

Whitehorse Uniting Church

Written Worship

Sunday 12 February 2023



Introit: 699 A New commandment

Source Unknown

Arrangement © Australian Hymn Book Co
Chet Valley Churches 2021

https://youtu.be/2X8m9tVR0_Y

Welcome

May today's 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.

Gurrumul & Paul Kelly – Amazing Grace

John Newton 1725-1807 Arrangement © L.F. Bartlett
Gurrumul Official 2015

<https://youtu.be/MVORrx9jliE>



Uncle Joy with the Dali Lama and a Cellist (Photo T. Lyndon)

Call to Worship

Lord, you seek out the lonely, grieving, and hurting, those who have hurt your people and those who cry for justice and mercy, those who seek forgiveness and reconciliation, those who are oppressed and those who desire your love and bring them back to your home and fields. You touch their hearts with your compassion and bring them growth.

You minister through us to care for others where we bring your reconciliation, justice, and love into the world.

So, all may rejoice in heaven and on earth

Prayers of Adoration

Lord, you seek us and call us to serve you

Even when we are tested, we remain steadfast in our faith

As we follow your ways, we cling to you and remain patient

We trust in you and know you will comfort and help us

You will make our paths straight

Lord, we will stay steadfast in our faith and put our hope in you

Lord, we wait on you and hope for good things, for lasting joy, grace, mercy, and love.
 Lord, you help us persevere in our faith, for we know we will never be forsaken by you.

Lord, we will stay steadfast in our faith and put our hope in you

Lord, we can call upon you when we feel faint-hearted.
 We can trust in you and because of you, we do not lose our nerve, we never give up and we hang in there

Lord, we will stay steadfast in our faith and put our hope in you

We know you are always there for us as we strive to keep your ways and seek to please you.

Lord, we will stay steadfast in our faith and put our hope in you

Prayer of Confession

Come before the Lord in reverence and silence with all that's on your heart

Silence

Hear then Christ's words of grace to us

"Your sins are forgiven"

THANKS BE TO GOD

YouTube Hymn 534 Love is his Word, Love is his way

Luke Connaughton 1917-79

Words and Music by permission McCrimmon Publishing UK

James Kilbane Music 2020

https://youtu.be/_FB0ilj7Wbs

Readings

NRSV Bible Gateway

1 Corinthians 3:1-9

3 And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people but rather as fleshly, as infants in Christ. ²I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, ³for you are still fleshly. For as long as there is jealousy and quarrelling^[a] among you, are you not fleshly and behaving according to human inclinations? ⁴For when one says, "I belong to Paul," and another, "I belong to Apollos," are you not all too human?

⁵What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. ⁶I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. ⁸The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and each will receive wages according to their own labour. ⁹For we are God's co-workers, working together; you are God's field, God's building.

Matthew 5:18

¹⁸For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter,^[a] not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished²¹ "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder,' and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' ²²But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister,^[a] you will be liable to judgment, and if you insult^[b] a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council, and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell^[c] of fire. ²³So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.

²⁵Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court^[d] with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. ²⁶Truly I tell you; you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

²⁷ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ ²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin,^[a] tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.^[b] ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin,^[c] cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell.^[d]

³¹ “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ ³² But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

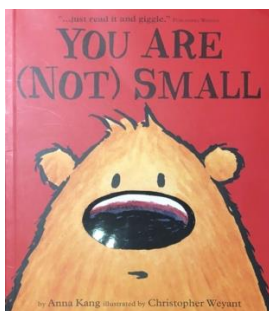
³³ “Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.’ ³⁴ But I say to you: Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, ³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶ And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷ Let your word be ‘Yes, Yes’ or ‘No, No’; anything more than this comes from the evil one.^[e]

³⁸ “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ ³⁹ But I say to you: Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also, ⁴⁰ and if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, give your coat as well, ⁴¹ and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. ⁴² Give to the one who asks of you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

⁴³ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I say to you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

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Young at Heart



Differences

Often, we see only differences, and this leads to conflict

We may ask what brings about reconciliation?

Spend a moment praying and reflecting on the times you were able to be reconciled
with someone who was very different to you.

What helped bring you together?

Hymn 468 We are your People

Words © Rev. 1999 by Hope Publishing Co, Carol Stream IL 60188 All rights reserved. Used by permission. Music by
permission Oxford University Press

Music John W. Wilson Words Brian Wren

First Presbyterian Church Oneonta Virtual Service Kim Paterson 2020

<https://youtu.be/8o4S5FGPsLg>

Sermon – The field of God – Rev Tina

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



Image RCL

What are we planting in God's field? Who is planting and who is watering? Who brings the growth?

1 Corinthians tells us we are God's servants working together for a common purpose. We are God's field. God's building. That means when we plant seeds in the field, we plant them in one another. When we water these seeds, we do it with God's love working through us, but it is God's spirit working within us that brings the growth. This growth will not happen if we do not provide the right environment.

The gospel offers us a new way of being and relating to one another. It is not the way of the world. It is God's way. A way of growing into a person who shares the characteristics of God.

In today's gospel Jesus sets the standard for disciples' behaviour and treatment of others. He challenges his disciples to behave in a way that is lifegiving for their community and themselves.

One of the most challenging teachings is to love our enemies. This is Jesus' teaching:

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I say to you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

It is strange how we put people into categories, those who love us, those who mistreat us and those we don't know. That is how we judge people. Only those who treat us with love are welcome into our inner circle. Perhaps we tend to judge people not as they are, but according to how they treat us. Jesus challenges this. He teaches his disciples to love their enemies. When we love and pray for our enemies there is no room for anger, retaliation, hatred, bitterness. This is the kind of love that heals us and sets us free.

Loving enemies embraces the agape love of God, unconditional love and compassionate love that sees into the hearts of all and loves all. Love for enemies reflects God's love for the broken and lost. To embrace God's agape love is a sign of the kind of growth brought about by God's spirit working within us that is found in today's gospel.

When I think of today's gospel, I remember Ross Langmead. I did missional studies at Whitley College and Ross was the lecturer. Ross died at 63 in 2013. He is well known for his songs written for congregations and we will sing one of them today called: *Lord let me see*.

I am including Ross's website link in the written materials. His website has copies of his songs and articles about mission and this photo of Ross which can be used for promotional purposes. I invite you to explore his website.

<http://www.rosslangmead.com/index.html>



I've read two of his articles about reconciliation and how it transforms relationships. Today's gospel focuses reconciliation and says:

²¹ "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder,' and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' ²² But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister,^[a] you will be liable to judgment, and if you insult^[b] a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council, and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell^[c] of fire. ²³ So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.

Ross defines reconciliation as "putting things right." He said: *Part of reconciliation is shalom which is a state of being, that involves wellbeing, harmony, and wholeness. Shalom and reconciliation belong together and imply the presence of Justice.*

Ross believed reconciliation without justice is false. It is false because it ignores the suffering of the oppressed and tries to bury history without dealing with it. Reconciliation is about remembering history, telling the truth, and working through the pain and if possible, repairing the damage and restoring relationships. There is no reconciliation without liberation and if it is genuine reconciliation, it's restorative.

Today's gospel is radical and overcomes barriers and upturns culture and the cross is the consequence of Jesus' radical challenge to social, religious, and political systems that promote oppression, mistreatment, and violence.

The gospel calls for a radical reconciliation and conversion of our hearts.

As in the letter to the church at Corinth that was experiencing division, it is God's spirit that brings necessary growth that restores our relationship with God, that reconciles us with God.

Ross wrote about reconciliation bringing about reconciliation within us and growth towards self-acceptance and integration. When we accept we are forgiven, we are set free to grow towards self-acceptance, loving ourselves instead of being at war with ourselves and being driven in our choices. Growth will come that leaves us with a sense of infinite self-worth. When we are reconciled with God and ourselves, we are more able to reconcile with others and take up the path of non-violent vulnerable love, especially disciples living under military might and Jesus gives examples, turn the other cheek, give up our cloak and walk the extra mile. But this choice to respond can apply in situations where we are being mistreated or oppressed. Ross called this response "*creative non-violent resistance.*"

Ross spoke about indigenous Australians who have suffered genocide, marginalisation, being treated as second class citizens, denied the vote until 1967 and who experienced twenty years of parents and children being separated with the assistance of the church (the stolen generation). Aboriginal life expectancy is twenty years lower than the majority of the population, they experience high unemployment, low social health with poverty, imprisonment and alcoholism and neglect due to lack of health, legal, educational and health services.

What does reconciliation mean in this context?

For Ross there is no true reconciliation without justice. Reconciliation often begins with the victim taking the first step. They seek to set the relationship right. They begin the process of forgiveness. They begin the journey of remembering and bringing the truth to the surface, so it can be faced. With the Holocaust, reconciliation began with hidden stories told in public. With the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission it began with stories told by the oppressed and leaders saying they were sorry.

In Australia in 2007 the Prime Minister Kevin Rudd made a formal apology to the Aboriginal people of Australia. This was a beginning. Since that time reconciliation has involved justice. Aboriginal elders having been leading the way forward for many years. This is Uncle Bob and Auntie Joy at the Parliament of Religions in Melbourne in 2009. Today we are considering the indigenous Voice to Parliament which will give the Australian government the opportunity to make policies with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, rather than for them. Constitutional recognition through a Voice to Parliament is a body enshrined in the Constitution that will enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander people to provide advice to Parliament on policies and projects that impact their lives. if you want to know more look at the website: <https://fromtheheart.com.au>



Images T. Lyndon

True reconciliation requires justice where rights and status are restored.

This year we enter into a time of discerning our vision and mission for the future. The field is our church. We have the opportunity to plant seeds within one another's hearts and some of us will water them and God will give the growth. Will some of those seeds make it possible to bring about reconciliation with God, within ourselves and with one another and the community around us or communities outside our local area?

Storytelling can be healing and bring about restorative justice and reconciliation. One current project is a book about our faith journeys called Memories and Recollections. Perhaps we can extend that to include a second book about stories from members of the community who have overcome or are experiencing injustices, oppression, and isolation.

Let us remember prayer is the engine of mission.

Mission is often a grassroots response to prayer. When you pray allow God to move your heart towards God's compassion for others. May your hunger be for reconciliation based on God's restorative justice in the world.

Articles by Ross Langmead that were a resource - 2008. "Transformed Relationships: Reconciliation as the Central Model for Mission". *Mission Studies* 25.1 (June): 5

Dr Ross Langmead, Reconciliation at the Heart of God and Mission

Myanmar Institute of Theology, November 2012 *(All Ross Langmead resources used with permission.)*

Let us offer one another the greeting of peace.

Hymn Lord let me see – tMt video

Lyric-Video created by partnership between Cheltenham-Mentone and Mountview Uniting Churches, for during the COVID-19 pandemic. Final production at the Mitcham Studio. Music & Lyrics: Ross Langmead 1949– ; © R.

Langmead; Permission to stream obtained from ONE LICENSE #A-620587 [MUC] Video: © 2021 the Multimedia team. All Rights Reserved.

<https://youtu.be/8z8roH9ocFM>

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 – Rhonda Goodall

Lord our God, heavenly Father, sustainer of all life, comforter, and confidant. In you, Lord, all things are possible.

Lord, we bring before you today in our prayers for the people of the countries of Austria, Liechtenstein, and Switzerland. All are wealthy countries by world standards and members of the European Union. These countries have taken in refugees from Syria and countries in conflict often in opposition of a section of the populace. Assist these countries, Lord, in their resettling programs. May those who oppose the taking in of the refugees come to have compassion for the refugees and become engaged and assist in a positive way to ease the burden and anguish of resettlement in a foreign country with a foreign language.

In our ecumenical prayers we remember the Nunawading and Waverley Lutheran Church community. Be with their leaders as they minister to their congregation and the wider community for the glory of you, Lord. We pray for the Burwood Heights Uniting Church. Be with them Lord as they join in Christian fellowship worshipping together and expressing the Lord's love by their community service and outreach programs.

We pray for Uniting's Harrison Community Services, connecting those raised in orphanages to reunite with their long-lost families. Assist the volunteer leaders as they provide services and support for the youth, vulnerable families, and child welfare, often offering emergency relief in times of dire needs and stress.

There has been a terrible natural disaster – major earthquakes across Turkey and Syria – with many killed from tumbling apartment buildings and other concrete structures during a severe cold winter storm. We pray for the relief workers as they attempt to reach the survivors buried under the rubble. May there be available the necessary equipment to dig out the survivors and the lost loved ones. Lord, comfort those who have lost loved ones from this disaster.

Lord, we pray for our own congregation of Whitehorse. Be with our ministers as they bring us your word and teaching. There are a number within our community who are suffering from a severe illness, confined to home, experiencing frailty or are in pain. Lord, ease their suffering and comfort them in their time of need.

We know, Lord, that deep and great is your love and your compassion for us. For you have breathed a new Spirit into us, giving us renewed vigour and vitality, to face the following week with you by our side, in all that we do and achieve in your name.

Lord hear our prayers and as we face the future and we remember the prayer our Lord Jesus taught us to pray:

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 409 O Breath of Life

Elizabeth Ann Porter Head 1850-1936

Mary Jane Hammond

Acoustic Song Leading Video (EMU Music) 2020

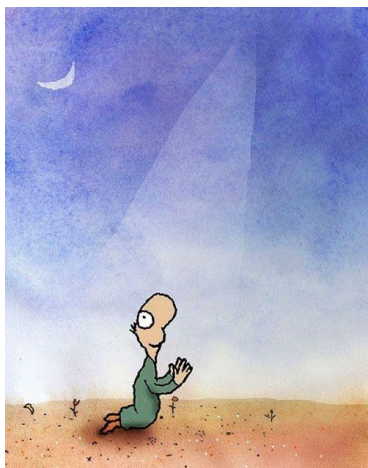
<https://youtu.be/0lpCy3Qq3VI>

Blessing

We go in Peace
 in the love of God
 in the Power of the Spirit
 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 this day and the coming week. Amen

Hymn 779 May the Feet of God
 Robin & Dorothy Mann Music
 Words A.W. Podlich
 Tunecore 2014
<https://youtu.be/WfOFIWxGaP8>

Pastoral Care Tips



Leunig – used with permission

Some of Joan Chittister's thoughts from her book *Songs of the heart. Reflections on the Psalms. Adapted* (Used with permission)

It is said every difficulty is an opportunity. But when tough times come it is a choice to be faithful under all circumstances. Most of us choose to pray and find a way to learn from our circumstances. God is at work in our lives, even when we cannot see it. Often, we only see the immediate and forget the full shape of our lives. We forget we have a history, a story of pain and a history of being saved and our history tells us to give thanks to God, to tell God's name, to spread hope and faith, not despair and discontent.

A Chinese Wisdom Story

from Joan Chittister's book: *Songs of the Heart* (Used with permission)

Once there was a farmer whose only horse escaped the corral. When his neighbours lamented his loss, the farmer said, "Good event, bad event, who knows?"

But when the horse returned to the farm leading a whole herd of wild horses with him, the neighbours congratulated the old man on his luck. Then the farmer said, "Good event, bad event, who knows?"

Later, when the farmer's only son was thrown from the back of the horse and broke his leg at harvest time, the neighbours bewailed his troubles. But the farmer said, "Good event, bad event, who knows?"

And when the warlord conscripted every young man in the valley for his army except the boy with the broken leg, the other farmers whose sons had been taken, cursed their bad luck and celebrated his fortune. But the farmer said, "Good event, bad event, who knows?"

An exercise from Joan Chittister's Book

(Used with permission)

Find a quiet place to pray and write down on a piece of paper the following:

I give thanks to you, my God. (10 times)

Then thank God for five good events and five bad events in your life.

Then if you feel comfortable, share your prayer of gratitude with a close friend.



Doors open and close every day

Images Tina Lyndon

I'll finish with a prayer

The Grateful Prayer – Rev Tina

O Lord, you are always with me.

You are faithful to me and will never fail me. You bring me through tough times and good times.

You comfort me and help me know I am loved by you.

When one door closes another will open.

Lord, you lead me, and I will follow you all the days of my life.

Lord my God, I give you my thanks, amen.