

**Whitehorse Uniting Church**  
**Written Worship**  
**Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> March 2023**  
**Lent 2**



**699 A New Commandment**

[https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=hymn+performed+A+New+Commandment#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:8946f201,vid:2X8m9tVR0\\_Y](https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=hymn+performed+A+New+Commandment#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:8946f201,vid:2X8m9tVR0_Y)  
 Chet Valley Churches

**Welcome**

May today's worship bless you

**Acknowledgment**

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.



*Uncle Bob (Photo T. Lyndon)*

**Call to Worship**

We lift up our eyes to the Hills.

**From where will our help come?**

Our help comes from the Lord.

**Who made heaven and earth.**

**Prayers Adoration and Invocation**

Lord, come to us and transform our hearts.

For we are your people born of water and Spirit.

You, Lord, help us see and enter your kingdom.

Jesus our Lord, you were led and empowered by the Spirit.

You were raised up on the cross and all who believe in you receive eternal life.

You, Lord, teach us about living water and teach us how to put our trust in the Spirit and be led by the Spirit.

You help us see and enter into the kingdom of God.

Holy Spirit, come upon us now.

Help us see and enter into the kingdom of God.

Where we are saved through Jesus and are blessed.

## Prayer of Confession

Come before the Lord in reverence and silence with all that's on your heart asking for wholeness, transformation, and forgiveness.

Hear then Christ's words of grace to us  
*"Your sins are forgiven"*  
**THANKS BE TO GOD**

## Hymn - How Great Thou art

Chris Rice 2009

<https://youtu.be/Cc0QVWzCv9k>

## Readings

**John 3:1-17 NRSV Updated**

**3** Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews.

<sup>2</sup> He came to Jesus<sup>[a]</sup> by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with that person." <sup>3</sup> Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>4</sup> Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" <sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. <sup>6</sup> What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup> Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You<sup>[a]</sup> must be born from above.'<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>8</sup> The wind<sup>[a]</sup> blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."<sup>9</sup> Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" <sup>10</sup> Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

<sup>11</sup> "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen, yet you<sup>[a]</sup> do not receive our testimony. <sup>12</sup> If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? <sup>13</sup> No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>14</sup> And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>16</sup> "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him.

*Scripture quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.*

## Young at Heart

### Lighthouses



We often imagine lighthouses are romantic places. But really a lighthouse keeper is always there and loyal and faithful. Night after night they put the light on so ships do not get washed up against the rocks or are guided through dangerous waters. They are a constant presence watching over ships and checking the weather for storms, so they can alert fishermen and others and give them time to seek safe harbours. In a similar way God is present to us, family members are present, friends are present, and we are present to God and our loved ones.

**Hymn 675 Lord the Light of your Love is Shining**  
**WMTV music 2016**

<https://youtu.be/rce9UHYZwl4>

**Sermon - Born from Above.**

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



*Image RCL*

Nicodemus is a Pharisee, an important Jewish leader. He comes in the dark seeking Jesus because he has heard God is with Jesus and works through him. He wants to see for himself. He wants to know.

We may wonder what leads him to believe in Jesus. What happens in this conversation that plants a seed in his heart that leads him to become a Christian? And he does become a Christian. We hear about it after Jesus is crucified, when Nicodemus helps Joseph of Arimathea place Jesus in Joseph's family's tomb.

So, what does Jesus say that plants a seed in his heart?

At first Nicodemus doesn't understand what Jesus is talking about. Born from above?

Nicodemus thinks of babies born and the waters of afterbirth.

Twice Jesus says: Very truly, which translates as a double amen. Amen. Amen. Very truly I tell you.

When Jesus says this, we know he's going to say a profound truth and invites us all to learn something and gain an insight into how God is God.

We all have a healthy desire to know God. Jesus says no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above. Can we see the kingdom of God? How?

Step by step Jesus takes Nicodemus through what it means to be born from above and we join him on the journey of discovery.

Again, Jesus says no one can enter the kingdom without being born of water and the Spirit.

So now we know we can see and enter the kingdom of God when we are born from above.

So, what kind of birth is Jesus talking about? He distinguishes between flesh and spirit. Natural childbirth and spiritual birth. Some say he is speaking about the waters of baptism. Yet, the Spirit is often portrayed as water in the gospel, as living waters.

Jesus takes Nicodemus and us a little further. Perhaps being born from above is about receiving the Spirit and the Spirit dwelling within our spirit.

What is flesh is flesh and what is Spirit is Spirit.

Again, Jesus takes us all a little further into the mystery. He speaks of what may be unfathomable for us.

The wind blows where it chooses, and we hear the sound of it, but we do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So, it is with everyone born of the Spirit.

Most people know about wind. We don't think about it much. A theologian and Jesuit named Brendon Byrne speaks of the Spirit bringing about a rebirth in us through Baptism. Yet we have the story of a Roman named Cornelius and his family who were baptised by the Holy Spirit before being baptised by water and Spirit.

It seems the Spirit cannot be contained and limited. It blows where it will.

Perhaps we do come to see with the eyes of faith after being born from above and this helps us enter into the kingdom of God.

But Nicodemus is still seeing with the eyes of flesh.

So, Jesus takes him a little further along on this journey of discovery. He speaks of the Ruah, the breath of God, something his religion is aware of in its teachings. The Ruah or wind of God.

Nicodemus still doesn't get it. He says: How can this be?

Jesus rebukes him. You, a teacher of Israel, don't know about these things.

What do we make of the mysterious saying about the wind and those born of the Spirit?

Last week we heard about Jesus being led by the Spirit into the wilderness where he was tempted. In Luke's gospel after Jesus leaves the wilderness, he returns to Galilee in the power of the Spirit.

Perhaps we know someone who we look up to as a Christian who has spent their life being led by the Spirit into ministry where they minister in the power of the Spirit. I look up to people like Jackie Pullinger who felt led to minister to addicts in Hong Kong or Edwina Gately who felt led to leave the UK to minister to prostitutes in Chicago or Corrie Ten Boom whose family sheltered Jewish people during WWII and ended up in a concentration camp or Bonhoeffer who stood up to the Nazis. Each of them was led by the Spirit in different ways. They had no idea where the destination was for their call when they responded and followed the Spirit.

I heard about Hudson Taylor in my devotional. He was ministering in China and embraced Chinese culture, language, mannerisms, and dress to bring the gospel to the people in a way they could relate to and at first people didn't understand and criticised his methods. But today churches know about the importance of inculturation.

Jesus knew it. He taught people about God in a way that spoke into their daily activities and faith practices. He brought healing to those labelled as outcasts so they could re-join their family and society, people with leprosy, the blind and lame, or people excluded because they were thought of as possessed by demons.

Hudson Taylor was led by the Spirit to minister like Jesus ministered. What if we took the same approach as Jesus with the forty percent of the population who have no faith.

Another story from my devotional is about Christian Huygens who made pendulum clocks. One day he realised that the pendulums in two clocks were swinging in unison, and it got him thinking. He realised that two pendulums or something similar which are on close proximity to each other with different rhythms, end up moving in unison. We can apply this to those who spend time with God and align their hearts with God's heart. They move in rhythm with God.

Perhaps that is what is behind being born from above and being led by the Spirit and being like wind or Ruah or breath of God. It's about spending time with God in prayer so we can move in rhythm with God.

Let's return to Nicodemus.

Jesus tries to connect with him. He speaks of Moses who lifted up the serpent in the wilderness so all those who were bitten by snakes were healed. What happened was the Israelites journeyed through a barren area where there were lots of snakes and kept getting bitten, so Moses took a bronze snake and tied it to a pole and when people got bitten, they looked up at the snake and were healed and lived.

Jesus uses this story to teach Nicodemus about him being lifted up where all who believed in him would not perish but would receive eternal life. Perhaps this must have planted a seed in his heart. Nicodemus would not have understood what Jesus was saying until his crucifixion. So Nicodemus came to believe in Jesus in between this time and the crucifixion of Jesus.

Like Nicodemus we have entered the journey towards Good Friday and Jesus' crucifixion. Just like on my stole, these are testing times, with rocky roads and a path that is not straight. It is a path that leads to the cross, the symbol of our salvation and all Jesus has given us.

I wonder; has today's gospel planted a seed in your heart? Will this seed grow as you journey towards Easter?

Dorothy Lee a theologian and expert on John's gospel spoke of an infant passing through the waters of childbirth and breathing into its nostrils that first breath of life.

Perhaps being born from above is about taking that first breath after the living waters of the Spirit cause us to be transformed from old to new, from darkness to light.

Nicodemus wanted to move from darkness to light. He needed time to be transformed and to understand. Seeds grow in the darkness and then burst forth into the light. Perhaps this symbolises his mind and heart being transformed over time.

Jesus accepted all this about Nicodemus and reassured him he did not come to condemn him. He came to bring life, eternal life, to him. Perhaps this was the seed.

Let us pray.

Loving God, synchronize our hearts with your heart.  
 Help our spirit meet with your Spirit.  
 Transform us into your image.  
 So, we may be born from above and see and enter into the Kingdom of God

## Hymn 164 The Great Love of God Paul Coleman 2022

<https://youtu.be/NDuPmxfQtiU>

### Offering Prayer

*(about offering up ourselves and giving thanks to God for all we have)*

**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 and the Lord's Prayer – Margot Kemke

Dear Heavenly Father, we bring our prayers to you today with love and concern in our hearts for all the people in our world, for our own community, for our congregation, for our friends, family and for ourselves. We thank you for your many blessings and your encouraging presence whenever we feel we may have failed.

We pray for the government and people in Ukraine who are so valiantly defending their homeland from their intrusive and power-hungry neighbours. We pray for the urgent recovery for the people in Türkiye and Syria following the devastating earthquakes and for more immediate aid. We pray also for the people of New Zealand following their recent floods and, at home, we pray for those who are worried about fires in their areas. O Lord, make us all more aware of our environment and our own responsibility to care for our land.

Following the world prayer cycle we pray today for the governments and people in Ireland; and in the United Kingdom of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. These parliamentary democracies, governing people from, now, many diverse cultures and traditions, have a very high standard of living, excellent education and health systems, and a legal system which protects and promotes equality. Altho' almost half of the people do not adhere to any religion, the values and beliefs are mostly Christian. O Lord, we pray for the Christian churches and their outreach and hope that your care and compassion will encourage further commitment to spreading your message of love and healing to all.

Within our own Christian community we pray for the minister and congregation at St Mark's Anglican Church, Forest Hill, and the Uniting Church congregation at the Church of all Nations in Carlton and for the Kildonan Community. Bless and guide these groups and encourage them in their work and service.

Here at Whitehorse Uniting Church we ask for your continuing guidance, love and blessings as we meet together to worship and praise you, and to thank you for your continuing guidance as we develop into one congregation – our one aim is to proclaim your love and care to the people around us and to nurture each other in our Christian faith. We pray for your blessings on our programmes of assistance and witness to all.

Hear our prayers, O Lord, and guide and protect us all during the coming week.

### 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 forever. Amen.

### HOLY COMMUNION

The Lord be with you.  
**And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.  
**We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.  
**It right to give our thanks and praise.**

Prayer continues ...

We proclaim your power in goodness  
and your might in compassion,  
as we say:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord,  
 God of power and might,  
 heaven and earth are full of your glory.  
 Hosanna in the highest.**

**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.  
 Hosanna in the highest.**

Prayer continues...

As he broke bread before the brokenness of his death, **(Break Bread)**  
 as he poured out wine before his blood was poured out on the cross, **(Hold up Cup)**  
 Prayer continues ....

Nurture us with your brokenness,  
 renew us with your poured out life,  
 empower us with your powerlessness,  
 that we may take root in your risen life  
 and bear fruit in your world.

**You are our life;  
 you are our hope;  
 you are our peace;  
 and we praise you. Amen.**

The bread of life is offered to us. **We feed on the bread of life with gratitude**

The cup of the newness of life is offered to us. **We drink of the cup with gratitude.**

The gifts of God for the people of God.  
**May we who share these gifts be found in Christ and Christ in us.**

### **Prayer after Communion**

**God of truth and love who calls us and leads us into the future, make us a blessing for others  
 Help us to see creation as being in the future and to love it into being.**

May we hold on to the hope You have planted in us,  
 believing the unbelievable,  
 reaching for the unattainable,  
 trusting the things beyond seeing and the things beyond hearing,  
 loving and living with compassion, offering hospitality and hope,  
 until the people who walk in darkness see the great light and are glad and free.

### **Hymn 599 Take my Life and let it be**

Frances Ridley Haveragal  
 Songs & Everlasting Joy 2022  
<https://youtu.be/H0z3f7fgEoc>

### **Blessing**

May the Blessing of the Holy Trinity of Love be upon us  
 the fire of the Spirit to ignite us  
 the love of God to encircle us and the wisdom of Christ to enliven us this day and evermore, amen

### Dismissal

Go in peace and remember:  
 Goodness is stronger than evil  
 Love is stronger than hate  
 Light is stronger than darkness  
 Life is stronger than death  
 Victory is ours  
 Through Christ who loves us. Amen

**YouTube Hymn 778 Shalom To You Now.** – tMt video by the CMMM Team

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2oqiFenpWxY&list=PL5dbbdzyKBag-mEd9qTgdyYNQLIsLD2rC&index=35>

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### Pastoral Care Tips

***“Read the Psalms and they will keep you”***

*From Fatee, an Egyptian man who died from a rare blood cancer.*

#### Psalm 121

I lift up my eyes to the hills—  
 from where my help will come?  
<sup>2</sup>My help comes from the LORD,  
 who made heaven and earth.  
<sup>3</sup>He will not let your foot be moved;  
 he who keeps you will not slumber.  
<sup>4</sup>He who keeps Israel  
 will neither slumber nor sleep.  
<sup>5</sup>The LORD is your keeper;  
 the LORD is your shade at your right hand.  
<sup>6</sup>The sun shall not strike you by day  
 nor the moon by night.  
<sup>7</sup>The LORD will keep you from all evil;  
 he will keep your life.  
<sup>8</sup>The LORD will keep  
 your going out and your coming in  
 from this time on and forevermore.





*Leunig, used with permission.*

### **Psalm 121**

Two friends are on a journey to Jerusalem, and they reach some large hills and one of them doubts he can make it to Jerusalem. They feel defeated.

His friend does his best to encourage them. They're on a pilgrimage to the holy city and to the Temple. It's no time to give up. There is some irony and humour in this story. The friend tries to say God is my help. God will help you too. But God is not going to help him climb the hill. He has to do it. They're in the middle of a desert and its either at night when the temperatures go down to zero or in the day when the temperatures go up to 45C or more in the middle of the day. Perhaps he is elderly and climbing hills are a challenge. We don't know.

The psalm reminds me of J. Edwin Or and his book: *Can God*. He rode a bike around the UK and depended on people's support and hospitality and took nothing. One day his bike broke down with a ruined wheel and tyre. He sat down at the side of the road and prayed. Lord, I wish a limo would come along and pick me up and take me to the next village. Sure enough, within minutes a limo stopped right in front of him, and the driver offered him a lift to the next village. He stayed for a few days and people passed the hat around and bought him a new bike and off he went on his way.

Maybe someone will come along with a donkey and offer the man a lift over the hills.

But we know life isn't always like this. Most of the time it's our friends who encourage us to have enough faith to keep on going on our journey through life.

We need our friends to encourage us. So many times, we lose heart or feel defeated or like giving up. We may be sick or facing an operation or depressed or feeling inadequate. But our dear friends are there for us, always at our side when we need them. What would we do without them? I invite you to thank your friend today for being there for you.