



Sunday 20th June 2021 UCA Birthday



Hymn TIS 626 Lord of creation – Helen Jackson (Recorded)

Welcome and Call to Worship – Rev Peter

It's been a rough week for so many (couple of years even!). The continuing Covid restrictions and anxiety around Victoria, the storm damage in the Dandenong's and the flooding in Gippsland. Climate changes evident; political indifference to the plight of refugees and those in need. Many struggling, businesses finding it tough and some not able to survive – just when we thought we were getting back to some kind of normality.

Where then do we find hope?

How can we stay connected?

What can we do to support each other?

All are important questions we need to consider as we join with God as part of God's story. Our passages today tell stories of conflict, struggle, and fear. Yet in each God is present, sometimes hidden and at others obvious. So, pause a moment. Let God speak. Listen. Share your concerns and struggles. Be encouraged and let God's grace hold you.

Acknowledgement

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.



Prayers of adoration and invocation - Rev Tina

Loving God, you are with us
 Even when the sun isn't shining
 Even in the midst of chaos and uncertainty
 Even when we are feeling afraid, frustrated, angry, hopeless, and lonely
 Even when we feel flat, restricted and down
 You Lord are with us.
 You are our happy moment when we feel anxious You are our rock and our anchor
 You give us the strength we need You send people to us who help us laugh and play
 Who comfort us when we are down
 Who care about us and love us
 You Lord are always there for us.

We give you our thanks and praise

Jesus, you are the one who teaches us to be community
 You help us know where we belong
 You show us how to be a good neighbour
 Jesus, you love all our messy bits
 Our compulsions, silliness, wounds, disabilities, and grumpiness
 You Lord are human like us, yet you are divine You show us the way and make our hearts burn
 You tell us to be like a child, trusting, and laughing and playing and hoping for better days
 You show us how to love one another

We give you our thanks and praise

Holy Spirit
 You fill us with love, faith and hope and joy
 You give us courage and guide us through all times
 You fill us with hope for the future and empower us so we can walk with faith

We give you our thanks and praise

Come Holy Spirit
 Come upon us today
 Lighten our hearts
 Fill us with God's love
 Remind us we are a beloved child of God. Amen

Prayers of Confession – Rev Peter

So let us pause.
 Rough times can unsettle us.
 At such times we can easily resort to reacting out of fear and anxiety;
 both normal reactions but sometimes they can lead to not the best decisions or actions.
 Sometimes we grab a hold of the nearest supports.
 These may not be the most helpful to ourselves or others.
 Sometimes we give vent to our own survival instincts and forget we belong to a community.
 Selfishness can take over.
 God forgive us.
 Transform us into the image of Jesus, the Christ.
 May your grace give us pause and new breath for life.
 Amen

Reading – Keith Williams (Blackburn North Nunawading Uniting)

Mk 4:35-41

35On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." 36And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. 37A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. 38But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" 39He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. 40He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" 41And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Amy-Jill Levine; Marc Zvi Brettler. The Jewish Annotated New Testament (p. 79). Oxford University Press. Kindle Edition. ©NSRV National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Young at Heart – Rev Tina

How's the spirit moving during these times?

There are days when we feel afraid, frustrated, and overwhelmed and want life to get back to normal. Our hearts feel heavy, and we are afraid for the future of our family and church and our own health. At times it seems like we are caught up in a storm where we have no control.

The invitation today is to centre ourselves in God who is like an anchor and invite the Holy Spirit to give us courage and strength to love one another and continue to hope for tomorrow.

Today is our church's birthday and the symbol of our church offers us hope with its large dove symbolising the Holy Spirit.

Long ago I tried to write a paper about the Holy Spirit and couldn't do it. What I discovered was the Holy Spirit isn't about words. It's about God's power to transform us.

I explored the beginnings of the Methodist church and found out a great deal about John and Charles Wesley. John got out there into the fields like Jesus did and got people praying for the church. There are stories about Charles Wesley's heart being touched by the Holy Spirit which inspired him to write hymns. There are stories about people in the fields falling to their knees in prayer with tears running down their cheeks after John encouraged people to pray.



What does our church's symbol have to say to us today?

I looked up the UCA website and found an article by Randall Prior in 2015 *Crosslight* and this is what I discovered. The dove's wings are red, the colour associated with the spirit. Its wings of flames of the Spirit empower and guide us through all times, just like the Holy Spirit came upon the first apostles, the Holy Spirit comes upon us too.

The cross relates to the Spirit and by the cross we are bound to Christ and one another.
The U is about us uniting and staying united.

The semicircle reminds us uniting is a process and is still happening, where we are constantly being renewed. The UCA symbol offers us a vision for future hopes and reminds us how the gospel is central to our lives. We need to be open, to reform and renewal and be committed to prayer, worship, witness and reaching out to our neighbours with love.

When I began ministry as a minister the people at my first church placement made me a set of stoles. They listened to my story and theology and prayed, and this is how they saw God working in the church and through me.

I'll share three images



The image of the dove was a constant in my prayer life on my journey of discernment with the church as we discerned together, whether God was calling me to be a minister. This image was made by a lady who was a gifted lacemaker.



The Cross symbolises Christ is the light of the world. It also involves lacemaking and is unusual where the light is coming out of the cross.



Peter walking on water symbolises faith in Jesus.

While Peter focused on Christ, he walked on water and had faith. When he took his eyes off Christ, he began to doubt and fear and sink into the water. When we keep our eyes on Jesus we will not sink into fear. We will do great things for God.



This image of a boat on a stormy sea is about Jesus sleeping through the chaos of a storm. He must have had a lot of trust in God. That God would care for him and bring him through the storm. Meanwhile his disciples, who are seasoned fishermen, are panicking and afraid. We all know the story. Jesus wakes up and stills the storm.

Today we are invited to have faith in our church, to keep on praying and know our inner storm will be stilled. Jesus is with us, every step of the way.



Hymn TIS 647 Comfort, comfort – Helen Jackson (recorded)

Sermon – Rev Pete

There are so many various ways to understand the imagery and truths in this text. Having been in bed during the 120km winds that hit the Dandenong Ranges last Wednesday, I cannot take literally this image of Jesus sleeping during a ferocious storm. I cannot imagine standing out on our back deck, as uprooted trees dropped on houses in our neighbourhood, in order to rebuke the wind and it works. Perhaps I should have tried though.

I cannot take this reading literally, but I can take it seriously.

Jesus begins our reading today by asking the disciples to accompany him over to the “other side”. Earlier in this chapter Jesus has been talking to a Jewish community, he has shared a parable about planting a mustard seed and disrupting the order of a garden as the image of the kingdom of God. This story was Jewish, for a Jewish community that believed that the kingdom of God belonged to them. However, Jesus, having just announced the disruptive nature of the Kingdom of God, is off to the other side of the lake. The “other side” indicates that he is going to the Greek side of the lake, to the gentiles. This disruptive kingdom image is not contained to the Jewish ordered garden,

but it spreads beyond the boundaries that the structures of religion have created for it. It is dangerous to cross from structured religious order and to go among the gentiles.

Sunny Chen broke this reading down using the Greek and he raised a wonderfully useful image for us. The word Sea in Hebrew is Yam, Yam is the Canaanite God of the Sea. Yam is considered evil because there is no order in the sea, and the desert dwelling Hebrew people could not swim. The brother of Yam is Mot. Mot is the god of death and the underworld. When the Hebrew people came to take the land of the Canaanites, they were instructed to completely wipe out all trace of them. But this word Yam and the imagery of unpredictable and dangerous Seas and deep water remained part of the language and imagery.

Yam is considered evil, and when Yam gets upset there are great storms on the face of the Sea. We can read into this image, that anger is sparked when the Kingdom of God moves from religious order towards those who are considered on 'the other side'. How many hymns or prayers have we sung that have talked about our God as if we owned God, as if God was not also constantly creating love and neighbourly goodness in the lives of those on the other side? What happens in our religious institutions when we change the religious orderly patterns of our worship services to create conversations of faith and meaning outside of our control, beyond our pews and without reference to *Uniting in Worship Volume 2*?

I am proud to say that I see great work within the Uniting Church. There is a constant tension to cross to the other side, even as pews are being stumbled over and regulations and standing orders are being quoted and reinterpreted. There is an image of the congregations of the Uniting Church being the boats that are carrying on towards the other side even as the storms of paperwork lash across the bows.

That is one way of understanding this reading. However, because it is a theological truth, there are many more ways to hear this reading.

The storm motif is a symbol of a new beginning. In the midst of the storm on Sinai, Yahweh passed to Moses the commandments that would define Israel in its covenantal relationship. Commandments that demanded they leave behind the story of Egypt, with its corrupting power, enslavement, and constant drive for greater and greater production. This new way of being included a deep knowing that Yahweh was God, a detachment from possessions and most of all neighbour love.

From the midst of the storm Yahweh brought a new sustainable way of being.

In our storm motif today, we see something similar. Jesus was sleeping as the raging sea threatened to swamp the journey to the other side and to drown the disciples. Jesus was sleeping as though the storm around him was not significant enough for him to even notice. Having listened to the wind scream through Mount Evelyn, sounding like a freight train, there was no way I could sleep. But Jesus, completely disinterested in the storm, was sleeping comfortably.

When he does awaken, he does not combat the storm with fire and brimstone. He conquers the evil Yam with the word "Peace". His power to calm the storm does not come from violent empire power, rather from a faithfulness that God will calm the storm. This faithfulness is the same faithfulness that sees the Hebrew people guided through the wilderness until they could secure a land of promise. It is the same faithfulness that heals, restores the dead to life and compels the disciples to the other side. It is this same faithfulness that is deeply disturbing to the religious leaders and those who seek to compromise covenantal relationship by bending to the will of Rome. Ultimately it is this radical faithfulness that will cost Jesus his life.

How do we hear this story today? Our windstorm from last Wednesday night brought out neighbour love as strangers offered shelter, food, showers, and tears for those who had lost homes. We sit in the storm of Climate Change, as we faithfully pursue a crossing to the other side where we care with creation rather than have dominion over it. Can our faith carry us through the storm of political and economic rage that threatens to end us? Perhaps our storm is the raging death of Christendom, caught halfway to the other side where we are called to plant a disruptive mustard seed, while institutions, purity preachers and the religious elite swamp our understandings with powerful waves of Australian Christian lobby pamphlets and bluster us with weaponised thoughts and prayers?

We are called to be faithful in the midst of this storm, because those on the other side deserve our mustard seed. Our brothers, sisters and the blessed in between, those stuck in lives without neighbours to care with and for, the widow, the anxious, the pushed down, shoved aside, and forgotten, they deserve the disruption of the mustard seed

of the kingdom of God. Those who lives are reduced to financial concerns, insecure work, domestic violence or defined by the colour of their skin or whose lives are held in community detention at the whim of a nation's harsh refugee policy. We are compelled, in the midst of these storms, to realise that our lives are not defined by fear, rather they are defined by a radical faith that God will not only calm the storm but define us into a new people and take us to the otherside.

"Why are you afraid? Where is your faith?"



Intercessions– Trevor Thomas (Forest Hill)

A prayer for those who Fear

Heavenly Father, we come to you today with prayers for our friends and neighbours experiencing the aftermath of a wild and violent storm which has struck fear into the hearts of many people. They experienced the fear of the unknown as the wind strength increased and roared like lions, as massive trees fell around them and even crushed homes, injuring people, cutting power in the darkness and the cold of mid-winter. Others experienced floods washing away valuables and destroying their livelihoods and rendering their homes unliveable. Just over a year ago our nation grieved for people affected by massive bush fires that destroyed property, injured hundreds of people and killed many.

Lord these people have experienced the Storm of Fear. Lord we pray today that you will help them, by our actions, and that you will convert their Fear into Faith in you. Lord we pray that they will rely entirely upon you by Faith, and that they will pray, and that prayer will be the vehicle that releases them from their fears and replaces that Fear with Faith. Lord let them know that they can CHOOSE Faith and dispense with Fear. Fear believes that something bad will happen whereas Faith believes that something good will happen. Lord we know that only Faith in you will change our mindsets and by that change you will release in us Faith, Trust, Belief, Confidence, and Love.

We thank you Lord for those who volunteered to help the fearful, those who risked their own lives and sometimes gave their own lives (because they had Faith) and others who worked beyond their endurance to help those in need. The Police, the SES people, the Fire Fighters, the Helicopter crews and ambulance drivers, Medical and Hospital staffs and the neighbours who dropped what they were doing to help others in their street. Lord, we thank you for their Faith and that they banished their fear.

Lord, we thank you that many people of Faith have pressured the Australian Government to be more compassionate and remove the fear of deportation from our Sri Lankan family who have been held for years at an immigration detention centre on Christmas Island, and we pray that their daughter will fully recover from her illnesses and that the family will return to their loving community in Biloela.

We pray also for Filippo Grandi the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, head of the United Nations agency mandated to aid and protect refugees, forcibly displaced communities, and stateless people, and to assist in their voluntary repatriation, local integration, or resettlement to a third country. "UNHCR is navigating extraordinarily difficult waters. The combination of multiple conflicts and resulting mass displacement, fresh challenges to asylum, the funding gap between humanitarian needs and resources, and growing xenophobia is very dangerous." Lord we pray for the workers all over the world who do the work of the UNHCR. Be with them and enable them to share Faith in you.

We pray that COVID-19 vaccinations will be shared across the world on a needs basis rather than richest first and we ask our people of Faith to continue to pressure our politicians to increase the puny contribution of aid by the world's richest Governments to the world's poorest people and nations. To those who also suffer from Fear, who do not get

COVID-19 vaccinations, who do not have clean drinking water or adequate food. Lord help us all to give them these essentials and thereby Faith in you.

Lord, we thank you also for the lessons we can learn from the storms of Life, from the elements of your faith and love; that is Gratitude, real Joy, Peace, Power, Trust, Diligence, Endurance, Fearlessness, and Thoughtfulness. Lord give us all the Faith we need to have a positive mindset, to minimise our fears and maximise our faith, to set an example for others to follow and to rejoice in the Lord always. We pray these prayers in the name of 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 forever. Amen

Blessing – Rev Peter

Revel and delight in God's name, let all seekers rise up and celebrate!

Set your mind on God's kind of strength, set your heart on the presence of the Spirit!

Remember all the great things that have happened and remain confident that God stands with you.

Amen

Song - For you deep stillness – R. Mann (Recorded)

Many Thanks to Geoffrey Willis for playing the music from Come Down O Love Divine which forms the basis for reflections during our service. (Mountview Uniting) and Rob and Helen Jackson and Rev Peter for their ministry in producing the recorded service.



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By request - Self Care Tips and Meditations - Rev Tina

Tips on self-care during Lockdown from Beyond Blue (see their website)

- Go outdoors or exercise
- Meditate or practice Mindfulness
- Talk with your family or friends
- Make a homemade meal
- Listen to music or read
- Do a jigsaw
- Take a break from the news
- Clean your home or declutter
- Watch a funny or uplifting movie
- Learn something new
- Join a group

Easy Five-Minute Meditation

Take time out and find a quiet place where you won't be disturbed. Sit on a chair or lie on the floor with a cushion and pillow. Rest your hands on your abdomen and breathe gently and deeply, noticing your abdomen rising and falling. As you breathe deeply, listen to the sounds outside your home. Sounds of birds, cars passing by, or trees' leaves rustling in the wind. Or listen to classical music. It only takes about five minutes to relax. Don't worry about thoughts passing through your mind. Just let them pass like clouds pass through the sky. Say a simple prayer like: Lord, to help you focus. If you fall asleep that's fine. Don't struggle or try to relax. Just focus on your breathing and listen. Thanks all.

Practise mindfulness

Make yourself something nice for a meal. Don't read or watch TV when you eat.

Look at the colours of the food. The fruit or vegetables, the meat, or fish. Its texture. Smell it and taste it. Focus on what you're eating and enjoy it.

Most people don't even bother looking at what they eat. When we do, we are present to our food and that is mindfulness.