

Whitehorse Uniting Church
Sunday 28 April 2024 at Mitcham
Easter 5_B



Call to Worship *written by Rev Peter*

How has your day started?

Quiet, rushed, stressed or smooth?

However it has begun,

Now is a time to pause, to be still and to notice the Divine presence.

Pause in silence

How do you describe your theology?

Conservative, progressive, pragmatic or just trying to work it out?

No matter your description,

Now is a place to gather to journey alongside of each other,

in grace, compassion and acceptance.

Pause in silence

What is it you seek?

Meaning that inspires,

Peace that eases the mind

Or a place where you belong.

Come, all of you,

For in this time and place

we are assured of welcome,

offered hope,

challenged to grow

and in God's embrace invited to be loved as we are.

Acknowledgement of Country and First Peoples:

All: We acknowledge the First Nations peoples whose relationship with the land is central to their spirituality. We particularly acknowledge the Wurundjeri People of The Kulin Nation, their elders, past, present emerging, and their stewardship of the land upon which we meet throughout the ages. They have never ceded their sovereignty of the land and we commit ourselves to work towards healing and reconciliation.

Prayer of Praise: The Mystery Of Your Love © John van de Laar, [The Mystery Of Your Love – Sacredise](#), used by permission

Leader: How can we ever understand the mystery of Your love, O God?

How can we ever estimate

the value of Your compassion and mercy?

Left side: In our weaknesses and brokennesses,

in our strengths and wholenesses,

we find the touch of Your support and creative energy.

Right side: In our fears and suffering, in our joys and pleasures,

we find the moistness of Your tears

and the percussion of Your laughter.

All: In our failures and despair, in our successes and dreams,

we find the comfort of Your forgiveness

and the inspiration of Your Spirit.

These are gifts beyond measure,

and we can only respond with joyful praise.

All: You are the home we long for,

the family where we discover that we truly belong

the hearth where we are warmed and renewed

And we worship You with our whole being, wonderful and loving God.

Amen.

Hymn: **Let us build a house (All are welcome)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gKJgcv8SdnQ> MVNU Collegians Virtual Choir, Salisbury Cathedral.

Reading:

Acts 8:26 – 40 (NRSV (UE))

Shirani Nagarajah

Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a wilderness road.) So, he got up and went.

Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was going home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah.

Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it." So, Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him.

Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:

"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth.

In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth."

The eunuch asked Philip, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?"

Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus.

As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is to stop me from being baptized?"

He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.

When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more and went on his way rejoicing.

But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was going through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Prayer of confession:

The Family You Have Given © John van de Laar, [*The Family You Have Given – Sacredise*](#), used by permission

How many ways You have cared for us, O God;

How many companions You have given

to share our difficult and joyous journey.

**And yet we forget Your care,
and reject Your messengers.**

Forgive us for failing to recognise You
in those who are different from ourselves.

**Forgive us for rejecting other people –
children of Yours who are equally loved.**

Forgive us for believing the lie
that says we can do it our way, and we can do it alone.

Silence

Teach us to love as You have loved us,

to embrace and welcome others

as You have welcomed us,

to enjoy and commit to the family

which You have given for our comfort and nurture.

In Jesus Name.

Amen

Reading

(a response to the confession): **1 John 4:7 – 21 (NRSV (UE))**

Shirani Nagarajah

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹ God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us.

¹³ By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. ¹⁶ So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. ¹⁷ Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. ¹⁹ We love^[a] because he first loved us. ²⁰ Those who say, "I love God," and hate a brother or sister are liars, for those who do not love a brother or sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. ²¹ The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

Hymn: TIS 217 Love divine all loves excelling

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yRF4KKx7czU> The Tabernacle Choir at Temple Square

A reflection on Acts 8:26 – 40

Our reading from Acts 8, the story of the apostle Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch, seems on the surface to be full of magical moments. It is easy to be swamped with the mythical elements of Philip being whisked this way and that at the whim of the Holy Spirit. If we get caught up in these things, we miss some really important points in Luke's telling of the story.

At the heart of the story is God's love for all people, even those who we may think are outside God's reign. There are elements of the story that to a Jewish person of the time and to many of other religions, quite shocking to say the least. I would like to share with you Rev John van de Laar's wisdom as he reflects on the story.

On a local and personal level, Philip's example is a good one for us to follow as we seek to love God and others, and bear fruit for Christ. A number of factors stand out in this "fruit-bearing" moment of Philip's. He was willing to be driven out of his way by his love for and obedience to God. He was willing to engage someone who was very different from him, and who would usually have been marginalised by his people. The eunuch was a foreigner, a Gentile and a man who had been castrated and was therefore, in one sense, unclean. He was also willing to meet the man where he was, beginning the conversation from the questions and reading of the eunuch. He did not impose his own agenda on the man, but listened and responded graciously and gently. Finally, he welcomed the eunuch into the community of faith by baptising him without question. All of these loving acts are the ones Jesus calls all his followers to perform in order to bear fruit. Our love for God is truly revealed as we act in these loving ways toward one another, and to the "outsiders" we encounter. And, as we welcome, listen to, serve, and love others, the impact of that on their lives can have healing, transforming, and empowering effects that can flow out to touch others and make a real difference in the world. To change the world, and manifest God's Reign we don't need to do "great" or dramatic things. We simply need to love the people God sends across our path genuinely, humbly and sacrificially.

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May we too allow the love of God to flow through us into those we meet each day.

Hymn: TIS 697 All the sleepy should have a place to sleep



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Offering

(© Francis Macnab, **A Fine Wind is Blowing: Psalms of the Bible in Words that blow you away.** Richmond. Spectrum Publications, 2006, CAL Licence #)

Let our gratitude for life be expressed in our generosity.

Let our faith be expressed in good causes.

***Let our belief in the future find full expression
in our daily attitude of mind.***

Prayers of the People

Anne Smith

We come to prayer: Let us be still and acknowledge God with us.

Loving Lord, God of Care and Compassion,

We bring to you today our concerns for all the people who are hurting.

We pray for those whose hurts are physical:

– their loss of essentials – shelter, homes, food, clothing – or with injuries, many horrific, in the war-torn areas of the world.

Grant courage and safety to all who try to alleviate their desperate needs.

– for those who go in fear of lurking danger or violence, known or totally unexpected, particularly when it is known and near at hand, or even at home.

Grant understanding and timely protection from those called to their aid.

We pray for those whose hurts are mental

– brainwashed to violence against innocent victims

– unable to find a place in society where they feel accepted

– addicted to drugs or activities which ruin their lives

– longing for a sense of purpose or possibility in the future

Grant insight and wisdom for those who try to assist and encourage

Grant courage and persistence, too, to those who are trying to move away from destructive habits.

We pray for those who suffer hurts in daily living, both physical and mental

– with difficulty caused by illness or disability

– with distress at the loss of activities from changing abilities

– the pain suffered from careless comments or destructive comments

– the difficulty of adapting to change

Grant all the sensitivity to care for our neighbours,
to offer sympathy and assistance where appropriate

to be careful in what we say and leave unsaid

and to be able to comfort, cheer up and a reminder of your Peace.

We bring these prayers remembering Jesus,

and share, with so many around the world, the prayer he taught:

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.

Candle Prayers



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Hymn: TIS 607 Make me a channel of your peace *(by Sebastian Temple 1928-1997)*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihhvm6eLWZI>

Blessing and commissioning

(stanza #1, author unknown – sourced from Rex Hunt's web site, [Lent5B.17.3.2024 — Rex A E Hunt \(rexaehuntprogressivegy.com\)](#); stanza #2, Rev Peter)

The God we worship is never confined to this place.
So go and travel with the God who is found
in ordinary and surprising places.

Share peace,
Be bearers of grace,
And offer hope.

Hymn: TIS 779 May the feet of God *tMt Video*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YhiG-Vj8CGU&list=PL5dbbdzyKBag-mEd9qTgdyYNQLIsLD2rC&index=40>