

# WHITEHORSE UNITING CHURCH

WORSHIP AT HOME

PENTECOST 25<sub>A</sub>

19<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2023



Image: "[Whether Awake Or Asleep](#)"

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## GREETING

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**And also with you.**

Our worship this morning is being held on the lands of the Wurungeri people of the Kulin nation and I wish to acknowledge them as traditional owners.

I would also like to pay my respects to their elders, past and present, and emerging.

## CALL TO WORSHIP

How shall we enter the house of the Lord

**With songs of great praise and rejoicing!**

How shall we prepare ourselves to receive the blessings?

**With hearts, minds, and spirits that are open.**

Come, let us worship the Lord and bow down.

**Let us offer our praise to God who has redeemed**

**us.**

## HYMN TIS 442

“All praise to our redeeming Lord”

All praise to our redeeming Lord,  
who joins us by his grace,  
and bids us, each to each restored,  
together seek his face.

He bids us build each other up;  
and gathered into one,  
to our high calling's glorious hope  
we hand in hand go on.

The gift which he on one bestows  
we all delight to prove;  
the grace through every vessel flows,  
in purest streams of love.

Even now we think and speak the same,  
and cordially agree;  
concentred all, through Jesus' name,  
in perfect harmony.

We all partake the joy of one,  
the common peace we feel,  
a peace to sensual minds unknown,  
a joy unspeakable.

And if our fellowship below  
in Jesus be so sweet,  
what heights of rapture shall we know  
when round his throne we meet.

Charles Wesley

1707—88

<https://youtu.be/wPK1B3Lbwus?si=e54Y65pDBGO>

[THymT](#)

## GREETING AND INTRODUCTION:

Today's readings present an opportunity to challenge us to consider our own vocation to be a Christ follower in the reality of uncertain times. We see themes of chaos and uncertain times in the Hebrew bible reading:

we see strands of the importance of good leadership;

we see an emphasis on taking risks for the Kingdom of God;

we are encouraged to love one another and as a community to uplift and be people of light.

These are all speaking to the times into which the texts were written, but also (sadly) still speak

powerfully into the times we are living in now where people are facing trauma of the pandemic, upheaval caused by changes in the Church structure, and ongoing and increasing global instability.

This is a set of readings that can offer hope, and inspiration to remain faithful, find courage and make a real difference in the world around us.

### **GATHERING PRAYER**

Constant God, as we gather together and gather our thoughts we bring to mind and to our hearts something that has filled us with praise with wonder and with awe this week –

Maybe the hope of a sunrise or the glow of a sunset

Maybe the comfort of a cuppa or the sound of a friendly voice.

Whatever has caught our eye and even our breath we allow it to fill our hearts with praise with gratitude and adoration for You, Ever-present, God.

We also allow those things that have filled us with worry, with sadness and with frustration to come to our minds and our hearts.

The events or incidents that have depleted our joy, drained our hearts of praise.

We bring those to You, too, knowing that You meet us here in the reality of life.

And for that we are also grateful, Ever-present God.

We ask for Your blessing on this time of worship. Thank You that You are present.

Meet us each at our point of need Creator, Son and Holy Spirit, the same, yesterday, today and forever. Amen

### **PRAYERS OF CONFESSION**

Merciful God, we come before You, trusting in Your kindness, hoping in Your faithfulness, abiding in Your love.

Knowing You, not as a harsh and fearful master, but as a caring, guiding parent.

Our hearts are heavy with regret for what we have left undone and for what we have left done.

For when we have been harsh and dismissive hoarding and ungenerous perpetually focused on growth at the cost of Creation and the flourishing of all of life.

We ask for Your courage to live another way to sow and plant that which will flourish, to give generously without seeking return,

to share hospitality with strangers, to care for the vulnerable, and be humble to receive care in our own times of need.

It is to Your caring and compassionate gaze that we lift up our eyes, no longer hanging our heads under the weight of guilt and shame.

We choose to abide in Your amazing grace.

We enter into the joy of Your deep mercy, trusting that You will never expel us from your presence.

Amen

### **ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS**

You are loved by God and given so many gifts to be used to help others.

Do not fear to use these gifts, for God is with you, continually blessing you and the gifts in your service. AMEN.

### **A LETTER TO THE CHURCH**

Your word, O Lord, is a lamp to our feet  
**A light to our path.**

### **1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 NRSV**

<sup>1</sup>Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters,\* you do not need to have anything written to you.

<sup>2</sup>For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

<sup>3</sup>When they say, 'There is peace and security', then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape!

<sup>4</sup>But you, beloved,\* are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; <sup>5</sup>for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness.

<sup>6</sup>So then, let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; <sup>7</sup>for those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night.

<sup>8</sup>But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.

<sup>9</sup>For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup>who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him.

<sup>11</sup>Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

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Lord, may your word live in us:  
**And bear much fruit to your glory.**

### REFLECTING ON THE WORD TOGETHER

This letter is probably the earliest Christian text in the Bible and therefore gives a fascinating insight into the thoughts of Christ followers less than 20 years after the death of Jesus.

Paul is writing here from Corinth a few months after visiting, around 50-51 CE.

Thessalonica was situated at the head of the Thermaic Gulf, in what is now modern day Greece. At the time when Paul was writing, it was a city with sharp divisions between the wealthy elite and aristocrats, and poorer citizens of the Greco-Roman in the world.

In the Greek world, a letter like this was designed to be thought of as an extension of the author, so that the friendship or connection begun in person could be deepened.

Paul was communicating with power and presence into this new community, helping to shape its being and identity as a Christian community.

This passage comes in the section of the letter where Paul is describing the coming of the Lord. This was probably prompted by anxiety about Christians who have died before the Parousia. Therefore Paul is taking the time to describe the future to the readers.

For any group, including ourselves in the Church today, having an idea about the future helps to orientate themselves in the present, create group cohesion, and helps the group to tell their story with power and passion to themselves and those who might join them.

The stories we tell about past, present and future really matter.

In today's reading, the theme is about staying wakeful for the return of Christ.

Paul is avoiding discussions about when exactly this might be – He will come when they are not expecting it.

The "day of the Lord" (v2) would have been a familiar phrase in Jewish texts, e.g. in Isaiah 27:13 (where it was expected to be a joyful occurrence) or in Zephaniah 1:14-18 (a more terrifying event). It would be at an unknown time, like when the pains of childbirth begin for pregnant women (v3).

In this verse, Paul is probably using the phrase "peace and security" to refer to recent political events in the city; this was a slogan found on Roman coins.

In verses 4-5 we find dark and light imagery to illustrate the differences between the Christ followers and others.

This is a clear dualism to encourage a separation of them from the worshippers of Dionysus, the Greek god of wine, who was also worshipped in the city, with sensual rituals.

Paul encourages them instead to be awake and ready for the Lord.

He employs battle images (breastplate), introducing here his famous triad of faith, hope and love (v8), putting visually into action a way of being in the world for those in the light.

'For a helmet the hope of salvation' is more battle imagery for the followers for there are allusions to Isaiah 59:17 or Wisdom 5:18, which both talk about righteousness.

So here Paul is making points about following Christ being the way to righteousness, and therefore escaping the wrath (v9).

In verse 10 we find for the first time Paul's phrase: "Jesus Christ who died for us".

This is the new state of life that the Christians find and how they must live while they wait for the future – encouraging one another.

This is what this waiting, hopeful, light-filled community must do – encourage one another.

To our ears the words "Jesus Christ, who died for us" might be very familiar.

They perhaps land in us with a lighter impact.

But what would it be like to be amongst the first people to ever hear these words read out loud.

What kinds of questions might they have had?

What questions might we have, if indeed we were there?

Before the text is read out, consider inviting people to try and forget they'd ever heard the words,

"Jesus Christ, who died for us", to put themselves in the shoes of the those who were to hear and respond to them before everyone else – First Responders, if you will.

Perhaps we would have questions about the how and the why of His death-for-us?

About the morality of the God who allowed it, or the Love of the one who endured it?

Also, what changes does it provoke with me or invite from me?

The interesting thing about an exercise like this is that when we imagine ourselves as someone different, we are often suddenly free to voice the very questions we have just now but might be afraid to admit to.

Taking a moment to feel how fresh, exciting, shocking, frightening these words could have been to the first hearers gives us permission to connect with our own shock, fear, excitement without censoring our thoughts about it or suppressing our feelings.

Thinking particularly around the Thessalonians passage, what is our 'armour' like now?

Amidst times of distress, what makes us feel protected?

Where do we find security and safety?

How can we 'put on' these things and 'put away' their opposites?

What processes do we have to help us actually put this into practice?

Alternatively, how can we turn our vulnerability into the very thing that makes us strong and safe? How do we turn the tables on aggressors and oppressors?

If isolation is our weakness, what does connection do for us in the face of an overwhelming situation? But amidst all of that, remember that some of us are pretty broken.

And sometimes we are more broken than we are at other times.

If the weight of the world overwhelms us and causes us to retreat from our responsibility, perhaps focusing on being given a valued gift by God might help to heal us.

Stay with that thought and feeling for a time. Enjoy being blessed and loved and trusted – and try not to be drawn into a 'use it or lose it' guilt trip.

Stay with the middle of the passage for a while. Do not rush to the end.

Enjoy being trusted, enjoy the gift given.

Again, some of us are pretty broken and we might need to be blessed and to heal, before we can "trust and obey."

**HYMN: TIS 537**

"Let us talents and tongues employ"

Let us talents and tongues employ,  
reaching out with a shout of joy;  
bread is broken, the wine is poured,  
Christ is spoken and seen and heard.

*Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,  
pass the Word around: loaves abound!*

Christ is able to make us one,  
at the table he sets the tone,  
teaching people to live to bless,  
love in word and in deed express.

*Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,  
pass the Word around: loaves abound!*

Jesus calls us in, sends us out  
bearing fruit in a world of doubt,  
gives us love to tell, bread to share:  
God-Immanuel everywhere.

*Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,  
pass the Word around: loaves abound!*

Frederik Herman Kaan  
1929—

<https://youtu.be/nYnF86ZzHH8?si=2IRtVejqBgDLKmc3>

**THE PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE:**

Concerning the times and the seasons we give thanks for these lightening days of spring.  
Choosing to enter into a more restful pattern of life following the wisdom and rhythms of the seasons.  
Avoiding the tendency to rush and be frantic  
Choosing hibernation and cosiness over being harassed and hassled.  
Taking time to watch and wait and discern.  
On this threshold of another round of climate change talks we give thanks for the willingness of nations to gather and discuss, debate and work together.  
We choose not to be complacent or complicit  
Grateful for the abundance of this amazing planet and for the true wealth of wonder at the meticulous detail of it all  
Grateful even for the sense of urgency and the gift of hope concerning these challenging times and the upending of the seasons  
And in the face of a year of more forest fires, more extreme flooding, more powerful than ever hurricanes, more people on the move because their harvests have failed again and their homes have become inhospitable  
We pray for an awakening to what is of real worth  
For a seismic shift in the hearts and minds of decision makers and influencers that will shake us from complacency, denial or despair

We join our voices with siblings across the world  
and with all of Creation crying out for systemic  
change

To have the courage and humility to live  
respectfully within the planet's limits  
To hope and work for harmony and unity between  
each other and with the Earth  
For the flourishing of all  
The healing of Creation and the Glory of God –  
Parent, Sibling, Spirit.  
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: TIS 459 :

*In Christ there is no east or west,*

In Christ there is no east or west,  
in him no south or north,  
but one great fellowship of love  
throughout the whole wide earth.

In Christ shall true hearts everywhere  
their high communion find,  
his service is the golden cord  
close-binding humankind.

Join hands, then, people of the faith,  
whate'er your race may be;  
who serves my Father as his child  
is surely kin to me.

In Christ now meet both east and west,  
in him meet south and north,  
all Christlike souls are one in him  
throughout the whole wide earth.

William Arthur Dunkerley  
(‘John Oxenham’) 1852—1941 alt.

<https://youtu.be/lxG0EhEXA3k?si=B4-8QrM4bxXPMdkV>

### DISMISSAL AND BLESSING:

Blessings on you as you now go into this day and  
week that you belong to.

May your heart be guarded from all that causes it  
to ache with the breastplate of faith and love.

May your mind be calmed from all that causes  
anxious thoughts as you put on the helmet of  
hope.

Whether you are awake or asleep may you know  
you are living with and in Him, who loves you so  
much

He died to save you.

May we encourage one another at every turn

May we build each other up at every opportunity  
May we live into the salvation that is ours through  
our Lord Jesus Christ.

Go in peace to love and serve our God.

Amen.