

**Whitehorse Uniting Church
Devotion from Rev Julie Ross
Sunday 16th April 2023
Easter 2**



THE GATHERING OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge those who were here before us, the first inhabitants of this place. We honour them for their custodianship of the land of which we gather today.

CALL TO WORSHIP:

Easter is not over!

It lies ahead of us in every moment, inviting in us the choosing of risen life.

It waits over every horizon when challenges close in on us, or our faith falters.

It is there, like a hidden gift within us, if we will dare to act in the name of Christ Jesus.

Come, accept the Easter day which never ends.

For Christ is risen and calls us to receive new life.

***Let our rejoicing be heard far and wide
as we witness to our belief in the risen Lord.***

WELCOME:

May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you!

Hymn: TiS 360 Verses 6, 7 and 8

6

That Eastertide with joy was bright,
the sun shone out with fairer light,
when to their longing eyes restored
the apostles saw their risen Lord.

7

He showed to them his hands, his side,
where yet the glorious wounds abide:
the tokens true which made it plain
their Lord indeed was risen again.

8

Jesus, the king of gentleness,
come now yourself our hearts possess,
that we may give you all our days
the tribute of our grateful praise.

Anon., Latin c. 7th cent. Public Domain

OPENING PRAYER:

We rejoice in our risen Lord and it is right that we should do so. But we must never allow his glory to overshadow his humanity. I have had the privilege of studying with Rev Kathy Galloway former Warden of the Iona Community and her prayer poem reflects this. Let us pray:

Here's a man,
born to a mother who broke the rules and said 'yes';
parented by a man who was not his father,
knowing his ancient lineage
yet calling people to be born again into a new community.

Here's a man,
tramping the dusty roads of his country,
drawing inspiration from the land,
loving its fruitfulness,
sailing its waters,
stilling its storms.

Here's a man,
giving up a steady job to follow his calling,
keeping bad company, often sleeping rough,
touching people who were considered untouchables,
raising up those who were overlooked.

Here's a man,
refusing to be less than free,
refusing to be less than utterly committed,
refusing to bow down and serve the empires of the world;
in tenderness, justice and joy,
in forgiving and healing,
he lived the promise of a new relationship with God.
He was called by many names.
He called himself 'the Son of Man'.

PRAYERS OF CONFESSION:

Risen Christ, even though we have before us the faithful witnesses of old, there are still times when we struggle to believe in your way, your truth and your life - moments when we doubt your resurrection and the hope it offers us.

Touch our lives with your grace.

Forgive our lack of faith and show us the way to truth and understanding.

We confess that sometimes you come to us in friend or stranger and we do not know you because we are determined to find you in some place or in someone of our own choosing.

We search through the tombs of our own life or cling together behind locked minds and we miss you standing before us.

Touch our lives with your discerning wisdom.

Forgive our lack of discernment and show us the way to truth and understanding.

Sometimes our minds are locked into our own beliefs and dogmas and we turn away from those whose journey with you has differed from ours.

Touch our lives with compassion and respect for the beliefs of others.

Forgive our lack of tolerance and show us the way to truth and understanding. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Jesus says to us "Peace be with you".

The Christ stands in our midst in everlasting mercy.

Grace is indeed the gift for us today.

We are loved and we are forgiven!

Thanks be to God.

Hymn: TiS 691 "Faith will not grow from words alone".

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1SvNT2eDluc>

Julian Singers, St Francis' church Melbourne, 16 July 2016.

1
Faith will not grow from words alone,
from proofs provided, scripture known;
our faith must feel its way about,
and live with question-marks and doubt.

2
The pattern Jesus showed, we share:
life comes through death, hope through despair.
God is made known in brokenness,
and faith feeds on God's emptiness.

3
The church still tells how Jesus came
through death to glorious life again -
the strangest story! Yet, maybe,
our faith will thrive on mystery.

4
Faith takes the little that we know,
and calls for hope, and tells us: Go!
Love and take courage, come what may;
Christ will be with us on the way.

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THE SERVICE OF THE WORD.

EPISTLE READING: 1 Peter 1:3-9 NRSV

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, ⁷ so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ Although you have not seen^[b] him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

GOSPEL READING: John 20:19-31

Jesus Appears to the Disciples

¹⁹ When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when

they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' ²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

Jesus and Thomas

²⁴ But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

²⁶ A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' ²⁸ Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' ²⁹ Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

The Purpose of This Book

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹ But these are written so that you may come to believe^[b] that Jesus is the Messiah,^[c] the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

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In this is the Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God!

YOUNG AT HEART:

Most grown-ups have lots of ways of proving who we are – things like driver's licences, credit cards, passports and they usually have our photographs on them. We need them to be allowed to drive a car, ride on the train for a cheaper fare, open a bank account, borrow books from the library, travel overseas – all sorts of things. If I show mine, people know it is me from my picture on the card. They know I am telling the truth when I say I am Julie Ross.

It was a bit like that with Jesus.

After Jesus had died on the cross, his disciples were very scared. They locked themselves in a small room because they were afraid the leaders would send soldiers to arrest them too.

On the Sunday after Jesus had come alive again, they were hiding in this room when suddenly, Jesus appeared to them! He said, "Peace be with you". They thought he was a ghost. One of the disciples Thomas was not with them. When they told him that they had seen Jesus and that he was alive, Thomas said, "I won't believe it until I see it with my own eyes." He said he wanted to see the nail-prints in Jesus' hands and the place where the spear was thrust in his side. Thomas wanted proof that this really was Jesus that they had seen.

A week later, Thomas saw Jesus in the same room. Jesus invited Thomas to touch his hands where the nails had been and his side where the spear had pierced. Then Thomas believed!

The disciples all cheered! They were very, very happy to see Jesus again.

A lot of people today won't believe that Jesus really rose from the grave and came back to life again because they haven't seen him with their own two eyes. They want "proof of identity" just like the people who want to see my identity cards.

But Jesus said, "Blessed are they who believe in me, even though they have not seen me". Blessed means "happy" and when we follow Jesus and believe in his love that is where we will find true happiness. And what is really important is to know that one of the ways we can **see** Jesus' love is when we see people in this church help other people who are sick or in trouble. And we see Jesus' love when we welcome everyone who comes to this church. We see Jesus' love in the people here who teach you about Jesus. And you can show people Jesus' love by being kind, helping people and loving everyone just like Jesus does.

CHILDREN'S HYMN: TiS 236

Margaret Beatrice Cropper 1886-1980

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1
Jesus' hands were kind hands, doing good to all,
healing pain and sickness, blessing children small,
washing tired feet, and saving those who fall:
Jesus' hands were kind hands, doing good to all.

2
Take my hands, Lord Jesus, let them work for you,
make them strong and gentle, kind in all I do;
let me watch you, Jesus, till I'm gentle too,
till my hands are kind hands, quick to work for you.

Let us pray:

We worship you, Holy God, aware that we are a group of people at differing stages in our journeys of faith. Our knowledge of you has been shaped by diverse experiences, teachings and relationships throughout our lives. At times, we move between faith and doubt, certainty and unbelief.

We pray that our hearts and minds may always be open to new reflections on our faith, new wisdom from scholars and teachers, but always seeking to honour our traditions and to discern wherein lies your truth. Amen.

.....
LET US KEEP SILENCE FOR A FEW MOMENTS WHILST WE REFLECT ON THE WORD PROCLAIMED

Hymn: TiS 648 'Help us accept each other'

1
Help us accept each other
as Christ accepted us;
teach us as sister, brother,
each person to embrace.
Be present, Lord, among us
and bring us to believe
we are *ourselves* accepted
and meant to love and live.

2
Teach us, O Lord, your lessons,
as in our daily life
we struggle to be human
and search for hope and faith.
Teach us to care for people,
for all - not just for some,
to love them as we find them
or as they may become.

3
 Let your acceptance change us,
 so that we may be moved
 in living situations
 to do the truth in love;
 to practice your acceptance
 until we know by heart
 the table of forgiveness
 and laughter's healing art.

4
 Lord, for today's encounters
 with all who are in need,
 who hunger for acceptance,
 for righteousness and bread,
 we need new eyes for seeing,
 new hands for holding on:
 renew us with your Spirit;
 Lord, free us, make us one!

Frederik Herman Kaan 1929-
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WE RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE. John Gerrard and Rev Julie Ross

Loving God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we bring to you now our prayers for others. We want to care for all of your people in all parts of the world, Lord, and we pray particularly today for the people of **Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine**:

We give thanks for:

- the distinctive icons, art, literature and music that have come from this area
- the faithful witness of churches under the reign of Communism, and their revitalization since then, after decades of official atheism
- all those who help to alleviate the suffering of people due to the conflict in Ukraine and who try to counteract and overcome divisions
- those who work for democracy and openness in government.

We pray for:

- guidance, as these nations work to reconfigure political and economic structures
- compassion and integrity for all peoples in these nations with such diverse ethnic histories
- those who suffer from alcoholism, HIV and AIDS, tuberculosis and other life-threatening diseases
- the large numbers of people who now live in poverty and are unemployed
- those in Belarus and Ukraine who suffer from the continued effects of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster
- those who struggle for democracy and truthfulness in the media
- asylum seekers and refugees seeking hope, safety and security in new lands.

In our **Nation** we pray for our First Peoples that their gift of the Uluru Statement and their dream of a Voice to Parliament may become something that unites our Nation in love and reconciliation and ceases to be driven by politics.

In our **ecumenical** prayer cycle we remember today your people worshipping and serving at St Luke's Catholic Church, Blackburn South. We pray for your guidance and encouragement in their Caring Ministries and for their Parish Renewal Program. May they know that you are with them as they work to show your way and your compassion to others, including to younger people.

Within our own **Presbytery** we pray today for those worshipping as members of the Living Faith Uniting Parish at Greensborough - a collaboration between the Greensborough Uniting Church and the Greensborough Church of Christ. We pray that through this model of working together, people from both

denominations will see and share the fundamental truths of the Christian faith as they show forth God's love to their community.

We pray, too, for the **Melbourne City Mission** and their work amongst the needy of our city as they help people to mend broken families and lives. We pray, too, for the people who are their clients in difficult situations.

Here within the **Whitehorse Uniting Church** congregation we seek your blessing on our people, on our worship and our work together. Encourage and guide those who have accepted responsibilities within our congregation, we pray, and refresh those who continue to work quietly on a host of activities that support our community and enhance our relationship with you,

O Lord. Be with our ministers Rev. Tina and Rev. Peter as they lead our endeavours to establish a growing and effective cluster Church serving our community.

We pray especially today for Rev Peter's speedy return to health and that Rev Tina will be refreshed from her post Easter break, and we also uphold in prayer.....

We bring these prayers in our Saviour's name, and pray as he taught us:

**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

OFFERING

Offering Prayer:

Gracious and loving God, you gave us everything in the life, death and resurrection of your beloved Son.

We humbly respond with these gifts and with our lives and pray that you will bless them and use them to further the coming of your Kingdom in the world. **Amen.**

THE SENDING FORTH OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

NOTICES, NEWS & REQUESTS

Hymn: TiS 183 'Sing of the Lord's goodness'

1
Sing of the Lord's goodness, Father of all wisdom,
come to him and bless his name.
Mercy he has shown us, his love is forever,
faithful to the end of days.
*Come then, all you nations, sing of your Lord's goodness,
melodies of praise and thanks to God.
Ring out the Lord's glory, praise him with your music, worship him and bless his name.*

2

Power he has wielded, honour is his garment,
risen from the snares of death.
His word he has spoken, one bread he has broken,
new life he now gives to all.

Refrain

3

Courage in our darkness, comfort in our sorrow,
Spirit of our God most high;
solace for the weary, pardon for the sinner,
splendour of the living God.

Refrain

4

Praise him with your singing, praise him with the trumpet,
praise God with the lute and harp,
praise him with the cymbals, praise him with your dancing,
praise God till the end of days.

Refrain

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BENEDICTION:

Go with the grace and love of God enfolding you;
the deep peace of Christ within you,
and the living breath of the Holy Spirit inspiring you.

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

Threefold Amen. TiS 783 (ii)

POSTLUDE