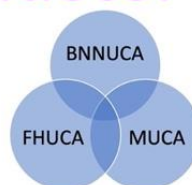




Whitehorse Uniting Cluster

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



Sunday 1 August 2021

Call to worship: (Rev Pete)

Christ within us,
Light above us,
Earth beneath us,
Love surrounds us.
- from EcoCongregation Ireland

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Wurrundjeri people of this area as the traditional owners of this land. We acknowledge that our story has not been one of comfort and compassion or learning and wisdom. We recognise that, as a people of God's justice, we are called to weave our stories together.

Opening Prayers - (from Rev Pete)

God who calls us into restorative love, speak truth to us this day. Speak truth to the most inward parts of our hearts and minds, that we might speak your truth in radical love. Speak into us so you might speak your truth through us each and every day. In your holy name, we pray. Amen.

Prayer of confession and assurance of forgiveness: (Rev Peter)

Poem for reflection: BREAD FOR THE JOURNEY (John 6:24-35) © *Jeff Shrowder, 2018*

Looking for Jesus
they mistook bread of heaven
for bread from heaven.
 The bread of heaven
 feeds one's daily faithfulness
 rather than stomach.

Jesus, bread of life,
arms open wide, you offer
bread for the journey.

Readings

Ephesians 4:1-16

4 I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. **4** There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

⁷ But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸ Therefore it is said,

“When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people.”

⁹ (When it says, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended^[a] into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) ¹¹ The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. ¹⁴ We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people’s trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love.

John 6:24-35

²⁴ So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” ²⁶ Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. ²⁷ Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.” ²⁸ Then they said to him, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” ²⁹ Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” ³⁰ So they said to him, “What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? ³¹ Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” ³² Then Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is that which^[a] comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” ³⁴ They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”

³⁵ Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

Sermon (Rev Tina)

Let us build one another up in love

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



I managed to escape Melbourne between lockdowns and walk the Larapinta Trail and it offered me an opportunity to reflect on the past eighteen months.

Most of us fear lockdowns becoming part of our lives. We fear it won’t totally be eliminated, and we will have to learn to live with Covid-19 and consequences that will affect our health and economy for a long time. It is easy to get caught up in this fear, the downheartedness, and the tiredness of it all.

The trek I went on was challenging. The paths were upside down riverbeds with rocks that were ankle crunching and I had to scramble over boulders, wade through icy cold water and climb mountains. We walked 16k most days. I made many connections with my experience of lockdown.

Yet, there were moments when I glimpsed beauty in the landscape. The starry skies at night from horizon to horizon made me feel like the man in psalm 8 who asked God the question:

Who are we that you are mindful of us?

I believe God is mindful of us.

Those starry skies are still with me and drew me closer to God and deepened my faith.

To return to lockdown made me more aware of how tired we are of the dreary mess of lockdown with its limitations and heaviness of heart. Lockdown can wear us down at times and exhaust us.

We're made for freedom and relationships, not to be restrained where we cannot roam and be with our loved ones.

I know some people who are cracking on the inside and mental health issues are on the rise. It's been very hard on young people. Some may wonder, where is the light at the end of the tunnel? Some may be losing a little piece of themselves each time they go into lockdown.

It's made me wonder that perhaps what we believe, shapes our response to these constant lockdowns

Trekking in the Australian desert with a group of people made me realise no one was going to carry me and I couldn't stay out there. There was no food, water and shelter. If I was going to survive, I needed to depend upon something deep within myself, an inner resource that gave me the mental strength and helped me find the motivation to keep on going.

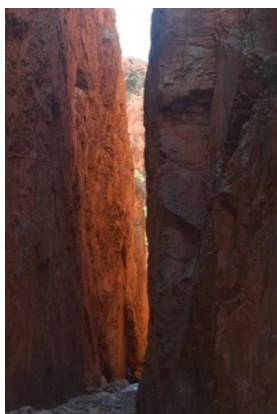


My companions were in the same boat, and we depended on one another's love and encouragement. To survive we had to draw on our attitudes to life and sense of belief in ourselves that we could do it. So many of us lose hope in challenging situations and sink into dark moods and negative thinking that can defeat us.

With survival the choice is getting through whatever landscape we face or dying out there.

When there are companions and guides, their presence, sense of responsibility for us and encouragement, help us get in touch with our beliefs.

Glimpses of the sheer beauty of our surroundings filled us with hope.



The sheer size of Standley Chasm and a local aboriginal man's stories filled us with wonder. There was a man at the bottom. You could just see him.

The beauty of mountains and waterholes in dry deserts with icy cold water that kept people alive gave us hope.

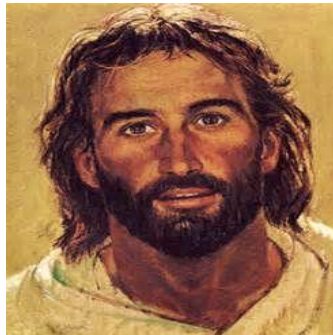
We can find beauty in nature and in our memories of nature. I'm sure many of you have experienced the Australian outback or countryside and there is one memory that stands out for you. One glimpse of beauty that sustains you and gives you hope. Like my memory of the starry skies. There is beauty in one another, our garden, in flowers and birds. We are surrounded by beauty.



When we walk through challenges it is our attitudes and appreciation of one another, of beauty and our faith that pushes us on. Our desire to survive gives us strength and endurance and somehow we grow in our self-belief and faith in God. We come to believe God will never leave us out there in the wilderness, deserts, and storms of life. God is with us as we journey through these lockdowns. During these tough times.

It is our belief and attitude that save us from the challenges of lockdowns.

Today's gospel tells us we will never hunger or thirst when we believe in Jesus.



We know deep down in our hearts that it's our belief in Jesus that truly satisfies our deepest longings. The gift of lockdown has been finding out in the midst of having to survive isolation and limitations, what really matters to us and what sustains us. It is our relationship with God and our loved ones.



It is our belief in God, in those who love us and in ourselves that keeps us going. It is the conviction that we are not alone in this mess of life. It is the confident belief and trust in Jesus that we will come through all difficulties, with God's help.

Today's gospel was addressed to Jews and written in Greek. The Jewish understanding of the Torah was that believers laboured under the law that was given by Moses so they could find life.

Jesus turns their beliefs upside down. He says the work they must embrace is to believe in the one God sent, himself, and then they will find life.

People come to Jesus asking: What must we do to be devoting ourselves to the works of God? Jesus says: "This is the work of God, that you believe in him who God has sent."

What Jesus said made me wonder. Is belief or believing, 'our work' or is it "God who works in us and in our hearts", so we come to believe in Jesus, whom God has sent? Is it about us devoting ourselves to the works of God and believing or is it about the work of God in us?

No amount of signs from heaven, or works on earth will ever convince us.

What we do is receive God's work. We believe in Jesus and receive our spiritual food and eternal life, a deep nourishing food that sustains us in all times. We receive it as God work in our hearts, so that we come to believe in Jesus. Our belief in Jesus is accomplished through God's grace.

When Jesus says: "I am the bread of life." we cannot grasp this intellectually.

Belief according to Jewish people was about a quiet trust and confidence in God. The Greek word is *Pistis* meaning confidence or trust. Christians have a confident attitude towards God involving commitment to God's will for our life. When we believe we know something is true, without a doubt. We don't need proof. We are quietly confident that God in Jesus is real and present to us and will always be there for us and this trust and quiet confidence sustains us and becomes our spiritual food.

It is easy to be hungry and thirsty for all manner of things during lockdowns. It seems like we are continually frustrated and stuck and unable to go forward with a strong sense of purpose.

When I was a child, I watched farmers and fishermen. When the weather became stormy fishermen spent time mending nets and farmers made plans for fields and prepared seeds. They dreamt big dreams of what they'd do when the storms passed. They made plans. They thought about how they would go about fishing and farming. They made foundations for their endeavours, so that when the weather became good, they were ready to move ahead and carry out their plans and live out their dreams. They were ready to go forward with a sense of direction and purpose. They used downtime to build relationships with their loved ones and bring them onside with their plans. Family and crews would eat and drink together, often under starry skies around outback fires.

Those who believed in Jesus would look to the dawn and the horizons of their life and find nourishment in beauty. We can learn a great deal from fishermen and farmers. Perhaps we can use this time to build foundations for the future.

Perhaps we need to come from a place of prayer and silence, and look for beauty, before moving ahead with our lives after all these lockdowns end. We've been using our homes as places where God dwells for a long time now and I'm sure God has done deep work in our hearts, that's deepened our belief in Jesus.

Paul wrote a letter from prison to the church at Ephesus. He knew what it was like to be in lockdown. He encouraged the church to remain united and to love others. He said our maturity as Christians is measured in terms of our faith and love and that we must remain united as one in Christ.

Perhaps each day we could pray and ask God to put one person on our heart. One person who we need to reach out to by phoning them or meeting at a park for a walk or café for a chat or to pray for them. Paul encourages us to use our gifts and love to build one another up. May we come to know the love of Christ in one another and see Jesus Christ in one another.

I'll finish with this quote from my devotional: Celtic Daily Prayer produced by the Northumbria Community in the UK.

Christ of the human road
 Let us reach out to touch you
 And sweet Christ,
 Show us your lovely face.
 As we see Your face by faith,
 We learn to become like You,
 Lord Christ,
 That the world may see Your glory.
 Show us Your lovely face.

Taken from Northumbria Community's Celtic Daily Prayer published by Collins

The Lord be with you

Hymn: Brother, Sister, let me serve you (V 1,2,3)

Brother, sister, let me serve you,
 let me be as Christ to you;
 pray that I may have the grace to
 let you be my servant too.

We are pilgrims on a journey
 and companions on the road;
 we are here to help each other
 walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ-light for you
 in the night-time of your fear;
 I will hold my hand out to you,
 speak the peace you long to hear.

Offertory Prayer (Rev Pete)

God our Father, you created the world and sent your own Son to live among us, made of the same stuff, breathing the same air, marvelling at sunrise and sunset just as we do. Help us to participate in the life around and within us as your life, as you living in us and we living in you and in each other. God of love and life, restore us to your peace, renew us through your power and teach us to love all that you have created and to care for the earth as your gift and our home.

- The Earth Community: In Christ through the Integrity of Creation

Prayers of the People (John Gerrard, Mountview)

Loving God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we bring to you now our prayers for others. As we consider the wonderful world in which you have placed us to live, we are reminded of the gross inequalities which we have allowed to persist in the world. We pray particularly today for the people of the Republic of Congo, Sao Tome and Principe.

We give thanks for:

- wildlife and rainforests in these lands, and those who protect this habitat
- the oral traditions, folklore, and good practices that have been preserved
- rich minerals and economic development, although benefits need to be shared more fairly
- healing from exploitative practices that began under colonial rule.

We pray for:

- democratic fair elections and political stability in this region
- economic development that benefits all the people, especially those living in poverty
- preservation of the wildlife and the land
- the witness of the churches and other faith groups in the midst of the challenges

In our ecumenical prayer cycle we remember today your people worshipping and serving at Saint Alfred's Anglican, Blackburn North. We pray for the on-line outreach programs conducted by the people at St

Alfred's, including their Pulse youth group and their forthcoming youth camp. We think, too, of the deeper understanding of your Word to which the on-line worship resources program is directed, and pray that it will be meaningful and effective.

Within our own Presbytery we pray today for the worship and work of the Uniting congregation at Eltham/Montmorency. The outreach programs of this congregation have been curtailed by COVID restrictions. We ask your blessing on these folk. May they be encouraged to sustain their witness and work in their community so that they will be ready to reactivate their programs when restrictions are eased. Give them the optimism that comes from knowing that you, O Lord, are with them, and have a plan.

We pray, too, for the work of the Uniting Church's Melbourne City Mission. The Mission provides early childhood support and education, support for the homeless, disability services, palliative care and education. The winter months and the COVID pandemic will put the staff providing these services under increased pressure, and we ask that you will guide and strengthen them as needs increase. We pray, too, for the many clients of the Mission's services. May they perceive God caring for them through the hands of the Mission's staff.

We seek your blessing on all of our people in the Whitehorse cluster, on our worship and our work together. We ask your blessing on each member of our cluster ministry team as they lead us in worship, service and growth at the parishes within the cluster. May this be a time of encouragement and growth for us all.

We pray today for comfort and healing for those close to us who are unwell or who need your guidance and strength, and we remember and pray for them now in silence.
We bring these prayers in our Saviour's name, praying the words that he 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.

Commissioning (Rev Peter)

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You are justified by faith in the God of absolute grace, mercy and peace.

Therefore, go out into the world as people of freedom.

Give liberally, receive gratefully, serve humbly, and be served graciously,
forgive generously, receive forgiveness humbly.

We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

The grace of the Redeemer, the love of the Creator, the friendship of the Counsellor will be with you this week and always.

Amen!

Hymn: May the Feet of God

May the feet of God walk with you,
and his hand hold you tight.

May the eye of God rest on you,
and his ear hear your cry.

May the smile of God be for you,
and his breath give you life.

May the Child of God grow in you,
and his love bring you home.

Aubrey Podlich 1946-

Self-Care tips (Rev Tina)

The gospel reminds us it is our beliefs, daily practices, attitudes, thinking and others' love for us and ours for others, that sustains us.

We are invited to try to spend time each day praying and practise coming out of a place of prayer. We often find our day is richer and more meaningful after some time praying. It feels different and when we miss a day, we notice it. It is so important to try to look for or remember something beautiful each day or contact a loved one. To not get bogged down in negative thinking and instead to try to reach out to others who we know will lift our spirits and encourage us. It is good to give thanks for the wonderful blessings in life that we have received. It is our beliefs and attitudes and daily practices and thinking that give us a sense of purpose in life. No matter what hardships we are encountering, we know God loves us. Everything is passing. God and our belief in Jesus, is permanent. Our gratitude for life's blessings and appreciation of one another and life's beauty can sustain us. Trusting and having quiet confidence God is there for us and belief in Jesus is our food. Always.

Risk – A Poem

To laugh is to risk appearing a fool
 To weep is to risk appearing sentimental
 To reach out to another is to risk involvement
 To expose your feelings is to risk rejection
 To place your dreams before the crowd is to risk mockery
 To love is to risk not being loved in return
 To go forward in the face of overwhelming odds is to risk failure.

But risks must be taken, because the greatest risk of all is to risk nothing
 The person who risks nothing, does nothing, has nothing, and is nothing
 They may avoid suffering and sorrow, but they cannot learn, they cannot feel
 They cannot change, they cannot grow, and they cannot love
 Chained by certainty, they are a servant
 Only the person who risks is truly free.

Read at Sue's memorial service on 7 June 2006 by Rebecca Fear, Sue's eldest niece. (Sue fell off a mountain at 7800m in Nepal in 2006, her body is still there on the mountain in a crevasse)