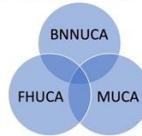




Whitehorse Uniting Cluster

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



Sunday 22nd August 2021
Finding our home in God

Welcome to our Service

May our worship be a blessing to you



Acknowledgement– Alex Adam

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.



Introit – Come as You Are – Helen Jackson

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NZ_XiYJKnQM&list=PL5dbbdzyKBag-mEd9qTgdyYNQLsLD2rC&index=26

Call to worship -Rev Pete

(Ps 111, Eph 5)

Let us give thanks to the Lord with all our hearts. Great are the works of our God— the wise take delight in them. The works of the Lord are faithful and just. Mighty are the precepts of our God— the wise regard them as trustworthy and true. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Blessed are the teachings of our God— the wise apply them in all things. Come! Let us worship the Lord, whose faithful love endures forever.

Prayers of Adoration, Invocation and Confession – Rev Tina
Based on psalm 84 and the hymn Love Divine, all loves excelling

Response – Lost in Wonder, Love and praise

Lord Our God how we long to be close to you, to know you more.
 How we long to find our home in you and for you to find your home in us.
 So we can be: - **Lost in Wonder, Love and praise**

Lord Jesus, walking with us on the journey
 Teaching and leading us to places of peace and comfort
 You strengthen our hearts and help us anchor ourselves in God
 Giving us the courage and fortitude to persevere during challenging times
 Offering us the grace and love to keep on drawing closer to God
 So we can be: - **Lost in Wonder, Love and praise**

Holy Spirit, dwelling within our hearts,
 transforming us into the people of God united as one people in Christ,
 where we seek the love of Christ in others,
 and seek to be the love of Christ for others.
 Holy Spirit, pouring the love of God into our hearts
 So we can be: - **Lost in Wonder, Love and praise**

Lord our God, send your Holy Spirit upon us,
 Keep on pouring your love into our hearts
 Where we are filled with hope and our faith grows and blossoms
 So we can be: - **Lost in Wonder, Love and praise**

Prayer of Confession

Lord, if we have not loved you with all our being
 If we have not loved our neighbour as ourselves
 If we have hurt another or been hurt
 Forgive us
 Give us grace to forgive others as you have forgiven us
 Help us forgive ourselves

Lord, in this moment of silence, we come before you with all that troubles us
 Hoping for forgiveness, transformation, and new beginnings.

Silence

Hear then Christ's words of grace to us
 "Your sins are forgiven"
Thanks be to God

Hymn – Come Down O Love Divine – Helen Jackson

Readings – from New Living Translation

Ephesians 6:10-20 - David Rowe - Mountview

¹⁰ A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on all of God's armour so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. ¹² For we^[a] are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but

against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.

¹³ Therefore, put on every piece of God's armour so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm. ¹⁴ Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armour of God's righteousness. ¹⁵ For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared.^[b] ¹⁶ In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil.^[c] ¹⁷ Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

¹⁸ Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.^[d] ¹⁹ And pray for me, too. Ask God to give me the right words so I can boldly explain God's mysterious plan that the Good News is for Jews and Gentiles alike.^[e] ²⁰ I am in chains now, still preaching this message as God's ambassador. So pray that I will keep on speaking boldly for him, as I should. (NLT)

Gospel – John 6:56-69 – Finau Manuofetoa - BNNUC

⁵⁶ Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ I live because of the living Father who sent me; in the same way, anyone who feeds on me will live because of me. ⁵⁸ I am the true bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will not die as your ancestors did (even though they ate the manna) but will live forever."

⁵⁹ He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. ⁶⁰ Many of his disciples said, "This is very hard to understand. How can anyone accept it?"

⁶¹ Jesus was aware that his disciples were complaining, so he said to them, "Does this offend you? ⁶² Then what will you think if you see the Son of Man ascend to heaven again? ⁶³ The Spirit alone gives eternal life. Human effort accomplishes nothing. And the very words I have spoken to you are spirit and life. ⁶⁴ But some of you do not believe me." (For Jesus knew from the beginning which ones didn't believe, and he knew who would betray him.) ⁶⁵ Then he said, "That is why I said that people can't come to me unless the Father gives them to me."

⁶⁶ At this point many of his disciples turned away and deserted him. ⁶⁷ Then Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, "Are you also going to leave?" ⁶⁸ Simon Peter replied, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life. ⁶⁹ We believe, and we know you are the Holy One of God. (NLT)

Sermon – Rev Peter Cannon

This week the exit of allied troops from Afghanistan and the subsequent takeover by the Taliban has been prominent in the media. Furthermore, in The Age there has been an exposé regarding the neo-Nazi movement in Australia. I hear likewise of the role of fundamentalist Christianity in Trumpism, anti-vaccination and anti-COVID movements. Together, these can be overwhelming. We can ask "just what is the world coming to?" Fear can encourage us to pull up the drawbridge and batten down the hatches.

Then these passages from Ephesians and John are designated for this Sunday in the lectionary! I sit uncomfortably with them. I grew up with an appreciation of the Ephesians passage and understood it as a guide to grow in faith and my confidence in my faith YET it also used to encourage an "us vs them" approach. The militaristic language highlights conflict and we automatically consider those we differ from or are fearful of. It is easy to see those who think differently, look different or live differently as being the other – ones to be wary of.

But the problem is we misread v12, "*For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*" We apply it to our neighbour who holds different beliefs and lifestyle to ourselves. We think of it as applying to the Taliban, the Muslim, the Atheist, the New Ager or even to our political opponents. We misread that verse and take the passage out of the context of all that has gone before in the letter.

Previously in the letter there are extensive remarks about treating others of difference with respect, whether such difference relates to status, standing, gender, relationship or belief. We are to relate in such a manner that we are

gracious to all we engage: 4:29 says, *“Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.”*

When contrasts to the other is made in the letter, the emphasis is upon behavior such that our behavior is to be life-giving to those we meet and the community among whom we belong.

Our story from John’s Gospel also appears to highlight the divisiveness of Jesus. People find what he is saying too much to take – either to take in or to accept. Many desert him. John’s stories of Jesus are used as well to divide, to suggest (my particular version of) Christianity is the truth and all else leads astray into darkness.

Yes, John does highlight the division brought about by Jesus’ presence but again when we say “I am right and you are wrong” we miss the point. The very division comes about because of such rigidity! It comes because we are not open to the move of the Spirit! John constantly highlights the openness of the gospel to all who would respond. It is a message of life and grace. It is when we close off to the other, we miss out on what God is doing in the movement of the Spirit. In allowing the walls and barriers to arise to protect ourselves from others, we paradoxically cut ourselves off from the life giver. As Peter says, *“Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life.”* We need to be open to the other in order to be open to eternal life!

So, what is encouraged is to build in our heart, our core being, a strength of faith, compassion and connection to God. To do all we can to grow and build one another up in this strength of faith and love BUT to have open soft edges that connect and allow the blessing and grace of God to flow out. This can’t happen behind walls, barriers and rigidity. We need to build on the real strength at the core of being “Uniting Churches” - we come together with our differences to find unity and grace in such a space. It is to allow our differences to bless, teach, encourage, challenge and to enrich each other. Your gifts and strengths help me. Mine are there for you. It is in being vulnerable to each other that we are built.

So then as a cluster of church communities, we need to embrace not just our similarities but our differences. The strengths of one blesses another. My vulnerability can open me to the blessing you bring. So we are built together as a people of God. Together we find strength when we listen for the truth from each other, when we find ways to treat each other with justice and grace, seeking to find peace in love together.

HYMN – 609 May the mind of Christ my Saviour – Helen Jackson

Quiet moment of Reflection



Offering Prayer – Rev Tina

Lord we give thanks to you for all our blessings
 With gratitude we offer up all we are and all we have to you
 With gratitude and love we give thanksgiving to you

Lord, we offer these gifts to you for the building up of the people of God,
 your church, both within our cluster and for the wider church.
 Lord our God, we give you thanks and praise, amen

Prayers of the People – Bob Laslett

My father and grandfather were both lay preachers. I don't remember any of their sermons but I do remember "In everything give thanks" from 1 Thessalonians 5. Let us come before God with our prayers of the people with hearts full of thanks.

Let us pray

We thank you God that you are a God who cares and has revealed yourself in Jesus.

We pray for the people of Afghanistan. This week we have seen indelible pictures of desperate human beings clinging to aircraft in that country. We pray particularly for women and girls frightened for what the new Taliban regime will bring. We include Christians and other religious minorities anticipating persecution under the new regime. We pray for the Taliban leaders that they live up to their promises of kindness and respect. We pray for those working to rescue people and planning how to cope with a dramatic increase in refugees and internally displaced peoples.

We praise our God because bible stories remind us over and over again that You do care and You suffer along with the suffering. Thanks be to Jesus who inspires us with faith, hope and love.

Our countries set down for us to pray for this week are Liberia and Sierra Leone.

We pray for the people of Liberia. They are coping with the spread of the Delta variant of COVID and the loss of tropical rain forest.

We pray for the people of Sierra Leone. This tropical country is rich in wildlife and faces a range of humanitarian challenges such as rampant hunger and very high infant mortality rates.

We pray for the people of Australia. We remember the lonely, the confused and those for whom COVID and its consequent restrictions are too much. We pray for the diseased and the nurses who touch and tend them, the injured and the surgeons and carers who rehabilitate them, the mentally ill and each counsellor who patiently works for their well-being.

We pray for the handicapped and the therapists who encourage and enable them, the oppressed and those who empower them, the alcoholics and other drug addicts and each clinic or adviser who offers some respect and hope.

We pray for the dying and those who stay with them to the end, the sorrowing and pastors and loved ones who comfort them, for the inconsolable and those special friends who do not become impatient or expect a rapid recovery from grief.

We pray for the unemployed and those who recognise their despair, for the unemployable and all who understand their frustration, for those in sheltered workshops and the supervisors who encourage and affirm them.

We pray for our leaders that they do not lose sight of the needs of the people and offer practical compassion.

We pray for the church in its many denominations and congregations, for its leaders and members who elect them, the pastors and those who train and pastor them, the new converts who may feel impatient with staid ways, and established members who forget what it is like to be newcomers. We particularly pray for our cluster and our three ministers with their different gifts and responsibilities.

Loving God, our health and salvation, channel love through our praying, and show us how to practice love in activity as well as in prayer. We thank you in the name of Christ Jesus. Amen!

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- 648 Help us accept each other – Helen Jackson

Benediction -Rev Pete

(1 Kgs 2, Ps 111, Eph 5)

Go forth and allow God's wisdom and understanding to guide your steps. The fear of the Lord lights our path and illumines our path. Go forth and let God's mercy and grace lead your way. The blessing of the Lord sends us forth to be a blessing to the world. Go with God.

Scifres, Mary; Beu, B. J.. The Abingdon Worship Annual 2021 (p. 191). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.

Hymn - Shalom to you Now – Helen Jackson

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liH_HdkWs74&list=PL5dbbdzyKBag-mEd9qTgdvYNQLsLD2rC&index=40

This week's Pastoral Care Tips

Finding our Home in God Through Prayer, the psalms, images and Music



Photo – Ricki French © 2021 Used with Permission

**YouTube – Josh Groban – You Raise me up
Official Music Video, Warren Vault (Warner Records Vault) from Album Closer, © 2003**

<https://youtu.be/aJxrX42WcjQ>

Psalm 84

How lovely is your dwelling place,
O LORD of hosts!

²My soul longs, indeed it faints
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and my flesh sing for joy
to the living God.

³Even the sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O LORD of hosts,
my King and my God.

⁴Happy are those who live in your house,
ever singing your praise. *Selah*

⁵Happy are those whose strength is in you,
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.^[a]

⁶As they go through the valley of Baca
they make it a place of springs;
the early rain also covers it with pools.

⁷They go from strength to strength;
the God of gods will be seen in Zion.

⁸O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer;
give ear, O God of Jacob! *Selah*

⁹Behold our shield, O God;
look on the face of your anointed.

¹⁰For a day in your courts is better
than a thousand elsewhere.

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than live in the tents of wickedness.

¹¹For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
he bestows favour and honour.

No good thing does the LORD withhold
from those who walk uprightly.

¹²O LORD of hosts,
happy is everyone who trusts in you.

God's Home – Reflection

Over time church buildings can take on a presence and beauty of their own, after many years of devotion and worship. They become God's holy places where God dwells, and we sense the holiness of these places in our heart and soul. A lot of holy tears have been cried and holy voices raised up to God in worship and praise and we grow to love them.

In the same way we take on a presence and a beauty of our own after many years of worship and devotion to God. We become God's dwelling place after many holy tears and raising up our voices to God in worship and praise as we come to know God's love for us, and others see this love in us and love us too.

Both buildings and our body come to have light, Spirit, presence, silence, reverence, love, grace, and beauty that speak of God's presence. Both are sacred. Both house the Holy Spirit.

Invitation

Set aside time to each day to nurture your soul.
Spend time with God in worship and praise
Invite the Holy Spirit to come and dwell within you.

Prayer – Rev 22:16

Jesus you are our morning star,
we look to you with hope for our future.
You rise up on our horizons every day, without fail.
You lead us closer to God as we follow you.
Nothing will ever trouble our hearts,
when we hand over our daily burdens to you,
on the stretchers of our prayers.
We trust you Lord and will follow you,
through this life to the next.
All the while dwelling in eternal life and love.
All the while being nurtured by your love and grace. Amen