



Image – T Lyndon

Whitehorse Uniting Church
Sunday 25 February 2024
Lent 2 B
Commissioning of Church Council



Introit – Be Still for the Presence of the Lord – David Evans 1986
 Chet Valley Churches 2020

<https://youtu.be/XOCfPjLOvC4?si=Ehzh99ffhrWsBjLL>

Welcome

The theme is Covenant & Commitment and faith.

Acknowledgement



Image T. Lyndon

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.

Like Abraham let us not weaken in our faith

Let us trust in the promises of God and hope against hope.

Let us grow stronger in our faith and commitment to follow Jesus Christ and his ways.

Let us take up our cross and with faith, hope and courage, continue to follow Jesus Christ.

Prayer



Image T Lyndon

Inspired by a prayer by Ian M Fraser, Iona Community, Wild Goose big book of Liturgies, Wild Goose Publications, Glasgow. www.ionabooks.com Used with permission.

God, meet us in the silence.

The place beyond the business and the bustle.

The chatter and the clutter.

Beyond our preoccupations and prejudices

There bless us with wisdom, insight, and vision

To discern and lay hold of what is valuable and true,

To glimpse, hope, and strive for possibilities of transformation and fulfilment,

To commit ourselves to the new future in which you are calling us to share.

Silence

Lord Jesus Christ,

In your earthly life you failed to live up to people's expectations.

Faced with testing situations, you were outrageously inventive.

In human relationships you were outrageously imaginative, compassionate and straight speaking.

Your love of the poor showed you to be outrageously committed to justice.
 You lacked balance, perhaps were short of diplomatic skills.
 Yet you are the way, the truth, and the life.
 It is human expectations that need to be changed.
 So, make us unbalanced we pray,
 Not saying on the one hand, on the other to excuse inaction.
 Not pandering to social prejudices.
 Willing to jettison advancement, prestige, in favour of truthful living.
 Prepared to spend our lives sacrificially,
 to share in the building of God's kingdom
 and the doing of God's will on earth,
 for we want to follow in your footsteps.

Living God, may the mind of Christ be ours,
 Clothe us with your grace and grittiness,
 Help us to embody the vision and values of your kingdom,
 and be ready to face whatever may come,
 as we seek to do your will,
 in Jesus' name we pray. amen

Prayer of Confession

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God of our brother Jesus,
 Your love is the love of a mother,
 Who adores her children and forgives them everything.
 Your love is the love of a father,
 Who is devoted to his children and accepts them always.
 We are your children.
 We fall down and you help us up.
 We go wrong and you put us right.
 Now, fill our emptiness with your love,
 Replace our brokenness with wholeness,
 And our weakness with your strength,
 That we may go out into the world and be of use to you. Amen

Please spend a moment in silence before God with what's on your heart and seek forgiveness or to forgive, if needed.

Silence

Words of absolution



Image T Lyndon

Hear then Christ's words of grace to us
 "Your sins are forgiven"
Thanks be to God.

684 Love will be our Lenten Calling

Holy Hermits Online 2021

<https://youtu.be/RLegowSR2nk?si=Lhf6g0kKm4Fz8sQz>

Readings

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

7 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty;^[a] walk before me, and be blameless. 2 And I will make my covenant between me and you and will make you exceedingly numerous.” 3 Then Abram fell on his face, and God said to him, 4 “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. 5 No longer shall your name be Abram,^[b] but your name shall be Abraham,^[c] for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. 6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. 7 I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. 15 God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. 16 I will bless her and also give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.”

Romans 4:13-25

13 For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. 14 For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null, and the promise is void. 15 For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there transgression. 16 For this reason the promise depends on faith, in order that it may rest on grace, so that it may be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (who is the father of all of us, 17 as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”), in the presence of the God in whom he believed,^[a] who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. 18 Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become “the father of many nations,” according to what was said, “So shall your descendants be.” 19 He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already^[b] as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), and the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. 20 No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, 21 being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. 22 Therefore “it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” 23 Now the words, “it was reckoned to him,” were written not for his sake alone 24 but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe^[c] in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, 25 who was handed over for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

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Young at Heart– Commitment and faith – Rev Tina



Abraham, Sarah, and the Angel, Jan Provoost, Louvre Museum, Paris, France
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jan_Provoost__Abraham,_Sarah,_and_the_Angel_-_WGA18441.jpg.

Does anyone know the difference between commitment and faith?

I looked up the thesaurus on my computer.

Commitment is about a pledge, promise, vow, obligation, assurance, word, binder, guarantee and loyalty, devotion, steadfastness, allegiance, and faithfulness.

Faith is about confidence, reliance, conviction, belief, assurance, devotion, faithfulness, loyalty, commitment, fidelity, constancy, fealty, allegiance, and belief.

Commitment is more about promise and faithfulness to the promise while faith is more about confidence, conviction, and belief, in the promise or vow or as in today's readings from Genesis and Romans, trust in God and faith in God's covenants and promises.

Have a look at the painting. What seems to be wrong with it? Does it match the readings?

An angel did not bring a message to Abram. The Lord appeared to him.

Abram did not sit on a throne like a chair, debating with God.

He fell on his face on the ground and worshipped God.

The readings are about God's initiative. God makes promises and a covenant with Abraham and Sarah. God recreates them, their identities, history, purpose, status, and name.

Abraham was 99 and Sarah was old and barren. How can this be? What is the point of this story? What is the good news for us?

God's covenant with Abraham is: *You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations.*

The father of nations. God changes his name to Abraham and God's covenant is with Abraham and his descendants and God promises to be their God.

God promises to bless Sarai with a son and changes her name to Sarah. She will be the mother of nations and kings.

We are descendants of Abraham and Sarah. That means the covenant is with us, the promise to be fruitful, to be blessed and for God to be our God.

Paul tells us God's promises depend on our faith, so the promise rests on grace. Grace is unmerited love. We can't earn the promise. It's God's initiative and freely given.

God who gives life to the dead and calls into existence things that do not exist can bless us, even if we are old and 99 and have never been fruitful, like Sarah.

Hoping against hope Abraham believed

Hoping against hope we believe

Abraham trusted God and grew strong in his faith.

When we trust God, we grow strong in our faith.

547 Be Thou my vision O Lord of my heart.

Nathan Pacheco Music 2017

<https://youtu.be/ihJAJA4ibEs?si=3K4I5gN64JLwMaX>

Gospel - Mark 8:31-38

³¹ Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes and be killed and after three days rise again. ³² He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

³⁴ He called the crowd with his disciples and said to them, "If any wish to come^[a] after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel,^[b] will save it. ³⁶ For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷ Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸ Those who are ashamed of me and of my words^[c] in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

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Sermon -The call to take up our cross and follow Jesus. – Rev Tina

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

Imagine being asked to go on a pilgrimage in the middle of a storm. Who would do that?

Well, a few years ago I was at a Celtic conference on Iona, a small island off the coast of Scotland and the minister leading the conference refused to change the date for our pilgrimage around the island, despite a storm. I made a movie of the group standing outside in the middle of the storm. Let's have a look at it.

"We face Challenges".

Movie of a storm by T. Lyndon

This storm was so bad kelp blew up from the beach into nearby paddocks and the cows were eating it. We all got drenched and blown about, but everyone persevered. Later on, we all agreed the experience was profound and unforgettable. We figured it was a metaphor for life's journey. Storms happen. They can't be avoided. It's our response that matters. We have to journey through them and come out the other side.

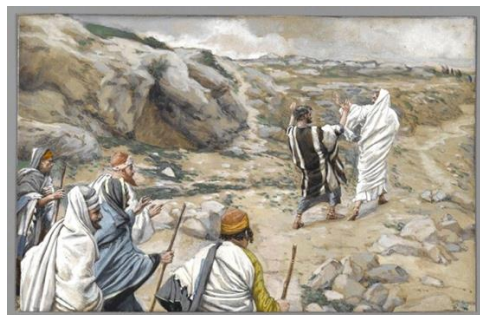


"The Suffering Christ"

Image of Christ at Palloti College, Milgrove – photo T. Lyndon

It's like Jesus' experience of suffering, death, and resurrection. Jesus made three passion predictions, and today's gospel is the first one. It's just after Jesus asks his disciples: *Who do people say that I am?* Peter declares: *You are the Messiah.* But after Jesus openly shares about how he will suffer; Peter cannot accept a suffering Messiah and takes him aside and rebukes him.

"Get behind me Satan." Says Jesus in front of all the disciples. Imagine how Peter felt.



"Get behind me Satan"

"Get Thee Behind Me, Satan!" -- James Tissot, Brooklyn Museum, New York, NY

[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Brooklyn_Museum_-_Get_Thee_Behind_Me_Satan_\(R%C3%A9tire-toi_Satan\)_-_James_Tissot.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Brooklyn_Museum_-_Get_Thee_Behind_Me_Satan_(R%C3%A9tire-toi_Satan)_-_James_Tissot.jpg).

When Jesus uses the word "Satan," he meant don't be an obstacle to God's plans for me. He knew his call and mission would involve suffering, especially from the authorities. He is still willing to take risks and suffer for our sake and to live out his call and mission.

Taking up our cross, as Jesus suggested, means taking up our life experiences, the good and the bad, and following Jesus, and risking suffering, but also embracing hope, love, joy, and faith. Suffering is part of the journey. It's something we encounter along the way. But there is a bigger picture, one that involves our relationship with Jesus

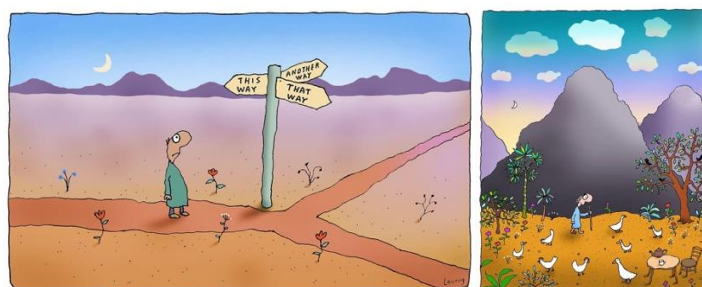
and perseverance, overcoming, courage, faithfulness, obedience, loyalty, trust and hoping against hope, and faith. Like Jesus and Abraham experienced on their journey through life. Despite suffering, Jesus lived out his call. He suffered for our sake and kept on going until he fulfilled his call and mission. Even a shameful death on a cross and failure, wasn't an obstacle.



“Cross at the Colosseum, Rome”

T. Lyndon

There is a cross in the Colosseum in Rome that witnesses to Christians who remained steadfast in their faith despite persecution and being killed as a form of entertainment for the emperor and those who supported this kind of behaviour. The early Christians suffered deeply.



“The Journey has ups and downs.”

Leunig used with permission.

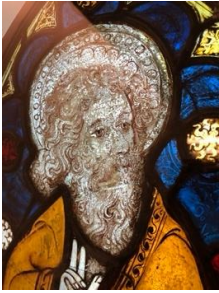
Most of us know suffering and challenge. There are times when we held fast to our faith, hoped against hope and trusted God. There are times when we haven't known which direction we are going. There are times when we have been happy and felt blessed by life. Such is the journey.



“Sometimes the task seems too big”.

Image T. Lyndon

Sometimes the task may feel too big. This tiny boat symbolises our church. It may not be big compared to other churches, but it's filled with caring and faithful people. Beside it is a path that's been worn down by many feet. The journey can be like this, where others have gone before us and made a path for us to walk, and we follow in their footsteps. The task may seem too big when the path isn't clear, and we have to make a path by walking into the unknown. But we don't walk alone. God walks with us, and we walk together. All of us are on the same journey of trust.



“Prayer brings peace and reassurance.”

Image T. Lyndon

Prayer can bring comfort, peace, and reassurance when we feel like the task is too risky, too big, with unknown destinations.



“We never walk the journey alone.”

Image T. Lyndon

We do not walk alone. Abraham and Sarah walked together. Husbands and wives, friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, entire congregations, trust in God, and walk together. God promised to be there for us. God promised to bless us. God made a covenant with us, so we can bear fruit and be a blessing to the church, our family and to the world. Let us strengthen our faith by giving glory to God and hope against hope, and trust in God’s faithfulness to us, as we take up our cross and follow Jesus.

Moment of Quiet – journey image



T. Lyndon

659 The Lord is my Shepherd and I want to follow.

Brian Boniwell Music 2015

https://youtu.be/4sZaJpllj_c?si=KKetDzg1B27BlAgX

Commissioning of Church Council Members

“Used with permission - National Working Group on Worship Theology and Discipleship the Uniting Church in Australia. 2000”

Rev Tina

We invite our Church Council Members to stand and come forward.

Presentation

Rev Tina addresses the congregation.

The Uniting Church provides for the exercise by men and women of the gifts God bestows upon them for the building up of the church. Having sought the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we are now to commission as church councillors those whom we have elected to this ministry.

Rev Peter

On behalf of the people of this congregation, we present the following persons to be commissioned as church councillors and note Jeff Randles is unable to be here with us today:

Julie Hawkey	(Chairperson)	David Rowe
George Manuofetoa	(Co-Chair)	Jeff Randles
Trevor Thomas	(Secretary)	Joy Williams
Rob Jackson	(Treasurer)	Rev Peter Cannon
Brian Head		

The candidates stand together facing the congregation,

Rev Peter addresses members of Church Council

Brothers and sisters, the congregation has elected you to serve as church councillors.

The church council shall give priority in its life to building up the Congregation in faith and love, sustaining members in hope, and leading the Congregation to a fuller participation in Christ's mission in the world.

The Vows

Rev Tina asks the candidates:

Do you confess anew Jesus Christ as Lord?

I do.

Do you believe that you are called by God through the church to this ministry?

I do.

Being guided by The Basis of Union of the Uniting Church in Australia, will you live and work within the faith and unity of the one holy catholic and apostolic church?

With God's help I will.

Relying on God's grace, do you promise to carry out the duties of your office?

I do.

Will you, the members of this congregation, accept these brothers and sisters as church councillors?

We will.

Will you encourage them in love and support them in their ministry, serving with them the one Lord Jesus Christ?

We will.

May God give you strength to fulfil these vows, and to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus from generation to generation for ever.

Amen.

The people sit.

ACT OF COMMISSIONING

Rev's Tina and Peter

Beloved in Christ, let us pray in silence for these people before we commission them for the work to which we believe the Holy Spirit has called them.

Members of Church Council Kneel (If comfortable)

After a time of silence Rev Peter says:

Almighty God, we thank you that in every age you have chosen leaders to serve and care for your people. We thank you that you have called Julie, Trevor, Rob, George, Jeff, Brian, Joy, David, to serve you. May those you have chosen have the same mind which was in Christ Jesus and be faithful disciples, giving example to Christ's flock and witnessing to the truth of the gospel; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The people say: **Amen.**

Rev Tina prays:

Rev's Tina and Peter lay hands on each member of Church Council and say their name and the prayer.

God of grace, through the Holy Spirit empower your servant, Julie, Trevor, Rob, George, Jeff, Brian, Joy, David, to serve you for the ministry of church councillor.

And the people say: **Amen.**

Hymn 776 Aaronic Blessing

John Rutter 2013

<https://youtu.be/ICpxgEHqjFA?si=GaBgfSA0GqAxBkTN>

DECLARATION

The candidates stand.

Rev's Tina and Peter say:

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, I declare you to be church councillors of the Uniting Church in Australia in the Whitehorse Uniting Congregation.

Members of the congregation may applaud.

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 Saviour, amen

Prayers of the People – Margot Kemke

Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for the opportunity to come together in prayer for all people in our world, for our leaders, our neighbours, friends, and family, and for ourselves.

In this time of conflict in Europe and the Middle East we pray for justice and peace, for deliverance from the human sin that causes wars and separates nations and families. We pray for an end to war, for reconciliation between nations and for all who long for peace and goodwill throughout the world. We pray especially for the innocent civilians who are paying an enormous price for all this death and destruction, and for those who are trying to relieve the suffering.

We pray for all governments – may they make and administer just laws that will make their countries free, prosperous, and peaceful. Grant them wisdom and compassion.

We pray for people who are recovering from damage due to recent storms, fires, and floods. Give them strength and hope to rebuild their lives and homes.

We pray for those who are poor and hungry, for those who need a home and shelter, and for all who are suffering pain and require healing. We ask for care and dignity for the elderly, comfort for the lonely and encouragement and assurance for those who doubt and feel insecure. Care for them all, O Lord, using us as your voice and hands wherever we see the need.

We pray for the mission of our church, its outreach and faithful witness in our community. This morning, we ask you to bless our leaders, our ministers, Rev. Tina and Rev. Peter, the members of Church Council, committee members, youth leaders, pastoral partners, musicians, and the multi-media team as they are called to share the responsibilities and worship of our congregation. Guide, encourage and strengthen them in their faith and commitment.

O Lord, bless our friends and families. May we treat each other with love, respect, honour, and endurance and encourage each other to reach our goals and potential.

We pray for ourselves – that we may live our lives with confidence and trust in you, our Heavenly Father, and continue to do your will.

Hear our prayers, in the name of Jesus Christ, Your son.

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 and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us in 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

You're welcome to light a candle and pray.



T. Lyndon

Hymn 658 I The Lord of Sea and Sky

St Andrews Metropolitan Cathedral, Glasgow. Hymn Channel 2016

https://youtu.be/mgLwH5RdtPk?si=jhCOtMzuN_y03_0v

Sending out

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The day is coming when things will change.

The day is coming when we will set out.

The day has come when Christ sets out.

The day has come for food and friendship.

The day has come.

Not to flee but to embrace

Not to escape but to welcome

Not to shut out but, in safety and in community,

To trust and not look back.

To trust and not look back.

755 You shall go out with Joy.

Bill & Gloria Gaither 2012 – Live in Jerusalem

<https://youtu.be/cjL27TISwYU?si=b65Hm2XUK5Na3RxC>