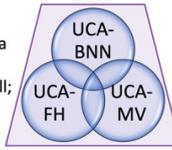




Whitehorse Uniting Cluster

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



Order of Service 23rd January 2022

Theme: Epiphany And Starting Anew

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

You are invited to pause and consider all those who have gone before you. Give thanks to God for them. We especially give thanks for the elders past and present of the Wurundjeri people who have cared for the land and waters on which we live and worship. We recognise that they have never ceded sovereignty. We commit ourselves to work towards healing and reconciliation of 1st and 2nd peoples, showing grace and compassion in the journey.

DAY OF MOURNING

Across many of our Uniting Churches, today also marks a Day of Mourning for the impact of 2nd Peoples' colonization upon the 1st Peoples. It is appropriate as we consider Epiphany and starting anew that we recognise afresh and seeking to move forward in repentance and a spirit of cooperation.

CALL TO WORSHIP *Based on Psalm 19*

The heavens proclaim the glory of God
they speak constantly
making God known to all.
Their words are ones you see and don't hear
but they cross all culture and language barriers.
And so we come to listen, understand and grow in faith and love.

PRAYER *Based on Psalm 19:14*

O God,
may the words of our mouths
and the meditation of our hearts
be pleasing to you,
O LORD, our rock and redeemer.

Amen

SONG: TIS 156 Morning Has Broken

CONFESSION AND ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS: 'THE WAY'

Written by John van de Laar @ www.Sacredise.com Used by permission.

We are poor, Jesus,
in love, in appreciation, in spirit;
and we need Good News to fill us.

*We are broken, Jesus,
in heart, in hope, in faith,
and we need to be healed.*

We are prisoners, Jesus,
of our own addictions, of our own foolishness, of our own pride,
and we need to be freed.

*We are blind, Jesus,
to the sacredness of the world we exploit,
to the image of God in the people we hate,
to the purpose you have planted within us,
and we need sight.*

We are oppressed, Jesus,
by our constant tendency to destructiveness,
and by the destructiveness of others,
and we need to receive and share forgiveness.

*Yet, in our great need of you, we rejoice and celebrate
because you are the way to what we need,
to what we can become,
to what we can contribute.*

**We praise you and bind ourselves to you again,
Jesus;
Anointed One;
The Way.
Amen.**

READINGS:

Nehemiah 8: 1-3, 5-6, 8-10 (NRSV)

8 ¹ all the people gathered together into the square before the Water Gate. They told the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had given to Israel. ² Accordingly, the priest Ezra brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding. This was on the first day of the seventh month. ³ He read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law.

⁵ And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. ⁶ Then Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, 'Amen, Amen', lifting up their hands. Then they bowed their heads and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

⁸ So they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. ⁹ And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, 'This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep.' For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. ¹⁰ Then he said to them, 'Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to our LORD; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.'

Luke 4: 14-21 (NRSV)

4 ¹⁴ Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵ He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

¹⁶ When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸ 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'

BEYOND THE FENCE – VIDEO AND POETIC MEDITATION

SONG: TIS 690

Beauty For Brokenness

SERMON: Eureka! The penny has dropped!

There has been much discussion in the news sites about COVID deniers and conspiracy theorists and relating to them. It is clear you cannot engage in debate or argument and expect to win them over. Truth and facts get you nowhere. The best course of action seems to be gentle listening and humour along with boundaries and love. Answer questions briefly but don't get caught up in the emotion and conflict. You will never win an argument with them.

It is a bit like coming to faith. It is a rare thing indeed (won't say never) for someone to be swayed by argument and facts and to thereby change their belief system. It is mostly through trusting relationships where gentle explanation helps touch deeply into the heart.

The key is trusting relationships. And teachers find the same. People learn best and obtain insight when they have a good rapport with their teacher, coach, counsellor and preacher.

The old joke about psychologists contains a truth:

How many psychologists does it take to change a light bulb?

Answer: One. But the light bulb has to want to change!

Learning, insight and epiphanies only normally come when we are open to learn and grow. They come when we are at the point of being ready to adjust, change and see. Epiphanies are major insights and so they often result in major changes in our lives. When they come we need a supportive community to help us grow and adjust.

In our readings from the scriptures for today, Nehemiah 8: 1 – 10 and Luke 4: 14 – 21, new things are made known. Many obtain insight – but not all. With the Nehemiah story, those with prior understanding need to mix with the listeners to interpret and explain the readings. There needed to be a translation and grounding of the word.

In Luke's story, of which we read only a segment this week, we notice that there is a recognition of something momentous happening – the events leading up to that day point to it. But the people just don't quite see and so the challenge to their ways is too much.

Other recent stories told in our worship of the prophet Anna, the Wise Men and the sign of the water changing into wine are all epiphanies offered but not all recognised. The epiphanies are gifted but not always received.

An epiphany requires an open mind and heart on our part. We need to be willing and prepared to let it change us. We need to listen and observe.

To receive an epiphany, we need to be on a journey of learning, faith and hope. When a new thing comes our way, we need to be open to embrace rather than react. This is not to say all the new should automatically be accepted but rather we begin by considering it openly. We let the new engage in conversation with the old and the traditional. We need to let both challenge and examine each other.

This has been particularly evident during this COVID pandemic.

As a cluster, we have been asked to consider our past, present and future life. It is easy to say we want to return to the good old days of large Sunday Schools, full church services and many people vying to participate and lead. Those days as we knew them have gone. The future is uncertain but the Spirit is leading us on.

We need to identify the important things we need to take on the journey (not much according to Luke's commissioning stories) and be open to where the Spirit leads. A trusting relationship with God is essential. A supportive Christian community is empowering.

SONG: TIS 687

God Gives Us A Future

<https://youtu.be/64IXkcwZ06M>

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS

Written by Derek Moore. Used by permission.

Let us come before God in prayer.

Today we pray for the nations of: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen – countries with long and often complex histories. We pray for the wellbeing of their populations during the current pandemic, and for religious tolerance between their peoples.

In the Ecumenical prayer cycle we pray for Mitcham Baptist Church, and in our Presbytery for the Warrandyte congregation. Lord, please bless these faith communities and be with them in their worship and restricted outreach.

We uphold to you the staff and students of Billanook College.

We pray for their physical, mental and educational wellbeing.

We pray for the medical teams throughout Victoria dealing with the latest COVID surge.

May they not become over-fatigued or unwell, due to the high workloads – please help them to endure, including all hospital-based personnel.

May both surgical and non-surgical medical treatment continue to be available, when it is required.

Lord, please strengthen us all so that we can continue to endure these difficult times.

You are all invited to join me in the Lord's Prayer:

**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.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us in the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen

ANNOUNCEMENTS

SONG: TIS 416

Great God, Your Spirit (TO THE TUNE: "JERUSALEM")

BENEDICTION AND COMMISSIONING

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Go into the world as those who have been
renewed by the creative word of God,
inspired by the Spirit-filled witness of Jesus,
and bound together by the power of the Holy Spirit
today - and every day.

We go to live as one body in Christ.

To be at peace, and care for one another;

Suffering with one another and rejoicing with one another.

**We will give our attention to the Word of God
and proclaim the good news of freedom to all.**

And may God delight your heart and sharpen your vision;
May Christ Jesus keep you, thought and word, in his grace;

**May the Holy Spirit be the fountain that sustains us
and binds us together as one.**

**We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
In the name of Christ. Amen.**

RECESSIONAL SONG: TIS 609

May The Mind Of Christ My Saviour

<https://youtu.be/NKShn3EgEik>

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