

Whitehorse Uniting Church
Written Worship
Sunday 19th March 2023
Lent 4

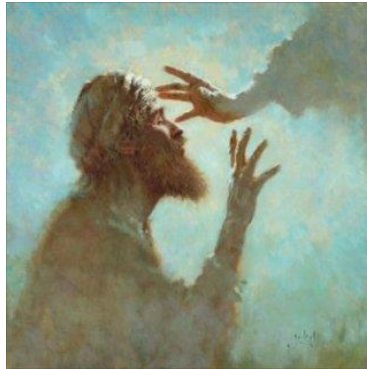


Praise God

Thomas Ken 1637-1711

The Doxology – Anthem Lights ft. Selah 2018

<https://youtu.be/tQUtvMtUhw4>



Welcome

May the 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.

Call to Worship Psalm 23 adapted

Shepherd of our souls,
open our eyes to your blessings and grace in our lives.

Shepherd of our souls,
You lead us beside still waters, restoring our souls and giving us wholeness and peace.

Shepherd of our souls
We need not want, for you offer us hospitality and a cup that overflows.

Shepherd of our souls
When we face challenges, we need not fear.

Shepherd of our souls,
 you are there beside us,
 comforting and leading us.
You Lord will never fail us.
You are always faithful to us.

Prayers of Adoration for Lent From UCA UIW2

God the Father, God beyond us, we adore you.
You are the depth of all that is.
You are the ground of our being.
We can never grasp you, yet you grasp us.

**The universe speaks of you,
And your love comes to us through Jesus.**

God, the Son, God beside us, we adore you.
You are the perfection of humanity.

**You have shown us what human life should be like.
In you we see divine love and human greatness combined.**

God the Spirit, God around us, we adore you.
You draw us to Jesus and the Father
You are the power within us.

You give us abundant life and can make us the people we are meant to be.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit:
God, beyond, besides, and around us. We adore you. Amen

Prayer of Invocation UCA UIW

Come, Holy Spirit, living water.
Giver of life that we may drink in the word.
And taste the bread of life.
Help us understand one another.
And to speak one another's language.
Keep us in union with Christ in all our worship. Amen

Prayer of Confession

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

Silence

Hear then Christ's words of grace to us.

"Your sins are forgiven"

THANKS BE TO GOD

Hymn 659 The Lord is My Shepherd

Brian Boniwell (Peter Lazaro 2022)

<https://youtu.be/Kor3ljrTd58>

Reading - John 9:1-41 ((Bible Gateway NRSV update)

9 As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. **2** His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" **3** Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. **4** We^{ἵνα} must work the works of him who

sent me⁴ while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” ⁶ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, ⁷ saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸ The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” ⁹ Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am he.” ¹⁰ But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” ¹¹ He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.” ¹² They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.” ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath.” Others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. ¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” He said, “He is a prophet.”

¹⁸ The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹ and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” ²⁰ His parents answered, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind, ²¹ but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” ²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus⁴ to be the Messiah⁴ would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

²⁴ So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.” ²⁵ He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” ²⁶ They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” ²⁷ He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” ²⁸ Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” ³⁰ The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” ³⁴ They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”⁴ ³⁶ He answered, “And who is he, sir?⁴ Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” ³⁷ Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” ³⁸ He said, “Lord,⁴ I believe.” And he worshiped him. ³⁹ Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see may see and those who do see may become blind.” ⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.

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Young at Heart



The Story is of the three trees who wanted to be noticed and stand tall and have important roles. Instead, one was a feed trough for baby Jesus, another a small fishing boat Jesus fished and slept in during a storm and the third, the cross Jesus was crucified on and the symbol of our faith. In many ways they found fulfilment and achieved their life goal, but in an unexpected way.

Hymn 129 Amazing Grace

John Newton 1725-1807

<https://youtu.be/CDdvReNKKuk>

Sermon – Rev Tina

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



Here's this man blind from birth.

He's judged as a sinner by his community.

Trying to survive by begging, his life seems set to continue in the same direction for the rest of his life.

His life is limited, and he's never seen anything - except darkness.

Then along comes Jesus who heals him, and he is sent to the pool of Siloam. He is healed and set to travel in a totally new direction where his life, identity and beliefs are completely changed.

One minute he was going in the same direction as he always had and then Jesus enters his life and changes everything.

Now this man is called to look around him. We may wonder if he changes or prefers to stay comfortable. The man blind from birth sits on the street trying to make a living as a beggar.

Jesus' disciples, men of their culture and beliefs stand near the man and ask Jesus a question: Who sinned? This man or his parents? No doubt the man would have overheard their question.

Jesus responds: No one sinned. Jesus makes it clear the man was born so that God's works may be revealed in him.

I wonder what the man thought of this comment.

Jesus being today's gospel with a parable: *We must do the works of him who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.* Perhaps what was said planted a seed in the blind man's heart.

Now Jesus meets the man at his point of need. He is blind.

Jesus takes some mud and mixes it with his spit and puts the mud on the man's eyes. Jesus sends the man to the Pool of Siloam. Siloam means 'sent'. The man is sent to be healed and obeys. He is healed.

Now people notice. Some say, 'Isn't he the beggar?' Others say, 'No, he looks like him'. A debate begins. Meanwhile the man is trying to get the group of people's attention. He keeps on saying, again and again, 'I am the man.' They keep on not believing him. He tells his story. They ask, 'Where is he?' He says, 'I don't know.'

The group of people take him to the pharisees. They interrogate him and he tells his story, and they listen. There's an argument and conflict. The Pharisees label Jesus as a sinner because he broke Sabbath rules. He's broken one of the 39 rules about what you can't do on the Sabbath. You're not allowed to knead. Now they're most likely stretching this rule a bit. Kneading bread is doing work on the Sabbath. But kneading mud as breaking the rules and working on the Sabbath seems a ridiculous interpretation of the rules. It shows them up as silly. They put it back on the man and ask what he thinks. He says, 'He's a prophet'.

The Pharisees are not satisfied. They interrogate the man's parents who are timid, and fear being cast out of the Synagogue, which is akin to being cast out from their community. The Pharisees are looking for a way to discredit the man's story. His parents say: *Ask him.*

The religious authorities interrogate the man again. They don't believe him. They tell him to give glory to God. A bit of irony here. God's glory has been revealed in his healing.

The man has become bold. When they try to convince him, Jesus is a sinner, he keeps to the facts. I was blind. Now I see. When they try to make him tell his story again, he is even bolder. *"I have told you already, and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?"*

When the man indirectly declares he is a disciple of Jesus the religious leaders begin to misuse their power to bully the man. The man stands his ground and teaches the Pharisees about God listening to those who worship him and do his will. He acknowledges Jesus comes from God. They turn on him, condemn him as a sinner and cast him out.

So here is the man who was ostracised and excluded when he was blind and is now healed and cast out of the Temple. He's not doing so well.

I wonder why the man has no name. Names are important. They identify a person's family, tribe, ancestors, and essence as a person.

Jesus comes and finds the man and asks him a question: *Do you believe in the Son of Man?*

The man asks to know who he is so he can believe in him.

This is when Jesus reveals who he is to the man.

The man declares: *'Lord, I believe.'* He falls on his face and worships Jesus.

What a journey to faith. All that testing and conflict and struggle. He hung in there and his faith grew and his relationship with God grew. He believes.

He learns the Son of Man came to judge, so that those who are blind can see and those who can see become blind.

A Pharisee overhears. Surely, we are not blind, are we?

It turns out the Pharisee sees but doesn't see. He is the sinner, far from God. He is being Judged. Things have been reversed. There have been two journeys about blindness in the gospel, where blindness is symbolic of unbelief. Perhaps that is why the man, and the Pharisees have no name. They symbolise two parallel journeys, in different directions, one to belief, the other to unbelief.

The blind man's journey is to faith and into the light. Jesus has been revealed to him. His physical blindness has been healed and he sees spiritually.

The Pharisees can see physically, but they have journeyed into darkness. By rejecting Jesus, the light of the world, they have become spiritually blind, and their sin separates them from God.

This is a story about the struggle to believe, a bit like a journey through a dark tunnel into the light.

I remember being in Jerusalem and entering Hezekiah's tunnel which goes from a spring outside the walled old city to the pool of Siloam. The pool was once the main source of water for the city. King Hezekiah built it about 800 years before Jesus was born. Builders carved into solid rock to make it and it's filled with waist deep water.

A friend and I borrowed some torches from Palestinian youths and walked through the tunnel. At one stage I wondered what if the torches' batteries gave out. We'd be in pitch darkness, deep underground where the tunnel goes under the wall and no noise comes out of it. It was a walk of faith. We reached the pool of Siloam in about 45 minutes. It has columns holding up a roof and is below the city streets.

Tunnels make good metaphors for a faith journey.

The blind man lived with being labelled a sinner and judged. To be healed and no longer blind must have been liberating. For the first time in his life, he could see the sky, desert, water, people. He kept on questing to understand and be enlightened. He journeyed until it was time to declare, 'Lord, I believe.'

The Peace

The peace of the Lord be with you
And also, with you

Hymn 619 - Have faith in God my Heart. Something different – Hillsong version

TIS Traditional version | Bryn Auston Rees 1911-83

YouTube Aaron Horton & Christ for the Nations Worship 2020

From the Album Breath of Heaven 1996

<https://youtu.be/okyaXIWB1X4>

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 Savior, amen.

Prayers of the People – John Gerrard

Loving and caring God, we bring to you our prayers for others. All people of the world need your care and guidance Lord, and today we particularly bring before you our prayers for the people of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania

We give thanks for the following:

- preservation of the distinct cultural practices, literature, music, and natural resources in these countries.
- the faithful witness of Christians during times of persecution and for those who survived times of occupation.
- how these countries peacefully became independent after 1918 and 1991.
- new-found freedoms that the people here have experienced, that they might be used for the good of all.

We pray for:

- peaceful relations with Russia and among all the ethnic groups in these lands.
- the healing of old wounds remaining from 20th century struggles.
- just economic development that benefits all citizens in these countries, and for those who live and work abroad.
- government leaders and all people, that they might together strive for justice, peace and the well-being of all.

In our ecumenical prayer cycle we remember today your people worshipping and serving at New Hope Baptist Church, Blackburn North. We give thanks and pray for the wide range of ministries that the church offers including the church itself, medical services, New Hope community services, New Hope pre-school, Middle Ground Café and the New Hope football club. Through these proactive initiatives into their community may they be able to demonstrate the practical relevance of the Christian message and be able to show the love of Christ in all they do in his name.

Within our own Presbytery we pray today for your people in the congregation at Deepdene. We pray for their outreach activities and for the care, nurture, and future of their own people. May they show the wider community the love of God in action.

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 an effective cluster operation which includes the previously independent three local congregations.

We pray especially today for those facing operations or recovering from them to medical treatment or grieving the loss of a loved one.

We bring these prayers in our Saviour's name, praying the words that he taught us.

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.



Hymn 582 – Lead Kindly Light
 Audrey Assad (Angelica Garza 2014)

<https://youtu.be/piUDbCtgymw>

Blessing

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

Hymn 779 – May the Feet of God.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YhiG-Vj8CGU&list=PL5dbbdzyKBag-mEd9qTgdyYNQLIsLD2rC&index=40>

Pastoral care tips



Leunig – used with permission.

We continue our commentary and contemplation of paintings from the Art and faith Series.

Lent 4

<https://youtu.be/FMveDPhmkiQ>

Bemused

This week we have something special from Rosemary Beavis. Her reflective small book called *Bemused, Reflections on Aging*.

It will come separately and be attached to the email that is sent to you with these materials.



From St Paul's Cathedral front doors