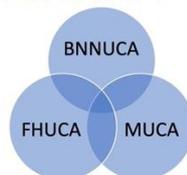




Whitehorse Uniting Cluster

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



Sunday 8TH August 2021



Hymn: Be Still

*Be still, for the presence of the Lord the holy one is here;
come bow before Him now
with reverence and fear:
in Him no sin is found -
we stand on holy ground.
Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One, is here.*

Call to Worship – Rev Tina

We wait for the Lord
More than those who watch for the morning
**For with the Lord is steadfast love calling us all
to be kind to one another, tender-hearted,
and to live in love as Christ loved us**
We wait for the Lord
More than those who watch for the morning.

Prayers of Adoration, Invocation and Confession – Rev Tina

Loving God

Our soul waits for you Lord
More than those who watch for the morning
We give thanks for your steadfast love for us
Your power to redeem us from all troubles
Lord Jesus, you have made us God's beloved children
You have taught us how to imitate God by being loving and kind-hearted towards one another
Holy Spirit you help us live in love
As Jesus loved us and gave himself for us
As Jesus was a fragrant offering to God and to us
You help us be a fragrant offering to God and one another
Like a beautiful rose filling a room with fragrance
You help us do the same

When we love God and others as ourselves
 When we make God's presence known to others
 Known in our love for God and one another
 With the fragrance of love
 Come Lord Jesus
 Be in our Hearts
 Help us build one another up in love
 And Lord if we haven't loved you with all our being and others as ourselves
 Help us forgive others and ourselves, as you forgive us
 By your Grace Lord, we ask this and come before you now in this moment of silence
 with all that's troubling our hearts, hoping for transformation, healing and forgiveness.

Hear The Christ's Words of Grace to us
 "Your sins are forgiven" **Thanks be to God**

Joyfulness

To be joyful in the face of adversity is an act of will. Don't let anything rob you of your joy.



Hymn Joyful, Joyful

. Henry Van Dy 1852-1933 alt. copyright public domain

*Joyful, joyful, we adore you,
 God of glory, God of love;
 hearts unfold like flowers before you
 opening to the sun above.
 Melt the clouds of sin and sadness,
 drive the dark of doubt away;
 giver of immortal gladness,
 fill us with the light of day.*

*All your works with joy surround you,
 earth and heav'n reflect your rays,
 stars and angels sing around you,
 centre of unbroken praise.
 Field and forest, vale and mountain,
 flowery meadow, flashing sea,
 singing bird and flowing fountain
 call to praise you joyfully.*

*You are giving and forgiving,
 ever blessing, ever blest,
 well-spring of the joy of living,
 ocean-depth of happy rest.
 You our Father, Christ our brother,
 all are yours who live in love;
 teach us how to love each other,
 lift us to your joy above*

Readings

Psalm 130

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.

² Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!

³ If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?

⁴ But there is forgiveness with you,
so that you may be revered.

⁵ I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;

⁶ my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the morning.

⁷ O Israel, hope in the LORD!
For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with him is great power to redeem.

⁸ It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

John 6:35, 41-51

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.”

2 Samuel 18: 5-33

⁵ The king commanded Joab, Abishai and Ittai, “Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake.” And all the troops heard the king giving orders concerning Absalom to each of the commanders.

⁶ David’s army marched out of the city to fight Israel, and the battle took place in the forest of Ephraim. ⁷ There Israel’s troops were routed by David’s men, and the casualties that day were great—twenty thousand men. ⁸ The battle spread out over the whole countryside, and the forest swallowed up more men that day than the sword.

⁹ Now Absalom happened to meet David’s men. He was riding his mule, and as the mule went under the thick branches of a large oak, Absalom’s hair got caught in the tree. He was left hanging in midair, while the mule he was riding kept on going.

¹⁰ When one of the men saw what had happened, he told Joab, “I just saw Absalom hanging in an oak tree.”

¹¹ Joab said to the man who had told him this, “What! You saw him? Why didn’t you strike him to the ground right there? Then I would have had to give you ten shekels^[b] of silver and a warrior’s belt.”

¹² But the man replied, “Even if a thousand shekels^[c] were weighed out into my hands, I would not lay a hand on the king’s son. In our hearing the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai, ‘Protect the young man Absalom for my sake.^[d]’ ¹³ And if I had put my life in jeopardy^[e]—and nothing is hidden from the king—you would have kept your distance from me.”

¹⁴ Joab said, “I’m not going to wait like this for you.” So he took three javelins in his hand and plunged them into Absalom’s heart while Absalom was still alive in the oak tree. ¹⁵ And ten of Joab’s armor-bearers surrounded Absalom, struck him and killed him.

¹⁶ Then Joab sounded the trumpet, and the troops stopped pursuing Israel, for Joab halted them. ¹⁷ They took Absalom, threw him into a big pit in the forest and piled up a large heap of rocks over him. Meanwhile, all the Israelites fled to their homes.

¹⁸ During his lifetime Absalom had taken a pillar and erected it in the King’s Valley as a monument to himself, for he thought, “I have no son to carry on the memory of my name.” He named the pillar after himself, and it is called Absalom’s Monument to this day.

¹⁹ Now Ahimaaz son of Zadok said, “Let me run and take the news to the king that the LORD has vindicated him by delivering him from the hand of his enemies.”

²⁰ “You are not the one to take the news today,” Joab told him. “You may take the news another time, but you must not do so today, because the king’s son is dead.”

²¹ Then Joab said to a Cushite, “Go, tell the king what you have seen.” The Cushite bowed down before Joab and ran off.

²² Ahimaaz son of Zadok again said to Joab, “Come what may, please let me run behind the Cushite.”

But Joab replied, “My son, why do you want to go? You don’t have any news that will bring you a reward.”

²³ He said, “Come what may, I want to run.”

So Joab said, “Run!” Then Ahimaaz ran by way of the plain and outran the Cushite.

²⁴ While David was sitting between the inner and outer gates, the watchman went up to the roof of the gateway by the wall. As he looked out, he saw a man running alone. ²⁵ The watchman called out to the king and reported it.

The king said, “If he is alone, he must have good news.” And the runner came closer and closer.

²⁶ Then the watchman saw another runner, and he called down to the gatekeeper, “Look, another man running alone!”

The king said, “He must be bringing good news, too.”

²⁷ The watchman said, “It seems to me that the first one runs like Ahimaaz son of Zadok.”

“He’s a good man,” the king said. “He comes with good news.”

²⁸ Then Ahimaaz called out to the king, “All is well!” He bowed down before the king with his face to the ground and said, “Praise be to the LORD your God! He has delivered up those who lifted their hands against my lord the king.”

²⁹ The king asked, “Is the young man Absalom safe?”

Ahimaaz answered, “I saw great confusion just as Joab was about to send the king’s servant and me, your servant, but I don’t know what it was.”

³⁰ The king said, “Stand aside and wait here.” So he stepped aside and stood there.

³¹ Then the Cushite arrived and said, “My lord the king, hear the good news! The LORD has vindicated you today by delivering you from the hand of all who rose up against you.”

³² The king asked the Cushite, “Is the young man Absalom safe?”

The Cushite replied, “May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up to harm you be like that young man.”

³³ The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: “O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!”

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The Story So Far:

Sermon – Rev Pete

David rises from Shepherd boy to King. He takes Saul's place on the throne, takes his wives (political power) steals Bathsheba and murders Uriah. The prophet Nathan confronts him with a story of injustice and David breaks down in tears and asks for forgiveness. God forgives David, but the consequences of his lack of moral integrity and just living will still be played out. As a result of the standard that David has set, his sons live in that moral vacuum. Amnon rapes his half-sister, Tamar, Absalom, brother of Tamar, murders Amnon. After banishing Absalom for a few years, followed by a whole lot of silent treatment, Absalom returns to the kingdom. Everyone is amazed at how beautiful he is, including Absalom himself. ²⁵ In all Israel there was not a man so highly praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom. From the top of his head to the sole of his foot there was no blemish in him. ²⁶ Whenever he cut the hair of his head—he used to cut his hair once a year because it became too heavy for him—he would weigh it, and its weight was two hundred shekels by the royal standard.”

This narcissism of Absalom plays out in his decisions including burning his faithful friend's field because he did not do what Absalom wanted. He had also erected a monument to himself in the valley of the Kings. He wasn't a king. Are we hearing echoes of entitlement here?

The parenting of David, his inability to embrace his children into the expectations of righteousness, moral and ethical living in public and private, have implications for not only his household relationship, but also the expectations of leadership from all of Israel.

Absalom undermined the kingship of David. He would white-ant David's leadership at every turn. He would announce to those who sought David's judgement that if only Absalom was King, he would have found in their favour. If we read Absalom's story of self-serving political manoeuvring we are not far from a party-room spill, stories leaked to the media, number counting and the sharpening of knives. The King of course, has my full confidence.

Absalom, believing he has numbers, brings together an army and begins a civil war in order to place himself on the throne.

And now our story today.

David in his self-serving ways had brought this state of affairs on, not only himself, but on all of Israel. When the leadership of a nation is self-absorbed and captured in narcissism it is not just the political class

that suffers, it is the soul of the nation. David, in his inability to lead his household to righteousness, created Israel's destruction.

Absalom's fate was his self-centred narcissism. His sense of entitlement, his self-righteousness. Absalom's hair is such a power metaphor for his self-absorbed image that we cannot ignore the role it plays in his downfall.

Thomas Merton asserted that the greatest Sin that humanity ever committed was placing itself as central to creation. Are we as humanity, like Absalom, so self-absorbed that we will play the central role in our own downfall?

When we consider the actions of David that have brought us to this point we see some interesting twists and turns. Uriah, one of David's most trusted commanders is betrayed and killed by David's selfish entitlement. Now David is saved from his own poor moral judgement concerning his son Absalom. Joab, a man of righteousness knows that unless Absalom is dealt with the ongoing civil war will destroy not only David, but all of Israel.

David was compromised in his ability to deal with the evil destruction unfolding through the entitlement of Absalom. Perhaps he understood his role in the corruption of Absalom and he saw his own narcissism mirrored back at him.

Joab did not have this compromised position. He understood that evil spreads when it is treated as though it deserves to exist. In that moment, it was not Absalom the human, but an embodiment of evil. All those things that lead to the destruction of nations, no respect shown to the lessons of the previous generations, selfish pursuit of power, narcissistic self-worship was all wrapped up in Absalom. Absalom was selfish, greedy, manipulative and beautiful. David chose not to ride out with his army, thereby allowing his army to treat Absalom like the unrepentant, disrespectful son, whose intent was to take what was not rightfully his.

Jesus tells a similar story with a slightly different ending. I'll just refresh your memory.

There was a man with two sons. The youngest was selfish, greedy, manipulative and beautiful. He manipulated his father into giving him his inheritance early. When the older Son, the faithful, respectful, righteous son, questioned this, the father said, "Everything else is yours."

The younger son, of course squandered his inheritance and after some thought realised that he had always gotten what he wanted from his father and went home safe in the knowledge that if his father treated his slaves with generosity how much more generous would he be to his favourite son.

When the father heard that the son was coming, David's reaction in the same situation was to not ride out to meet him, the father ran out, being aware that the punishment for disrespecting your father was to be stoned to death meant he had to get there before his servants.

True to form, the father immediately forgives his son, covering him in a cloak of protection and giving him a family ring. He then orders his servants to kill the fatted calf for a feast, get a band going and throw a massive party.

The older, faithful son hears music when he approaches the house and has to ask a slave what is happening. Nobody told him that his brother had returned, yet they had enough time to get a band together and organise catering. Now he realises that his inheritance has been compromised because the brother has been given a fatted calf, a cloak and a ring.

At the end of this story, the youngest wasteful son is inside having a party, while outside the oldest son is furious and the father is trying to convince him that this is a good outcome.

A household divided, a kingdom compromised.

We are challenged to take the bible seriously, not literally. In doing so we are not given easy answers, rather, like our Jewish fellow travellers, we are called to meditate and debate wisdom, truth and righteousness, trusting that God will call us forward.

Who made the right decision, the father of the wasteful son or David?

There are many evils in the world; consequently the list of mitzvot (sin) is long. Jewish tradition had an understanding of this centuries ago for as Rabbi Tarfon said, "You are not required to complete the task, yet you are not free to withdraw from it." (Pirkei Avot 2:21)

I read an article this week about the rising pressures in American hospitals as anti-vaccination, anti-mask protests are becoming super-spreader events. Hospital staff are being forced to choose between a patient that participated in anti-vaccination, anti-mask protests and a fully vaccinated, mask wearing patient who was somehow exposed. This kind of ethical, moral dilemma continues every day.

Heating homes vs heating the planet? Clothing the naked with cheap, unethically produced clothing or letting people stay naked?

None of this is cut and dried. We are challenged to immerse ourselves in debate and meditation even as we respond with as much wisdom and righteousness as we can muster.

God, through scripture and experience, calls us into prayerful examination of who we are now and who we are called to be tomorrow. There are no easy answers.

Moment of Quiet Reflection



Offertory Prayer from Rev Pete

Harvest Prayer

The yield arrives full and ripe,
plump and ready, bursting in flavor,
brimming with gifts of earth and sky.

Tree and grass, vine and root,
blessings of the rich soil,
the gentle rain, the constant sun.
Blessings from the flow of seasons,
and the work of our hands.

Blessings of abundance and grace,
the work of Your creation.

Blessed are You,
Father our God,
Source of Life,

Your bounty sustains us. Amen.

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Prayers of the People – Rev Tina

Lord Jesus, bread from heaven

Giving life to the world

Sustaining us through all times

Fill our lives with your goodness, fill your church with your presence and love

Lord Jesus, bread from heaven

Giver of all gifts

We give thanks to you for all that we have that satisfies and sustains us

For your love for us

For making us a gracious people, a generous people, a loving people

Lord our God, you are our hope, our joy and our strength

Lord we give thanks to you for all those who work hard to provide for us

Our loved ones

Our friends

Our brothers and sisters in Christ

Our neighbours

The postman, farmers, health workers, bakers, garbage collectors, those who work from home and with technology, those who make our clothes, for all those who provide for us

Lord our God, you are our hope, our joy and our strength

Lord our God we give thanks for and value others' gifts and how they build us up with love
 We give thanks for our gifts and love for others
 For kind-heartedness and gentleness

Lord our God, you are our hope, our joy and our strength

Lord we pray for our beautiful planet and all its creatures, vegetation and beauty
 We pray that the earth may heal from global warming, fires and floods, wars and turmoil, plastic in animals
 and watercourses and seas,
 For new leaders who will offer us all a future that will bring life to all.

Lord our God, you are our hope, our joy and our strength

Lord we pray for all your beautiful churches in the world and locally
 during these challenging times
 For all those who contribute their time, gifts and resources to your church

Lord our God, you are our hope, our joy and our strength

Lord we pray for those who are persecuted, refugees, homeless, disadvantaged, those out of work, the
 hungry, and those who feel limited and lonely during this time

Lord in this moment of silence we bring before you all those who are grieving, recovering from illness and
 operations, facing operations and treatment, and our loved ones and our own needs.

Lord our God, you are our hope, our joy and our strength

Silence

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 for ever. Amen.

Hymn: Be Thou My Vision – My favourite Irish Hymn – Nathan Pacheco Music 25 Feb 2017

<https://youtu.be/ihJAJA4ibEs>

Benediction – Rev Pete

As we leave this time, with our ponderings and wonderings,
 may we remain courageous in our seeking of the wisdom found in God.
 May we never allow disappointment to lead us to despair
 but always toward a more resilient and active hope. Amen

Dismissal – Rev Tina

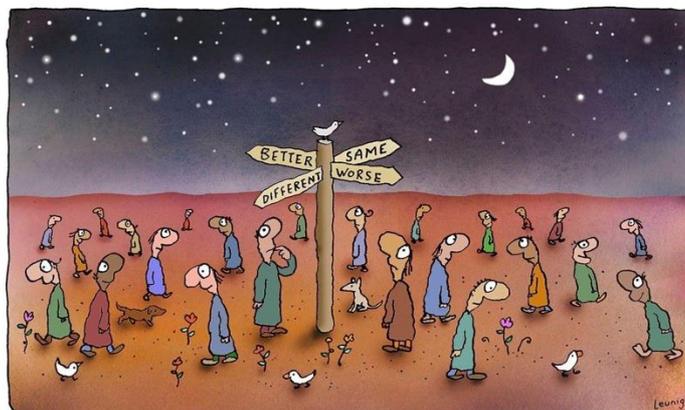
In all things and at all times remember Christ is with you.
 Make your life your worship to the praise and glory of God. Amen

Tips for Self-Care from Rev Tina

Expressing our feelings

Another Lockdown. We may be feeling a variety of feelings, including frustration, grief and anger. Anger long term can be corrosive of relationships and our health. No one likes being limited, cooped up and lonely. No one likes losing thousands of dollars when their business is forced to close, or they work casual and are out of a job. So many people are hurting. There is no choice in this and its beyond our control.

Lockdown saves lives and so does being vaccinated. For the meantime many of us will feel pain, and anger is a symptom of that pain. In the letter to the church at Ephesus Paul writes: Do not let the sun go down on your anger. It's good advice and an invitation to find someone we trust to share how we feel about the hurt, the disappointment, the worry, and most of all the anger we are experiencing. Sometimes talking things through and being listened to helps reassure us. You may choose a partner, friend, neighbour, or if it's affecting you intensely, a counsellor. Don't let the anger fester. And if you're experiencing any mental health issues reach out and seek help. Don't keep it all inside of you. Share the load with a person you trust.



I was pondering about today's readings, trying to find some sense of hope for today. Leunig's cartoon sums up our situation. There is no other place to go. So, what will get us through this time? When I look back over my life and remember the tough times, it's been the tender-heartedness and kindness of others that's got me through.



The best thing we can do is to care for one another and reach out to one another and build one another up in love. That's what will get us through this time.

Popcorn prayer

Help me Lord to wait for your deliverance with as much eagerness as a night watchman waits for the day. Help me in the meantime, to read the signs of your care displayed all around me.

In Jesus' name I ask, amen

Longing for God, Prayer & the Rhythms of life. G. Carney & W Long