

SERMON

When Jesus appears to the disciples it is the first day of the new week. It is a new week of new creation. One of the aspects of creation theology that underpins Judaeo-Christian thinking is the understanding that creation is not yet finished. God is continually moving in and through the garden in the genesis story. The implications of the Adam and Eve story implies an invitation to restored life in Eden - the longing of humanity to be back in the garden. However, the more we continue to think we have all the knowledge of the fruit of good and evil, the more that causes us to remain outside of Eden.

However, the emphasis in this reading on the first day of the week speaks to us of "continuing creation" theology. After the death by crucifixion of Jesus, the world was said to be in chaos and darkness. That image of darkness and chaos descending represents the undoing of creation. Remember back in Genesis, God begins God's work with darkness and chaos, breathing into it order to sustain life. Here, creation appears to be reverting to chaos!

Neshamah, is the Hebrew word for the breath of God that animates life within the body. Without this breath of God, life ceases.

The Ruach, the wind that moves over the chaotic waters, is the wind that animates life. Ruah is also translated as breath, but its role is different. The Ruach is the wind that moves over chaos to create order, without this Godly order, life descends into chaos again.

This Ruach is meant to guide or govern humanity in the ways of God. From the beginning of creation humanity was to live with order to sustain humanity. Every law that God lays down, each ministry teaching by Jesus was exactly that. Illness brings disorder, so Jesus heals. Hunger brings disorder, so Jesus feeds. Violence brings disorder, like when Peter cuts off the soldier's ear, so Jesus brings peace and healing.

The disciples have been locked in a room for fear of the Jews. Fear causes chaos, so when Jesus stands among them he says, Peace be with you. Then he reanimates them, breathes Godly sustained life into them.

Thomas though, was not with them, did not receive this breath of life, this Godly order. He also did not experience the presence of Jesus, so he remains in the chaos of doubt and fear.

The Rabbinic tradition understands that human beings are both body and soul and that God is concerned with the salvation of the whole human. Perhaps Thomas had already experienced the animated life that Jesus breathed into the disciples, that empowered them to forgive sins, to experience and embody peace. Perhaps this explains why Thomas needs to experience the body of Jesus before he can believe. He needs to witness the wholeness of the reality of salvation before he can believe.

Testimony is not enough for Thomas, he has to experience this new reality with his own hands.

So, how might we read this great story of hope filled resurrection today?

How might we see ourselves reflected in this reading?

For some of us we may see ourselves locked away by fear. A crippling anxiety that drives us to hide away from the work or Call of the gospel. Fear of what it might mean for us if we stood in the market place and offered an alternative to the violence of empire. Fear of what it might mean for us if we were arrested for standing in solidarity with refugees, or climate strikers or the many and various actions of civil disobedience that the Gospel calls us to. I debated getting arrested during the Love Makes A WAY actions but I was looking for work in schools at the time and my fear won over my sense of call action. I have been that disciple. We all have been that disciple.

Perhaps you see yourself in Thomas, questioning the reality of the resurrection because you have not seen it for yourself. Questioning whether those Christians you know who are full of optimism, full of hope are actually a bit crazy because the world still looks empire controlled, full of darkness and violence. Perhaps you see yourself in Thomas because you have been disappointed before. What you believed to be divine promises has disappeared before your eyes before leaving you jaded and cautious. Is that you?

Perhaps you, like Thomas need your hands to physically experience the resurrected life - you need to hold the wounded, feel the scars of a life fully given before you can believe that resurrection happens. Is that you?

Perhaps you see yourself in the disciples as they try to convince Thomas of the resurrection. They have experienced the risen Christ in their midst, they understand the implications of his call to life, and they are moving from fear to liberation, from fear to celebration. Or is that you?

I believe that we are all captured in this reading. We are all disciples, we all experience and respond to the resurrection in a multitude of ways, but we have all responded. Regardless of how we experience the resurrection, we have been ordained with the Peace of Christ, breathed on in an act of new creation, and gifted with the commission to bring forgiveness.

We are compelled to live this Gospel-filled life because forgiveness is greater than vengeance, because God's ceaseless creation cannot be destroyed by Empires of violence and greed, because the reality of resurrected Christ is always in the midst of us. May our eyes be opened to it, and may it be so.

COMMUNION

HYMN: TIS 100 All creatures of our God and King (v1 – 2, 4 – 5)

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS – Heather Barnes, Mountview

Our heavenly Father,

How wonderfully you care for us,

How boundless your merciful love.

As your people, we bring our prayers to you this morning.

Dear Lord, there are so many causes for concern in your world – so many areas of conflict or natural disasters. We pray that we may see beyond our own immediate concerns, and in our own small way, do what we can to help. For those entrusted with the responsibilities of leadership, we ask for wisdom, courage and compassion to lead wisely in order that your world may be shared and peaceful.

This morning in the World Prayer Cycle we are remembering the ancient civilisations of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. They are strategically located between the Black and Caspian Seas and have long histories of disruption and warfare.

Today they are independent nations in a very unsettled region and have experienced much religious persecution over the decades.

Heavenly Father, we give thanks for those Christians and Muslims who remained faithful to their traditions during Soviet domination and we earnestly pray for real peace in this part of your world.

The people of Ukraine are also very much in our thoughts and prayers with Russia attempting to occupy their

country. Nightly we see the horror of war on our TV screens and we pray that reason will prevail and this death and destruction will come to an end.

Within the Ecumenical and Presbytery Prayer cycles this morning, we are praying for the congregation at St. John's Anglican in Blackburn; and the Uniting Church communities in Box Hill – Hanbit Korean, St. Andrews and Wesley; and also Uniting's Hotham Mission. Bless them all as they seek to show your love in their localities.

This morning as we gather as the Whitehorse Cluster, we ask for your guidance as we discuss our future in your name. May we actively listen, be open minded and tolerant of varying ideas.

We ask your blessing on our ministry team as they seek to guide and lead us. Grant them good health and a restful holiday week for Tina.

Dear Lord we bring before you; all who are grieving, facing difficult family situations, recovering from illness or surgery, experiencing mental health problems or awaiting operations and treatments. May they know the comfort of your peace as we name them silently in our hearts.

Loving God, we give thanks for your constant presence in our lives and pray together the prayer you taught us -

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 for ever. Amen

THE CONCLUDING OF REV PETE'S SUPPLY MINISTRY

Daryl Hawkey, Chair of the Cluster Regional Council, says:

Rev Peter Rivett now concludes his term as a Supply Minister with us on next Sunday. We wish to thank and acknowledge him for his significant contributions to our life together as a Cluster. He commenced with us when we first formed a ministry team. He has supported and worked with the team in helping them to develop new systems and ways of leadership among us.

Pete, your term as a Supply Minister now comes to an end. In your commissioning service you committed to:

work as part of the ministry team to proclaim Christ's gospel,

to share in the conduct of worship,

to encourage God's people in their ministry,

to care for those in need,

to stand with those who suffer,

and to pray and act for justice.

You took Christ the Servant as your example, ministering to his people and serving with them in their witness to the world. In doing so, and in difficult times you fulfilled your calling with integrity, compassion, creativity and grace. You showed initiative and acted with dedication and wisdom.

Rev Pete says:

Brothers and sisters in Christ, you called me to minister with you, and charged me to preach the Word, lead you in mission, work with the ministry team, preside at the sacraments and oversee the life of the congregation. I now lay down the tasks you committed to me.

Daryl says:

We now release you to conclude this phase of your ministry in the peace and confidence of a job well done. We also hope we can also look forward to a time to see and hear of how God is blessing your ministry and leadership in the Uniting Church. *Daryl continues with his farewell remarks on behalf of the Cluster...*

The Aaronic Blessing may be said by the people

**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.**

PRAYER OF DEDICATION OF THE OFFERINGS

(adapted from Psalm 118:19, © Jeff Shrowder 2003, used with permission)

We thank you LORD God, for you alone are good,
and your loving kindness is everlasting.

With the faithful of every time and place we declare,
everlasting loving kindness is yours alone.

All: Use us and the financial offerings to bring life and hope.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Including an invitation to remain for the Workshops and an introduction of Phil McCredden

BLESSING

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Jesus said: "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I am now sending you".

He believes in you. The busy world awaits your compassion.

God believes in us.

Sometimes you will give your best yet fail.

God believes in us

At other times you will succeed in spite of your stumbling.

God believes in us

Go gladly, daring to succeed or fail to the glory of God,
and then at the very end, nothing shall dismay you.

God believes in us

With Christ's own breath within us, we shall travel well.

The help of the saving Christ,

the wisdom of the Living God,

and the support of the loving Spirit,

will be with you every step of the way, now and always. **Amen!**

CLOSING HYMN: TIS 390 ALLELUJAH, ALLELUJAH, GIVE THANKS TO THE RISEN LORD

