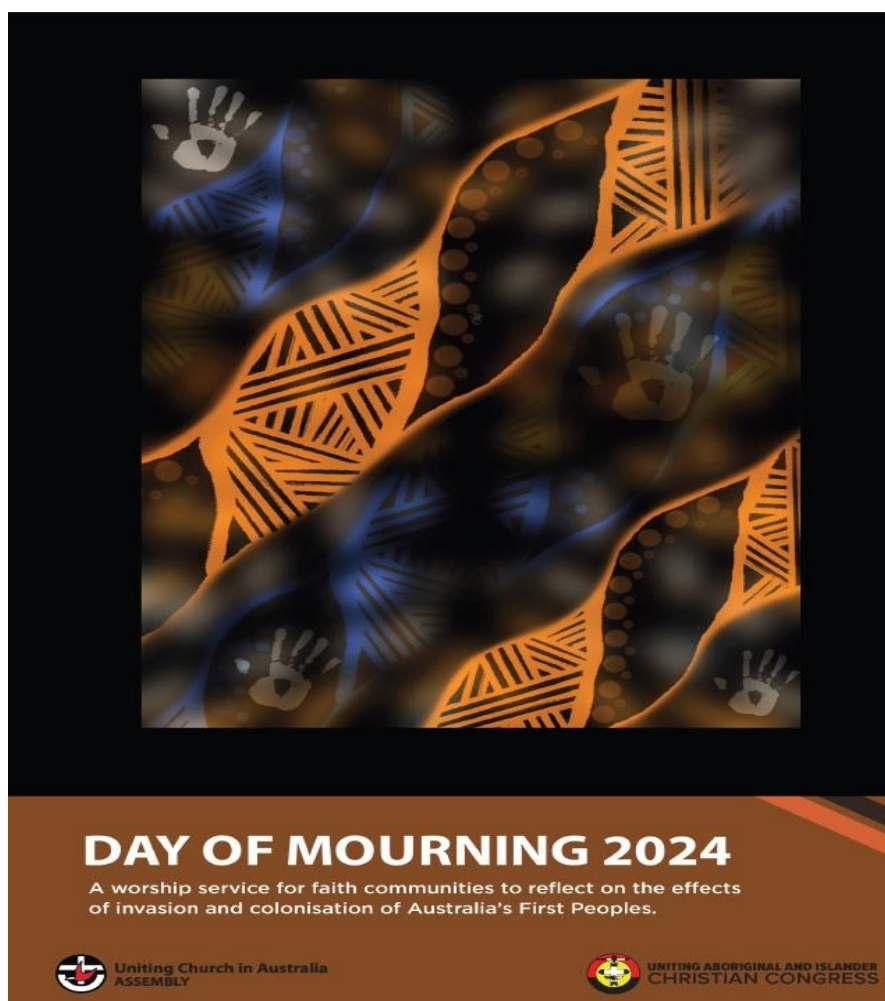


**Whitehorse Uniting Church
A Service for the Lord's Day
21st January 2024 Epiphany 3**



CALL TO WORSHIP

Our land is alive with the glory of God;
desert sands hum and gum trees dance.
Brown grasses sing and mountains breathe their stillness.

All created things add their rhythms of delight
and even stones rap out their praise.

Let our voices mingle with those of the earth;
may our hearts join the beat of her joy,
for our triune God is with us: the Source of all being surrounds and upholds us.

Christ Jesus walks beside and before us.
The Spirit moves within and between us.
Blessed be God, our wonder and delight

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF FIRST PEOPLES

Today, as we gather to worship, we acknowledge the Wurungeri peoples of the Kulin Nation, the first inhabitants of this place from time beyond remembering.

We acknowledge that through this land, God nurtured and sustained the First Peoples of this country, the Aboriginal and Islander peoples.

We honour them for their custodianship of the land on which we gather today.

We acknowledge that the First Peoples had already encountered the Creator God before the arrival of the colonisers;

the Spirit was already in the land, revealing God to the people through law, custom and ceremony.

We acknowledge that the same love and grace that was finally and fully revealed in Jesus Christ sustained the First Peoples and gave them particular insights into God's ways; and so we rejoice in the reconciling purposes of God found in the good news about Jesus Christ.

INVOCATION

Abba, Father,
Bäpa God,
source of all life,
answer our call,
as a mother responds to the cry of a child in the night.

Jesus Christ, teacher and liberator,
friend of the poor,
dwell with us as healer of creation,
and restorer of hope.

Creator Spirit, bringer of hope,
source of courage, help us to listen,
and open our hearts to the stories of these lands. Amen

HYMN TIS 477

“Jesus calls us here to meet him.”

https://youtu.be/yulQuvsFD00?si=NgeENNO-a7_keUF-

TRUTH-TELLING AND AN INVITATION

We are called to the day
We are called to this space
We are called to justice in the mourning
Not just for today but all that weeps from today
All that sits in the layers of mourning,
embedded in the trail of injustice
Of removal Of dispossession
Of stolen land
Of stolen children

Of stolen identity
Imposed policies on a sovereign people
Ancestral land

The mourning as a mother weeps for her child's hand
In the everyday dawning First Peoples sit in intergenerational mourning

We sit in silence and pray not just in the pain of this day but of all that this day weaves into – all the mourning, past, present and future

Creator let us arise
Arise in justice and truth telling
Arise in the mourning of the weeping hills

Let us mourn but in the mourning,
let us look to the love that calls us to seek out and speak out against injustice
To be present in footprints past
To be the advocates for change

LAMENT AND CONFESSION

Merciful God, we, the Second Peoples of this land, lament the injustice and abuse that has so often marked the treatment of the First Peoples of this land.

We lament the way in which their land was taken from them and their language, culture, law and spirituality despised and suppressed.

We acknowledge and lament the way in which the Christian church was so often not only complicit in this process but actively involved in it.

We lament that in our own time, the injustice and abuse has continued.

We have been indifferent.

Gracious God, hear our confession —
We have not loved you with our whole heart,
nor have we loved First Peoples and other neighbours as ourselves.

God of mercy, forgive us for our failures, past and present and give us the grace today to make a fresh start.

By your Spirit transform our minds and hearts so that we may love as you have loved us,
that we may boldly speak your truth and courageously do your will.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

WORDS OF FORGIVENESS

This is the best of all:
When we are empty, God fills us;
when we are disheartened,
God is compassionate;
when we are wounded,

God brings healing;
when we confess our sin,
God forgives.

In Christ, through Christ and because of Christ,
our sins are forgiven.

**Thanks be to God.
You refill the cup of life,
O God. In Christ,
we find refuge, strength and hope. Amen.**

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

You seek us, Holy One,
to be participants in the building of your reign on earth.
When we hear your call we sometimes respond with "I can't" resounding in our hearts.
May we remember, always, that with your call comes the promise of you being with us always. Amen.

THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES

Jonah 3:1-10 CEV

Once again the LORD told Jonah 2to go to that great city of Nineveh and preach his message of doom.
3Jonah obeyed the LORD and went to Nineveh. The city was so big that it took three days just to walk through it.

4After walking for a day, Jonah warned the people, "Forty days from now, Nineveh will be destroyed!"
5They believed God's message and set a time when they would go without eating to show their sorrow. Then everyone in the city, no matter who they were, dressed in sackcloth.

6When the king of Nineveh heard what was happening, he also dressed in sackcloth; he left the royal palace and sat in dust.

7-9Then he and his officials sent out an order for everyone in the city to obey. It said:

None of you or your animals may eat or drink a thing. Each of you must wear sackcloth, and you must even put sackcloth on your animals.

You must also pray to the LORD God with all your heart and stop being sinful and cruel. Maybe God will change his mind and have mercy on us, so we won't be destroyed.

10When God saw that the people had stopped doing evil things, he had pity and did not destroy them as he had planned.

Scripture quotations marked (CEV) are from the Contemporary English Version Copyright © 1991, 1992, 1995 by American Bible Society. Used by Permission.

REFLECTION ON THE READING by Anne Cumings

Ordained elder in The United Methodist Church; licensed clinical social worker; author of My Body is Good: Embracing Body Positivity and Giving Up Diet Culture for Lent; working for body justice and promoting embodied spirituality.

When Jonah first hears God's voice calling him to go to Nineveh, he does not drop what he's doing and follow God's lead like the disciples in Mark's Gospel.

He does the opposite.

He heads in the other direction, trying to get as far as he can from God's call.

Of course, this leads to him spending a cozy three days and nights in the belly of a great fish only to be spat out on the beach in a soggy heap of fish spew.

Our passage picks up with God trying again after Jonah has wiped off some of the fish goo. Jonah hears God's voice, saying, "Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you."

This time Jonah listens.

When it comes to God's call on our lives, we can be pretty thickheaded sometimes. There was a time after I had been called to ministry when I decided to head in the other direction. My rebellion was not as deliberate as Jonah's. I just decided to prioritize starting a family instead of following through with my ordination process for a few years.

But I ended up drifting further away than I had planned, until the work environment I found myself in was so toxic and harmful that I felt I had landed in the belly of a beast.

I left that position feeling physically and emotionally like I had been spat out in a messy pile of fish guts.

The good news of Jonah's story is that God's call doesn't dry up when we get lost in the waves of our own fears or egos.

When we turn away from God's call on our lives, it results in a loss of peace; but that isn't the end of the story. God is always ready for us to get back on the path God has called us to.

Longing God, you call to me in so many ways, but I do not always answer. Sometimes I even turn around and run the other way. But you remain there, longing for me to return to you. Thank you for continuing to call, even when I stray. Amen.

THE GOSPEL

Mark 1:14-20 CEV

14After John was arrested, Jesus went to Galilee and told the good news that comes from God.

15He said, "The time has come! God's kingdom will soon be here. Turn back to God and believe the good news!"

16As Jesus was walking along the shore of Lake Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew. They were fishermen and were casting their nets into the lake.

17Jesus said to them, "Come with me! I will teach you how to bring in people instead of fish."

18Right then the two brothers dropped their nets and went with him.

19Jesus walked on and soon saw James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They were in a boat, mending their nets.

20At once Jesus asked them to come with him. They left their father in the boat with the hired workers and went with him.

REFLECTION ON THE READING

The immediacy of Mark has always been startling to me.

With no birth story to ease us into the life of Jesus, we are thrown right in with a wild character from the wilderness dressed in camel's hair, eating locusts and honey.

John the Baptist introduces us to Jesus by "proclaiming a baptism of repentance" in preparation for Jesus' arrival.

Then just a few verses later, John has been arrested and Jesus has taken up his own message of repentance.

Mark moves fast!

The first half of this passage tells us that Jesus' ministry was about proclaiming the "good news." And in true Markan fashion, the good news is brief.

His sermon consists of this one sentence: "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

That's all we have at this stage of the story. Jesus proclaims that God has drawn near, and this little headline was enough to get people to change the way they were thinking and start to live in a different way.

I don't think the urgency and brevity we feel in Mark's writing is by chance.

Mark uses the word "immediately" forty-one times in just sixteen chapters.

There must have been something powerful about Jesus' presence that caused his earliest followers to change their entire lives with a simple encounter.

My own Jesus encounters have been more like a subtle, gentle wooing. But there is something inspiring to me when I meet someone with the kind of zeal that Mark's Gospel depicts.

They have experienced God in such a way that they can no longer live the way they lived before.

Whether or not your Jesus encounters have been quiet nudges or powerful impacts, let these words from Mark create some urgency in you to change the way you think and live.

God of new life, move me to change my thinking and the way I live. Fill me with holy urgency. Amen.

HYMN: TIS 665

"Jesus Christ is waiting..."

https://youtu.be/CSzEviUc_o?si=ySo8HPvYCIDLm-g6

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Most loving God, keep our prayers going when we leave this house of prayer today, that our daily experience may be enhanced by our prayers, and our prayers enriched by our experience.

Give us the courage to accept the realities of our history so that we may build a better future for our nation.

Teach us to respect all cultures.

Teach us to care for our land and waters.

Help us to share justly the resources of this land.

Help us to bring about spiritual and social change to improve the quality of life for all peoples in our communities, especially the disadvantaged.

Help all young people to find true dignity and self-esteem by your Spirit.

May your power and love be the foundations on which we:

walk together as First and Second Peoples; and build our families, our communities and our nation.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. 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 215

"You servants of God, your Master proclaim."

https://youtu.be/ptLLr_WjCz8?si=e6KtYhopFYW5O9SQ

DISMISSAL AND BLESSING:

People of God,
be strong and of good courage,
live as people of the Covenant,
seek justice and resist evil,
honour First Nations People
and confront racism,
love and care for creation
and turn from exploitation of the earth,
proclaim truth and challenge lies
until we are reconciled through God's love.

May the blessing of God, ancient of days,
Jesus, embodiment of God's justice
and the Spirit, animator of Creation
Be on us and remain with us.
Amen.

Go in the power of God's good Spirit:
with the gentle fire of God's zeal,
with the breath of life,
ready to work for justice and peace.

We go in Christ's name. Amen