

Whitehorse Uniting Church
Sunday 21 April 2024
Easter 4_B



Welcome Introit 699 A New Commandment

St Laurence's Church, Chorley

<https://youtu.be/aqM2Ujl7Aas?si=oYQjLffpaHyPzoZE>

May the worship bless you.



Cranach, Lucas, 1515-1586. Christ as the good shepherd, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=57054> [retrieved April 16, 2024]. Original source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lucas_Cranach_d.J._-_Christus_als_guter_Hirte_\(Angermuseum\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lucas_Cranach_d.J._-_Christus_als_guter_Hirte_(Angermuseum).jpg).

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.



Image T. Lyndon

Call to Worship

Jesus abides in us, and we abide in Jesus.

We believe in Jesus.

We embrace his commandment.

“To love one another as I have loved you.”

Prayer – Rev Tina

Loving God,
 You have given us so much,
 You have blessed and loved us,
 cared for and restored our soul.
 You have guided us through life,
 with all its ups and downs.
 You have taught us to love like Jesus loved
 us,
 filling us with the Holy Spirit,
 to empower us to love like Jesus loves us,
 to lay down our life and give of ourselves,
 according to our gifts and graces,
 given to us by you O Lord.

We give you our thanks and praise.

Lord Jesus,
 We believe in you,
 We want to lay down our lives,
 to give of ourselves and love others,



Johnson, Eastman, 1824-1906. Lord Is My Shepherd, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=55852> [retrieved April 16, 2024]. Original source: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Eastman_Johnson_-_The_Lord_Is_My_Shepherd_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg.

because of your love for us.
 You help us know by abiding in your love,
 you will through the Holy Spirit,
 fill us with boldness,
 to ask in your name,
 for God to work through us,
 so may we love others in truth and action.

We give you our thanks and praise.

Holy Spirit,
 dwelling in us
 helping us know we abide in God,
 and empowering us.
 We call upon you Holy Spirit to come upon
 us today,
 and fill us with love and courage.

We give you our thanks and praise.

Prayer of Confession

Lord, if our hearts condemn us,
 Forgive us.
 Help us know you are greater,
 than our hearts.
 Heal us and fill us with your Spirit,
 fill us with your love so we may stand bold before you.
 Help us believe in Jesus and
 live out the love commandment,
 where we love in truth and action.

Hymn – Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?

Rethie Van Niekerk 2017

<https://youtu.be/o469PRLdbHU?si=VFkw8U6vR4gvuMBa>

Readings

1 John 3:16-24

¹⁶ We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers and sisters. ¹⁷ How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

¹⁸ Little children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth. ¹⁹ And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him ²⁰ whenever our hearts condemn us, for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. ²¹ Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God, ²² and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

²³ And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. ²⁴ All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

John 10:11-18

¹¹ “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care

for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes^[a] it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

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Young at Heart – Activity - making a heart out of stones around a holding cross.

We are living stones and Jesus is the cornerstone.



Image -T. Lyndon

Hymn 398 Come down O love divine.

Music for Faith & Worship 2018

<https://youtu.be/zXO4rqBQOAU?si=TKakE-12WVJp7dbF>

Sermon – Rev Tina

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.



Dupre, Julien, 1851-1910. The Good Shepherd, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=54256> [retrieved April 16, 2024]. Original source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/thomashawk/2202377733/>

Psalm 23, that favourite psalm of so many people over the centuries continues to speak to us throughout the years as we journey through life. After considering all the blessings God has given, the psalmist declares: *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.*

Perhaps these words speak into our deepest longings to be blessed, to experience goodness and mercy in our life and to be close to God.

Close to God like Jesus who said God’s command was for him to lay down his life and to take it up again. Jesus who knew his Father loved him because of his choice, because he chose to be faithful to us.

1 John’s letter to the churches in Turkey spoke of the love command where Jesus asked us to love others as he loved us. Perhaps Jesus was teaching us how to find blessing and goodness and mercy in our lives through our choices and actions.

The letter says: *We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.*

Perhaps this is the way we find blessings, by abiding in Jesus and following his example.

I've always liked Evelyn Underhill's story of the faithful sheepdog. Many of us have watched sheepdogs so we may be able to understand her story. She was thinking of school students while watching sheepdogs, and this is what she said:

"Now those sheepdogs that afternoon gave me a much better address on the way in which pastoral work among souls should be done that I shall be able to give you. They were helping the shepherd to deal with a lot of very active sheep and lambs, to persuade them into the right pastures, to keep them from rushing down the wrong paths. And how did the successful dog do it? No by barking, fuss, ostentatious authority, any kind of busy behaviour. The best dog that I saw never barked once; and he spent an astonishing amount of his time sitting perfectly still, looking at the shepherd. The communion of spirit between them was perfect. They worked as a unit. Neither of them seemed anxious or in a hurry. Neither was committed to a rigid plan; they were always content to wait. That dog was the docile and faithful servant of another mind. He used his whole intelligence and initiative, but always in obedience to his master's directive will; and was ever prompt at self-effacement. The little mountain sheep he had to deal with were amazingly tiresome, as expert in doubling and twisting and going the wrong way as any naughty little boy. The dog went steadily on with it; his tail never ceased to wag.

What did that mean? It meant that his relation to the shepherd was the centre of his life; and because of that, he enjoyed his job with the sheep, he did not bother about the trouble, nor get discouraged with the apparent results. The dog had transcended mere dogginess. His actions were dictated by something right beyond himself. He was the agent of the shepherd, working for a scheme which was not his own and the whole of which he could not grasp; and it was just that which was the source of the delightedness, the eagerness, and also the discipline with which he worked. But he would not have kept that peculiar and intimate relation unless he had sat down and looked at the shepherd a great deal."

[Evelyn Underhill, "The Teacher's Vocation" Collected papers of Evelyn Underhill, Lucy Menzies, Ed. (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., Inc., 1946) pp. 182-183.] Public domain.

Perhaps this is where 1 John is going with the interpretation of today's gospel.

By focusing on God and quietly waiting for the movement of the Holy Spirit, we worship God in spirit and truth. We live our lives in a way where our actions show how we worship God. We love in truth and action.

When our hearts are filled with doubts, fears, regrets, jealousy, anger, we need to remember God is greater than our hearts.

If we worship God in truth and action, we are living out the love commandment and the Holy Spirit is poured into our hearts by God, filling our hearts with faith, love, hope, generosity, kindness, and peace and Jesus comes and abides within us. This makes us bold before God, where we can ask in Jesus' name, to be able to love in truth and action, according to our gifts and graces, given to us by God.

To love in truth and action, and not just with words, means when we see someone in need, we share our resources, and we have compassion and act on it by caring, supporting and loving others.

Our congregation is known for this love and care of one another and the community around us.

Each one of us makes a difference and pleases God according to our gifts and graces, given to us by God who knows us and loves us.

1 John speaks about those who obey Jesus' love commandment as abiding in Jesus and Jesus abiding in them and knowing this because of the Holy Spirit dwelling within their hearts.

Perhaps this is how the Spirit of God dwells within us and moves us to love others, especially those in need. I remember one of my sisters-in-law sharing her struggles with me after her husband died from cancer after eighteen months of marriage and then after listening to her, I shared how my faith helped me journey through times of grief. After I returned to Australia, she became a Catholic.

Another time I was talking with a man from China who was a professor at one of our universities. He wanted to know about the greeting of peace and our idea of love. I could see he wasn't impressed by my explanation. Then I shared how I chose to work part time so I could study theology, be a lay leader in my church and a volunteer at a respite house for men dying of HIV Aids. Being able to give up the money I could have earned to live out my faith and love with truth and action, must have impressed him. I saw him months later rushing off to a bible study.

Another time I was sitting on a seat looking out over the bay when a man sat beside me and shared his life story and all the pain he was feeling at that time and all I did was listen and acknowledge him. I hoped I lessened his burden.

Perhaps this is loving in truth and action. I'm sure that you have stories to share about the times you were there for others in their time of need.

Once I was lined up at a large supermarket chain and I was fifty cents short, and a perfect stranger gave me fifty cents. Another time my local greengrocer told me to pay next time when I was a dollar short. This may seem a tiny gesture of kindness but it's not about the money, it's about being there for me and being kind and compassionate.



Tanner, Henry Ossawa, 1859-1937. Good Shepherd, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=57405> [retrieved April 16, 2024]. Original source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Henry_Ossawa_Tanner_-_The_Good_Shepherd_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg

Long ago shepherds knew about laying down their lives for the sheep. They stood outside on cold nights protecting the sheep from wild animals and risking their lives for the sheep or sleeping at the door of sheepfolds that sheep slept in, to protect them from the wild animals, again risking their lives.

For us, it's different. If we were working in emergency services or as police, we would be risking our lives for others, which is like laying down our lives for others.

For most of us, laying down our lives for others is giving them our time and energy. As we get older, time becomes more precious, and we have less energy. To give our time and energy to others for their sake and wellbeing rather than our own, is laying down our lives for others. This doesn't mean sacrificing our wellbeing. If we did that, we couldn't continue to care for others. We need to care for ourselves so we are well enough to care for others and allow others to care for us, when we need care.

Recently a funeral was held for Les Twentyman. He was my teacher when I was at high school and I remember his kindness, his concern for his pupils and his care. After I left school and went to university, I heard about him from time to time, caring for the community. He gave a lot of time and energy into caring for others.

In the same way a mother or father or grandparent or one of our pastoral carers in this church or someone who is involved with hospitality or gardening or prayer for others or any of the numerous forms of ministry

that happen in this church puts a lot of time and energy into caring for others. The same for our outreach ministries and the many other forms of voluntary work in which we are involved.

All of this and more is loving others in truth and action where we are laying down our lives for others.

The Lord be with you.

Quiet time of reflection



Image - T. Lyndon

Hymn 650 Brother, Sister, let me serve you.

St Laurence's Church, Chorley 2021

<https://youtu.be/0JahFRDrSCs?si=1T3LZ3ZcLgBntyU->

Offering prayer

Lord and giver of every good thing we bring to you our lives and gifts for your kingdom all for transformation through your grace and love made known in Jesus Christ our Savior, amen.

Prayers of the People – Rev Tina

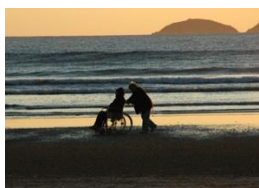


Image - T. Lyndon

Loving God, we pray for the small number of companies and their directors who are responsible for the majority of climate change and pollution of this planet. Help the people of this world and those who can act to stop this destruction, change laws, and introduce international conventions and help leaders act to protect this planet for future generations.

Lord, we pray for peace where there are wars in this world, for those who have lost loved ones, for orphaned children, for the destruction of hospitals, for starving people, for wounded and traumatized people. We pray for those who choose violence or act with violence. We pray for victims of violence and for their healing.

We pray for nations facing elections of new leaders, for wise and just leaders, for leaders who have been imprisoned and those ruling through violence and injustice.

We pray for those facing operations, diseases, cancers, struggling with aging and declining health, for those with mental health issues, for all those grieving and suffering and all those within our congregation facing these challenges and suffering because of them.

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 always Amen

Candle Prayers

If you have a candle, you are welcome to light it and pray.



Image T. Lyndon

Hymn 659 The Lord's my Shepherd – Brian Boniwell

Peter Lazaro 2022

<https://youtu.be/Kor3IjrTd58?si=8zCXCBnoKHTfeeb5>

Blessing

God the Father make you holy in his love;
 God the Son enrich you with his grace;
 God the Holy Spirit strengthen you with joy;
 the Lord bless you and keep you in eternal life. **Amen.**

Sending out

Go forth into the world in peace;
 be of good courage;
 hold fast that which is good;
 render to no one evil for evil;
 strengthen the faint-hearted;
 support the weak;
 help the afflicted;
 honour all people;
 love and serve the Lord,
 rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Sending out hymn 779 May the feet of God walk with you.

Robin & Dorothy Mann 2015

https://youtu.be/WfOFIWxGaP8?si=htdYIqXcZIn_7zyg