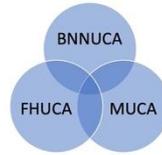




# Whitehorse Uniting Cluster

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



11<sup>th</sup> July 2021

## Welcome to our Service



## 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.



## Call to worship- Rev Tina

Come and let us worship the Lord with Joy and persistence

**As we seek the heart of God in others**

Let us come before the Lord with love and reverence

**As we become the heart of God for others**

Come let us worship the Lord with praise and thanksgiving

**Prayers of Adoration, Invocation and Confession – Rev Tina**

Loving God  
 You have led us to this place  
 You are always there for us  
 Throughout all times, challenging and joyful  
 You have made us your beloved children  
 Your people of grace  
**We will walk your ways O Lord**

Jesus our Lord  
 Always beside us  
 Our companion on the way  
 Making known to us the mystery of God's will  
 We trust in you to reveal in the fullness of time  
 God's plan for us  
 By faith we follow you as pilgrims on the way  
 putting our hope in you  
**We will walk your ways O Lord**

Holy Spirit, disturber and guide  
 Midwife and comforter  
 Lead us on  
 Pour God's love into our hearts  
 Help us choose life and to love  
 Give us grace and strength for the journey  
  
 Holy Spirit, Help us now come before God  
 With all that troubles our hearts

Lord we come before you  
 Asking for forgiveness and transformation  
 If we have not loved you with our whole heart  
 If we have hurt another or misused our power  
 Forgive us  
 Transform our hearts  
 Change us and make us whole  
 offer us a fresh start and a new beginning

Lord we come before you in this moment of silence with all that's on our hearts

*Silence*

Hear then the words of grace of our Lord Jesus Christ our saviour

*"Your sins are forgiven"*

**Thanks be to God**

**Song – As the Deer Pants**

**Reading**

Mark 6:14-29

14King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him." 15But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." 16But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised." 17For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. 18For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." 19And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, 20for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. 21But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. 22When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it." 23And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." 24She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer." 25Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." 26The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. 27Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, 28brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. 29When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

*Amy-Jill Levine; Marc Zvi Brettler. The Jewish Annotated New Testament (p. 82). Oxford University Press. Kindle Edition.*

## Sermon – Rev Pete

The opening frame of the Gospel of Mark focusses on John the Baptist. John the Wildman, standing in the wilderness calling to account all of Israel. Accusing the scribes and Pharisees of being hypocrites, offering redemption and forgiveness of sins. This radical prophet standing outside of the temple, outside of the status quo of religious understandings is working to reform Judaism. It is this radical, locust eating Wildman that baptizes Jesus.

According to the Mishnah

At five years old [one is fit] for the Scripture, at ten years the Mishnah (oral Torah, interpretations) at thirteen for the fulfilling of the commandments, at fifteen the Talmud (making Rabbinic interpretations), at eighteen the bride-chamber, at twenty pursuing a vocation, at thirty for authority (able to teach others).

In the years that preceded Jesus being baptized and in essence graduating into his Rabbinic role, Jesus would have learned at the feet of John. He would have been devoted to the teachings of John. His subsequent taking of disciples and his teaching styles and methods followed in the Rabbinic tradition. Part of the Rabbinic is to take on disciples in a way that includes devotion, orally teaching of Torah and its interpretations and the physical aspects of ministry. Whatever John started, Jesus continued into the realization of the Christ.

This John and Jesus relationship was not just cousins, or friends, it was like a spiritual adoption.

We see this as John's followers fall in as disciples of Jesus, join crowds and meet him in the temple. John is a radical reformer of Judaism.

It is this prophet-like status that brought John to the attention of Herod Antipas.

Herod Antipas was well aware of how highly regarded and popular John was. John had been creating problems for Herod Antipas. According to Josephus, John was publicly criticizing Herod for divorcing his first wife and subsequently marrying his brother's wife while his brother was alive. This was a problem for Herod as he was not really, truly a Jew. His father Herod the great was only a second generation Jew and he used his Jewishness to wield power in Israel by pandering to Rome while appeasing the purely religious Jewish community.

I do feel a little sorry for Herod Antipas, his father Herod the great was a bit of a monster. He was responsible for some of the most ambitious building programs in the History of Israel. He expanded the temple, built roads, castles and a great country club by making a mountain higher, then building a fortress inside it complete with Roman baths. He was an infrastructure king. But, he was also highly protective of his power, as his sons grew in stature and political ability he would see them as a threat to his throne, so he would have them killed. If he killed all the *intelligent, politically capable* sons, what does that say about Herod Antipas??

Herod Antipas still carried on building Israel as a client state of Rome. He is most famous for building Tiberias as a Roman capital of Israel. Herod Antipas was as political as his father and you can imagine the pressure he would be under to hold his social status.

His new wife Herodias understands that the implication for her and Herod Antipas is that the faithful Jewish community turn against them. They would lose power, not just with Israel's political elite, but also with Rome. Ultimately Caligula would turn against Herod Antipas, but that is another story. The fear of John the Baptist then is couched in terms of their social standing.

What happens when politicians like Herod Antipas begin to believe that their status and power is more important than the people they serve?

Now consider the power of a highly respected leader calling out the personal corruption of a political leader. It is not difficult to see how Herod Antipas became trapped in this predicament.

In Judaism, the raising of an individual from the dead is unusual, unless it is part of a greater, universal resurrection of the dead. This would indicate the arrival of the Messiah, which in turn means the judgement of Israel. For Herod Antipas, this judgement is his Macbeth moment with the echoes from beyond the grave from killing John.

There are a number of other things happening in this reading - a) John's death at the hands of Herod Antipas foreshadows the death of Jesus; b) in suffering for speaking Torah-truth to power; c) in Herod being both representative of Israel and Rome.

There is also the ongoing theological image of the Adam and Eve theme. Eve is seen as the one that corrupts Adam by inviting him to see himself as equal to God. Herodias and her daughter both carry the Eve image of seducing the Adam character, played today by Herod Antipas. The pain and suffering that is caused by this seduction is one of pain and struggle. By the way, I am not saying that women are evil, it is the seduction to make an idol of oneself that is the Eve. It is also amazing to see the corruption of Herodias as she uses her daughter as a pawn in this game. This seduction leads to John suffering the greatest dishonour that can be sentenced by a Jew. Beheading is only reserved for those who are seen as beyond redemption, those who commit the most heinous of crimes. In this case the heinous crime is speaking truth to power.

Where then, are *our* ponderings from this reading?

Do we resonate with John? Are we those who continue to speak truth to power, even after we have been victimized by that self-idolising corruption?

Do we resonate with Herod Antipas? How often do we find ourselves trapped between hearing truth and killing truth? How often does our need to save social face mean we side with the seduction of political and personal idolatry?

Do we resonate with Herodias? The one who seduces and influences power from behind the scenes, even to the point of using our children to manipulate for our own personal elevation?

Do we resonate with Jesus? The one who has lost his mentor, spiritual anchor and teacher. What work in this legacy needs to be carried on? How lonely it must be to have lost the one in whose footsteps you set your life.

Or are we not in this reading at all?

It is very hard to hear good news in this reading if we read it aside from its place within the narrative. Preceding this we see Jesus send his disciples out in pairs to heal and teach and to live in relationship to the hospitality of those who receive them.

Then we have this story, the end of John the Baptist, the mentor and Rabbinic prophet who baptized Jesus. John's death surely should indicate that his movement of reforming Torah should come to an end. The justice which brings truth-telling to power, and the call for repentance and new life should come to an end with this violence.

Following today's reading, we have the disciples Jesus sent out, now returning with great stories of what they had achieved. Stories of healing that are dependent on the hospitality of others. Healing that not only heals the individual but in wonderful Jewish understanding, brings salvation to whole communities.

The ministry of John continues to grow through the healing and teaching of Jesus, onward through the teaching and healing of the disciples and throughout the generations to us today.

The salvation that God brings has moved and is moving beyond the limitations of human violence and fear. We see the violent murder of John the Baptist, and still the salvation of God moves. Jesus was crucified, and still the salvation of God moves. Today we face the death of Christendom and still that salvation is moving. Even in the midst of violence to individuals, the community of God still walks with God into new ways of healing and teaching. Our roles, attitudes and connectedness to that salvation will continue far beyond our death.

## Song - Like a Candle

### Prayers of the People – Rev Peter

Loving God of all creation, we pray for the people of the world, bringing our joys and concerns to you our God:  
 For those with a voice, may they use it for the greater good  
 For those with no voice, may they now be heard.



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For those with power, may they use it with love, justice and mercy.  
 For those without power, may strength, honour and compassion be theirs.



For those who are health care givers and those who keep us safe, may they be kept well and blessed in their care  
 For those who have lost their health, may they seek their Creator and know they are loved.

For all of us in our sphere of influence may our power be couched in love and grace, God's guidance and light.  
 Together, or apart, may our prayers be a sweet blessing on the world through Christ Jesus. Amen.



Blessing Song  
 For you Deep Stillness

## Self-care tips

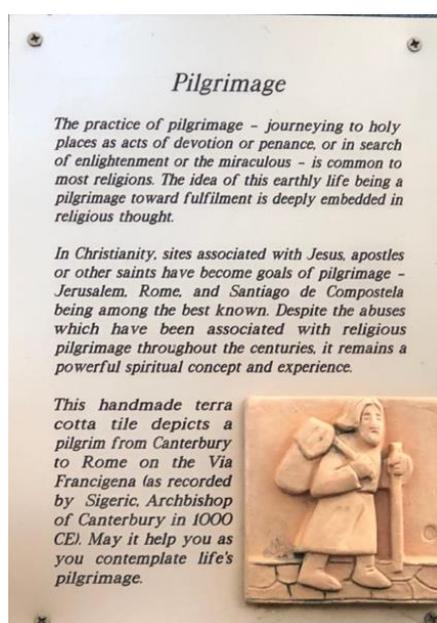


### Prayer

Come, occupy my silent place  
and make Thy dwelling there.  
More grace is wrought in quietness  
than any is aware.



*Labyrinths were originally used by Christians who couldn't afford to go on a pilgrimage. Instead, they would prayerfully walk a labyrinth while reflecting on the theme of pilgrimage and journey.*



Try and spend some time being still and quiet this week.