



Image, T. Lyndon

Whitehorse Uniting Church

Sunday 10 March 2024

Lent 4 B



Jesus Christ, our light in the Darkness

Hymn - 164 The great love of God.

A different version - The Selah Videos

<https://youtu.be/Fqp27IvdbSo?si=0BdV5PJu0N2C-8CD>

Welcome

May the worship bless you



Crucifixion, 1627, Zurbarán, Francisco, 1598-1664. Art institute of Chicago, United States

Zurbarán, Francisco, 1598-1664. Crucifixion, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville,

TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=47447> [retrieved March 6, 2024]. Original source:

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Francisco de Zurbar%C3%A1n - Crucifixion - The Art Institute of Chicago.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Francisco_de_Zurbar%C3%A1n_-_Crucifixion_-_The_Art_Institute_of_Chicago.jpg).

Call to Worship (from Psalm 107:1)

O give thanks to the Lord

For he is good.

For his steadfast love

Endures forever.



Image, T. Lyndon

Prayer - Ita - in fostering Courage

Taken from [Morning/Midday/Evening] Prayer from Northumbria Community's Celtic Daily Prayer published by Collins.' Celtic Daily Prayer, Book 2. Copyright 2015 The Northumbria Community Trust. P. 1109-1112

I desire to love,
as I get older my arms must get wider to embrace more of the world.

I think of the ones I have cared for in my life,
all remembered and all loved.

Though some be in heaven,
and some be still on the road,
all are remembered and all loved.

But when memories begin to tire me,
It is Christ's company alone that I desire,
I am loved with an everlasting love.

I thought that I would share Christ's hunger in the desert.
I thought that I would know His Calvary thirst.

You say to me, Eat.
You say to me, Drink

I thought that I would give myself,
To nights of sleepless vigil.

You say to me,
Rest, let it be so.

I find what I decide You lay aside,
And You say, 'No'.

**I do not understand,
But yes, amen, Lord,
let it be so.**

I looked for the silence of withdrawal,
I am surrounded instead,
By the restless energy of others.

I learn to listen for God's voice,
In the insights and the laughter of a child.

I have set my heart on going forward.

Do not ask me to turn back.
Travelling uncomfortably in the right direction,
I will not let middle age overtake me,
I will not let old age overcome me.

Keep me out of any rut of my own making,
and from the grave of habitual failings.

**Keep me flexible,
And eager to serve.**

Even by stepping from the path I had determined, I would follow.

I sense the peace that comes,
 when I admit I have been wrong,
 the unexpected freedom,
 when my judgement is submitted and the power of my will surrendered.

Let me be biddable,
 responsive of heart,

let me not be lacking in generosity.

Give me insight to see what I can give,
 and regret only should I hold back.

Teach me the habit of looking to You
 from hour to hour for guidance.

Lord, hear my prayer,
and let my cry come to You.

Come dear God,
 In our hour of need.

Come, Jesus,
 how I need you!

Come, Holy Spirit, Lord.
O Come.

Holy Trinity.
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Hasten to help us,
and this day will be a good day.

God loves and guards me,
 Jealously, and He has watched my thoughts,
 And guided them towards him.
I am loved with an everlasting love. Amen

Moment of Silence



Image T. Lyndon

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

Hymn 706 Bless the Lord my Soul (Taizé)

Catholique De France

<https://youtu.be/7zqHgbW00wQ?si=Lszgq4iV6a5Ps47W>

Readings

Numbers 21:4-9

⁴ From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea,^[a] to go around the land of Edom, but the people became discouraged on the way. ⁵ The people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food." ⁶ Then the LORD sent poisonous^[b] serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. ⁷ The people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD to take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. ⁸ And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a poisonous^[c] serpent, and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live." ⁹ So Moses made a serpent of bronze and put it upon a pole, and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

John 3:14-21

¹⁴ And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.^[a]

¹⁶ "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.

¹⁷ "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. ¹⁸ Those who believe in him are not condemned, but those who do not believe are condemned already because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹ But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."

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Young at Heart – introducing the cross and Taizé. Rev Tina



Crucifixion with the women and John. Victoria and Albert Museum. London. United Kingdom.

Crucifixion with the Women and John, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=31727> [retrieved March 6, 2024]. Original source: Prof. Patout J. Burns.

If you have ever been to Assisi in Italy, you would have seen the St Damiano Cross, in the church. It's dated around 1100 CE. The story is St Francis was praying before a cross like it when he was called to rebuild the church. It's an icon cross, with Jesus in the centre with images of people who were at the crucifixion. The tradition of icon crosses began in the Orthodox church, where, in the past, icons told a story to people who were unable to read and write. They are meant for prayer and reflection. Icons often show Jesus as filled with light, coming out of a dark background. We have been invited to join the Taizé network in Melbourne and have given use of a cross for worship. This cross has Jesus with Mary and John beside him. Perhaps we are to ponder about how Jesus trusted John to care for his beloved mother and how he trusts us to care for those who he loves. Each one of us. The cross was at St Margaret's Eltham and used for their Taizé service for many years.

Taizé is a simple service, with readings, prayers, and simple songs sung several times, with short periods of silence in between, to allow people to reflect. Most Taizé services are organised and led by a church's musicians and singers. We are hoping to have services on the second Sunday, so that people from the Taizé network can attend. The Taizé network is made up of musicians, singers, and those who love Taizé. The Melbourne Taizé Network often hosts people from the community in France. I have visited Taizé in France. It's an ecumenical community and thousands of young people travel there every summer, to be with other young people who are Christians. It's inspiring to worship with them.

Jesus Remember me, Taize

Maureen Theresa Ward 2012

https://youtu.be/r6tVReXsioM?si=80QuWH2f-4YHtU_d

Hymn 155 O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder

Frodsham Methodist Church 2022

https://youtu.be/IA_8sCMDzLY?si=VYxP9VSybNIDjXw



Image. T. Lyndon

Sermon – Rev Tina

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



Brazen Serpent, atop Mount Nebo in Jordan, 20th Century, Fantoni Giovanni
Fantoni, Giovanni. Brazen Serpent, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=55664> [retrieved March 6, 2024]. Original source: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Brazen_Serpent_Sculpture.jpg.

Some mornings when I wake up, I feel my age. I think you all know the feeling.

Today's reading from Numbers offers us a story about the long-suffering Moses. I bet he felt his age when the people he was leading, complained and blamed God, and him, for their woes.

They complained about God and Moses leading them out into the desert to die. Well, their troubles increase when they come to a place where serpents bite them and some of them die. It's a wakeup call and they repent, only because they think God is punishing them.

They go to Moses and ask him to deal with the situation by praying to God. I guess they felt God listened to him, rather than them. Without any guile, Moses prays and sure enough the problem is solved. The very thing they feared is put up on a pole, the serpent, and when they look at it, they are healed.

This leaves us with two things to ponder about:

Being healed when you look at the thing you most fear?

It's a fleshly cure, not a spiritual one.

This is food for thought for all of us.

Do we find healing when we face our fears?

We crave fleshy healings, especially when we face diseases related to aging.

John in his gospel takes this story a step further, where Jesus is the one who is lifted up on a cross and all who look upon him and believe in him experience the deepest healing of all, their souls being saved and eternal life.

This healing isn't about physical healing, although many people believe dis-ease is connected to our spiritual and emotional well-being and long term dis-ease such as bitterness, anger, disappointment, or behaviour that causes spiritual wounds, can lead to physical symptoms. This theory is worth exploring.

What is happening here is, we do not perish and die spiritually, because of Jesus.



Crucifixion, 1627, Zurbarán, Francisco, 1598-1664. Art institute of Chicago, United States
 Zurbarán, Francisco, 1598-1664. Crucifixion, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=47447> [retrieved March 6, 2024]. Original source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Francisco_de_Zurbar%C3%A1n_-_Crucifixion_-_The_Art_Institute_of_Chicago.jpg.

When we look at Jesus on the cross, we are invited to look at the very things we fear most.

We may consider sin, unforgiveness, shame, regret, injustice, darkness, suffering, pain, fear, and rejection. That's why Good Friday is confronting. It's a day to ponder on what we find difficult in our lives.

But the cross reminds us there is a resurrection and we have been given the gift of forgiveness, freedom from sin and separation, from what we fear. We do not perish and die spiritually, because of Jesus.

We physically age day by day and gradually draw closer to the time when we leave this life.

I've been with many people as they draw closer to death, and some are afraid.

I did the funeral for a friend's husband who didn't have a faith and neither did my friend. They had young children. They chose me because I have a faith.

When we arrived at the chapel at Springvale, it had a large cross on the wall. We had prayers and a story that witnessed to his love for family and friends. Over two hundred and fifty people came to the funeral, mostly scientists and people with a Chinese and Buddhist background.

What I remember is, the man asking a question as we ate a roast meal and planned his funeral, before he died. He asked: Do you think I am going to a place where I can watch over my family?

He was hoping for eternal life, life continuing after death. Isn't that what we all hope for?

John's image of God isn't of a punishing God. He believes in a God who doesn't condemn and who sent Jesus to save our souls and set us free from sin. I believe God welcomes all.

The promise to us is, when we look upon Jesus and believe, we are saved and given the greatest gift of all, eternal life.

John sees Jesus' death on the cross as a moment where the glory of God was revealed. It's a moment of triumph.

The gospel looks at the age-old problem of why some prefer the darkness and evil. They hide their deeds in the darkness, so they must have some self-awareness. The gospel mentions they are afraid of the light because it exposes their deeds to the world.

The darkness is a place of pain. It's hard for us and many others to understand why some people prefer hate and violence, that causes so much destruction in the world.

God leaves it to people to choose the light or the darkness. Perhaps by choosing to hide in the darkness, people reject God, and this creates a barrier between them and God. It is difficult to know what is in each person's heart.

The gospel is about invitation and making a choice about who and what we believe in and how we want to live our lives in this world and in eternal life.

There is always hope and perhaps we are slowly turning more and more towards the light as we age, where we embrace this great gift of eternal life God offers us. Perhaps this life prepares us for eternal life, or we are already living in eternal life. It often is a mystery.

The gospel tells us the call of God is to do what is true, so we can come to the light.

Others see our deeds and know they are done in God's grace and love. We know in our hearts what is true and of God. We know how to live God's way.

Look at children and how joyful and full of life they are and pray for God to set your heart free from troubles so you too can be joyful and full of life. Take your troubles to the cross and to Jesus and pray for freedom and release.

We want to believe we live on in life eternal and hope to join our loved ones who have gone before us.

We do not want to perish or waste away spiritually.

I've seen people covered in sores and rashes before they die and then they enter a time of letting go and peace and after they pass, their skin is clear. Perhaps this tells us when we pass on, we are set free from pain and suffering.

The good news is we are all invited to be true and do deeds in God. We are not condemned. We are saved. We are called into the light of Christ. May God give us all the grace to believe in Jesus and be set free to live in eternal life and love.

Moment of Quietness



Image T. Lyndon, Museum, on Iona, Scotland.

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

Please spend a moment praying for each concern

O Lord hear my Prayer, Taizé.

St Thomas Music Group 2015 (very beautiful – you know this one)

<https://youtu.be/LKyU5Bllxc0?si=DXHcp6g4nfsDcK9n>

We pray for our world, its oceans, and lands, which are currently being destroyed by climate change. Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayers.**



Image, T. Lyndon

We pray for humanity, in all its glory and suffering. For peace and for compassion.

Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayers.**



Leunig. Used with permission.



Image, T. Lyndon

We pray for the church, for many little mustard seeds to be planted in hearts that grow into ministry and mission that bless the church.
Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayers.**

We pray for those who are going hungry today. For our hunger. For our needs and the needs of others.
Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayers**

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.



Image, T. Lyndon

Candle Prayers

You are welcome to light a candle and pray for a loved one or situation.



Image from Mitcham site, T. Lyndon

Hymn 747 The Lord is my light. My light and Salvation

anggoworship 2011

<https://youtu.be/r64gcGMNhDE?si=D4WxY9e4YWwahugl>

Blessing

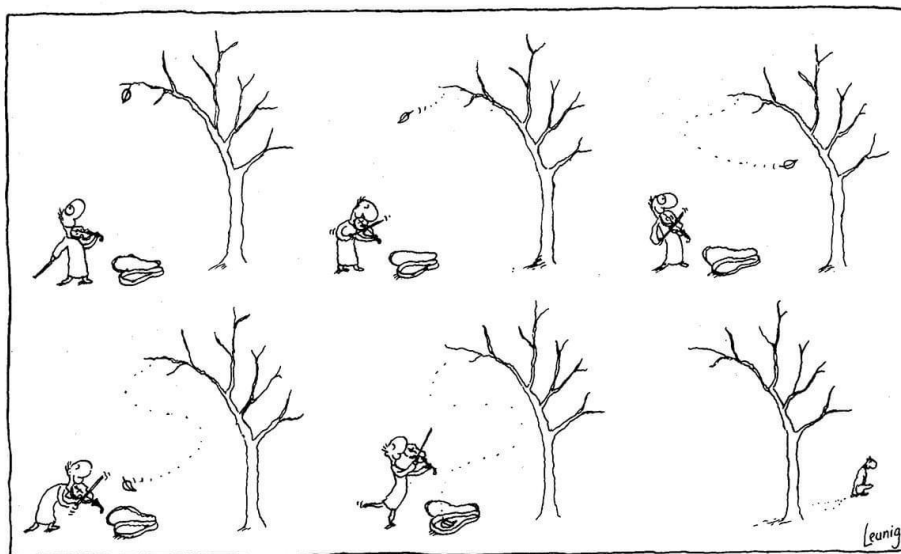
We go in peace,
in the love of God
in the Power of the Spirit
May the Lord Bless and Guard us
May the Lord make His face shine upon us,
and be gracious unto us,
as we bring Christ's love and peace to the world. Amen

778 Shalom to you Now – tMt video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2oqiFepWxY&list=PL5dbbdzyKBag-mEd9qTgdyYNQLlsLD2rC&index=35>

Pastoral care tips

Love one another as I have loved you – Jesus



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Andrea, Matteo, and Virginia Bocelli – Love, the greatest gift. 2023

<https://youtu.be/z5-yTw5alZ0?si=iLklCJeIku-qvOhD>