

Whitehorse Uniting Church
Christ the King Sunday
26 November 2023



Hymn – Gather us in

Marty Haugen (Emmaus Music) 2022

<https://youtu.be/j3qkB7gucDk?si=f92VVoTc60ppWMOu>



Welcome

May the worship bless 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.

Call to worship

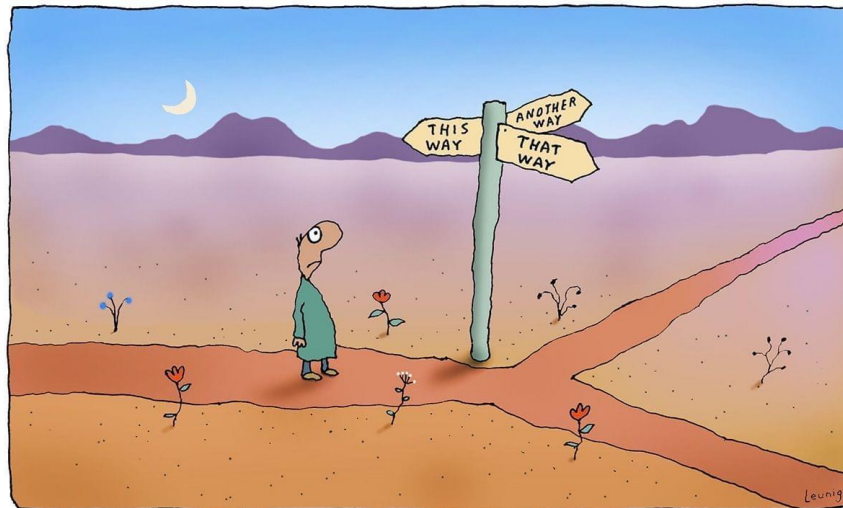
Loving God

You call us to be the hands and feet of Jesus.

Loving God

Help us embrace your call to love and care for our neighbour.

Prayer from Ephesians



I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, will give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may perceive what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.

²⁰ God^[b] put his power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,^[c] ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. ²² And he has put all things under his feet

and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, will give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸ so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may perceive what is the hope to which he has called you to love and serve your neighbour as you love and serve yourself.

Bless us Lord as we set off on our pilgrim journey, with values of respect, care, and inclusivity, with hope, respect for others, sharing of our resources, knowing compassion and love for others is compassion and love for Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Midwife of love, help us sing a new song in a land that often seems foreign to our values. Give us courage, imagination, and strength to dream new dreams and to embrace the future you are offering us. Give us ears to hear and a heart to embrace, your hope for us, in Jesus' name we pray.

Prayer of invocation

Come Holy Spirit Come

Midwife of new churches and ministries

Come Holy Spirit Come

Empower us to be the hands and feet of Jesus.

Confession adapted from Synod's 2023 opening worship.



This painting is at the Korean Church, St Andrews in Box Hill. It has a plaque underneath saying: "*Forgive them Father, they know not what they do.*"

Let us spend a moment in silence to reckon with the things that aren't sitting right with us.

Silence

God of light, show us who we are today. Help us lay aside that which is clogging us up. Help us unearth that which we've buried out of fear, confusion, or ignorance.

Silence

Forgive us for the sins that have got in our way.

Forgive us the narrow mindedness.

The shameful hoarding

The restless seeking

The avoidance of your still and present self

In the quiet, reveal our true selves.

The people we are.

The people you are forming us into

so, we may be the hands and feet of Jesus, amen.

Silence

Brothers and sisters in Christ
 Hear the good news.
 God is with us.
 We are forgiven.
 We are being made new.

Thanks be to God.

Hymn 768.

Doxology – Praise God (md1801 2013)

<https://youtu.be/RBz7vuJ2b1A?si=NwWtZFqHBGbAg1rK>

Gospel - Matthew 25:31-46 NRSVUE

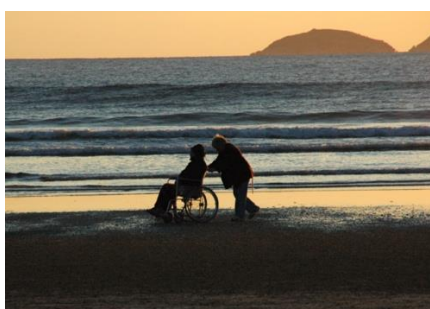
³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³ and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴ Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’

³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ ⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.’

⁴¹ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You who are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels, ⁴² for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ ⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not take care of you?’ ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment but the righteous into eternal life.”

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Sermon – Rev Tina



This is a challenging gospel.

During Synod one of the people offering a theological reflection said: *Don't assume you're not a goat.* I thought to myself, I'm not game to share that comment with my congregation. Sounds like the goats faced a horrible outcome for not caring for Jesus by way of caring for neighbours. But, I will mention it.

We all want to be the people to whom Jesus says:

'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.'

Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.'

We don't want to be a goat. They don't get to enter into eternal life and this sounds very harsh.

Once again Jesus tells a parable that grabs our attention. He's good at that!

There are lots of lovely stories about shepherds and sheep and the shepherd leading us.

In this passage, we are the shepherds. We are leading the sheep. Vulnerable, hurting, spiritually hungry and sometimes difficult sheep. We are welcoming them, giving them a cuppa, visiting them, even when they're in prison, and we are offering hospitality to them. We are not only being the hands and feet of Jesus where we are hosts, we are also hosting Jesus in our care of others. Yet, at the same time he is hosting us in the care of our souls so that we are fit for the kingdom. Jesus is both guest and host.



I may have told this story before.

One night in the middle of winter when it was cold and raining an old man and a boy came to my front door. They were selling diaries for the Blind Association. As the boy invited me to donate, I saw that the man was blind.

At the time I was a young mum, home alone with my two children and I didn't want to invite them into my home. I tried to find some money and only found one dollar. I gave it to the boy saying: *I wish I had more to give. It's all I have today.*

The boy accepted my dollar, thanked me, and gave me a diary worth far more than the dollar. The blind man smiled at me and also thanked me. Then they walked away into night.

I still regret not inviting them inside my home and offering a hot drink to them. Jesus came to my door that night and I was too afraid to offer hospitality.

That night I received far more than I gave, for that encounter changed my heart. It transformed my heart. It planted a seed of love for strangers that's grown over the years and allowed me to receive and offer hospitality. It was a repentance moment. A call to change.

Have you ever had an experience like this?

The other day I visited someone who was having a difficult time. They spoke about Christ at the door. I tried my best to listen, encourage and care for them and when I left them, I hoped they were in a better place, with more hope. I reflected on what they said and hoped I was Christ at the door for them, his hands and feet, his heart and voice.

Have you ever felt like this?

We don't always get it right. We do our best in the circumstances. What counts is we keep on doing our best to be Christ at the door, bringing light and love, being the hands and feet of Jesus.

I've been at Synod this week and challenged a working group I was part of with a question: *What makes Christians unique in the world?*

Psychologists help change behaviour and aim to bring wholeness. Today people go to them, rather than the church, for psychological healing. Health professionals such as doctors try their best to cure people physically. Lawyers fight for justice for their clients. Those in the hospitality industry feed the masses, while teachers do their best to instil a love of learning and to teach. Everyone has a purpose and role.

What do we do that's unique?

The answer is: We embody God's love.

That's what makes us unique in the world.

Care for the vulnerable is care for Jesus.

Jesus loved us enough to lay down his life for us. The least we can do is to lay down our life for Jesus, by caring for those who he loves, including ourselves.



Jesus said, *"Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me."*

Our vision statement is:

"We are the hands and feet of Jesus."

We are one congregation, and we need to work together for Jesus' sake. We can only do that if we remain united in Christ, one body, one people.

We are one congregation, and our resources serve all of us.

There is no room for us to cling to things that are passing.

Ultimately, we are judged by the love we show to Jesus through others. That's what we take with us. It is our love for Jesus through others that is the key to the kingdom for us.

The gospel is a sobering message. It cuts through all obstacles that oppress and limit us, all selfish motivations and fruitless or futile attempts at having power. It cuts through these obstacles to God's grace so we may all find eternal life and life, for the body of Christ and who we encounter who is Christ for us.

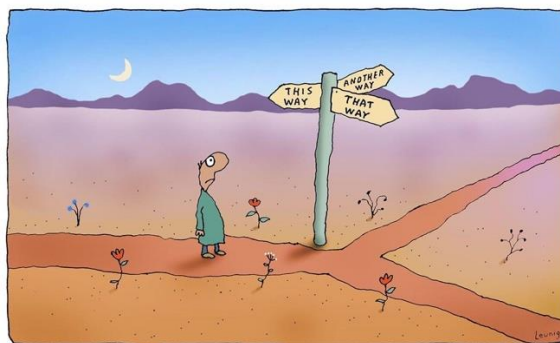
Many of us have shared stories of unity, grace, generosity, willingness to embrace God's values. We are called to grow more Christlike, and stories of acts of love, justice, and generosity inspire us.

Today's gospel invites us to enter into the story and be a neighbour to Christ, our Lord.

Will you embrace this challenge for the sake of Jesus Christ and his body, the church?

Love is costly. It takes time and energy. It means laying down our time, energy, and resources for others. Sharing what we have with others. Giving from the heart as we are able. Love for Christ means laying down our lives for others.

Will you accept Jesus' invitation to travel another way. His way. The way of love.



Leunig – used with permission.

Quiet Moment



**Hymn 629 When I needed a neighbour were you there?
Romsey Abbey Choir (Chor Gesang 2017)**

https://youtu.be/fExR7eOhJ00?si=yEYrT_imHimUHTEZ

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



NASA – Image of Eclipse

Lord, we hold our world in our hearts.
The climate crisis we all face
The mass extinction of many animals
The pollution and destruction of our environment
The destruction of lives and cities due to wars
Our fears for the future
Climate anxiety, especially of the young
Lord, we call on you to equip us, to give us a voice, to help us.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer.



T. Lyndon - Mustard Seeds

Lord, we hold your church in our hearts.
We do not know your plans for your church.
For the 2.6 billion Christians who follow you
Help us to know your path for your church,
in this place, in this community, in your world
Help us bear your light in the darkness.
Help us be your hands and feet for others.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer.



T. Lyndon

Lord, we hold all those who are facing a difficult Christmas in our hearts,
 We bring them to you on the stretcher of our prayers.
 Comfort them Lord and reassure them you are there for them, close by, holding them and loving them.
 Equip and help us be the bearer of your light to them.
 Grow our hearts so we may bring messages of hope into their lives.

Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer.

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 – Will you Come and follow me if I but call your name.

John Bell (Rethie Van Niekerk 2016)

<https://youtu.be/o469PRLdbHU?si=QwZnpe7WpOC5OXa0>

Blessing

In this new place

May we be blessed, in the opening of our doors to the stranger.

May we be filled in the sharing of our bread, with the hungry.

May we be enriched in the giving and receiving, of love and laughter.

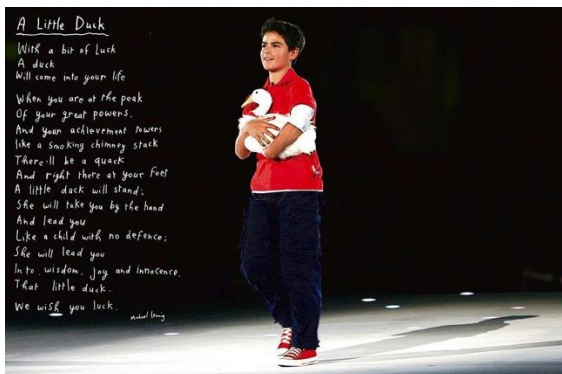
**And may the God of grace, gift us with all grace, and an abundance of blessings,
 as we build the kingdom of God here on earth.**

Hymn 779 May the Feet of God

Robyn and Dorothy Mann 2015

<https://youtu.be/WfOFIWxGaP8?si=QfFbkUmKRAL-F1Ac>

Pastoral care tips - Rev Tina



Leunig, used with permission.

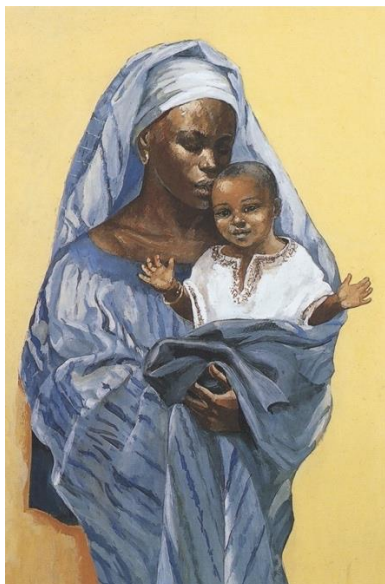
We all have different images of God, and of God with us as presence, love, Emmanuel, Spirit, nature, in others, in silence or cosmos or a quirky one like Leunig's.

I once heard a sermon where a question was asked.
How big is your God box? We cannot limit God.



NASA- Spiral galaxy

This image is of Mary and Joseph making their way to Bethlehem. Their environment seems bleak, and their way seems difficult. Many people throughout the world face a bleak Christmas. Pray for them.



There are many portraits of Jesus that embrace context. Perhaps this is so we can relate to Jesus from our hearts and identify with him as one of us.

This advent I invite you to ponder on what your image of Jesus looks like and where you find him. Engage in daily prayer and contemplation, as we journey through advent. Advent is a time when we reflect upon preparing our hearts and homes for the birth of Christ.

Our homes include our church community, our family in Christ, our brothers, and sisters in Christ. Prepare your hearts for the coming of Christ and the path he is opening for you at the beginning of this new Church year, for all of us as we celebrate our first Christmas as a new church.