

Whitehorse Uniting Church
Sunday 8 October 2023
Pentecost 19 A



Welcome to worship no matter where you are reading this from. It is a time to set aside some space to quieten our selves from all the demands and challenges that surround us and tune into the Spirit of Love within us. We are also aware that we are not alone from the Body of Christ that worships at Whitehorse and indeed the whole globe of faith family.

Our Psalm this morning acknowledges the way we experience the presence of the Divine. It is through nature and the observable skies above. Indeed, we are in solidarity with the first peoples of this land as we see the Divine in the whole of creation. We acknowledge the first people of this country.

As we gather, we acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land and these waters. We pay respect to the elders past, present and emerging. As First and Second Peoples walking together, we commit ourselves to be people of the covenant, listening, truth telling and seeking justice for all.

Our first hymn today is an expression of the Creation for which we give thanks.

Hymn: TiS 156 “Morning has broken”

<https://youtu.be/Li2-cS2uuyo>

Call to Worship:

From north and south, from east and west, we come:

God's people called to the Table where simple grace nourishes us.

From down the street to across town, from single households to apartment dwellers:

God's people are called to community, where we live and serve one another.

From every class, every race, every status; from little babies still on breast milk to elders with overflowing hearts:

God's people are called to witness to God's hope, to offer peace to a shattered world.

Prayer of Awareness:

For the healing love you have offered to us; for the patience you have with us; for your presence that will never fail, we give you thanks, O Lord of Love.

We offer our hearts and spirits to you that we may grow in our faith and service by serving others. Our prayer is that we may be more aware of the people that make up our lives. For the people we worship with on this day and the worldwide body of Jesus followers.

On this day we open our hearts and minds to the leading of your Spirit and the wisdom we gain from the ancient Scriptures.

We offer this prayer in Jesus' name. AMEN.

Psalm 19

¹ The heavens tell about the glory of God. The skies show that his hands created them.

² Day after day they speak about it. Night after night they make it known.

³ But they don't speak or use words. No sound is heard from them.

⁴ Yet their voice goes out into the whole earth. Their words go out from one end of the world to the other. God has set up a tent in the heavens for the sun.

⁵ The sun is like a groom leaving the room of his wedding night. The sun is like a great runner who takes delight in running a race.

⁶ It rises at one end of the heavens. Then it moves across to the other end. Everything enjoys its warmth.

⁷ The law of the LORD is perfect. It gives us new strength. The laws of the LORD can be trusted. They make childish people wise.

⁸ The rules of the LORD are right. They give joy to our hearts. The commands of the LORD shine brightly. They give light to our minds.

⁹ The law that brings respect for the LORD is pure. It lasts forever. The commands the LORD gives are true. All of them are completely right.

¹⁰ They are more priceless than gold. They have greater value than huge amounts of pure gold. They are sweeter than honey that is taken from the honeycomb.

¹¹ Your servant is warned by them. When people obey them, they are greatly rewarded.

¹² But who can know their own mistakes? Forgive my hidden faults.

¹³ Also keep me from the sins I want to commit. May they not be my master. Then I will be without blame. I will not be guilty of any great sin against your law.

¹⁴ LORD, may these words of my mouth please you. And may these thoughts of my heart please you also. You are my Rock and my Redeemer.

PASSING OF THE PEACE :

(This can be done with anyone who maybe present with you.)

The Peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Response: **And also, with you.**

Hymn: TiS 467 "I am the Church"

<https://youtu.be/ughMVTMhCuc>

Prayer of Reconciliation:

Patient Lord, you know how easy it is for us to whine and complain bitterly about all those things in our lives that are difficult.

We focus on them as though they were the only things that ever happened to us, forgetting the many blessings that you have given to us and the opportunities you give us to serve you.

When we feel alienated—Your Love enfolds us. When we feel lost--your ever present Spirit seeks us.

When we feel broken and battered—the awareness of the Spirit of love that enfolds us is a healing balm.

Forgive us when we forget those things. Help us to always look to your Spirit for our healing and to return thanks to you by praise and serving others in your name.

For we offer this prayer of confession of our failures and gratitude for your blessings.

AMEN.

Words of Assurance:

Turn again to the Lord, for you are beloved of God and have been given many blessings. Rejoice in God's love for you. **AMEN.**

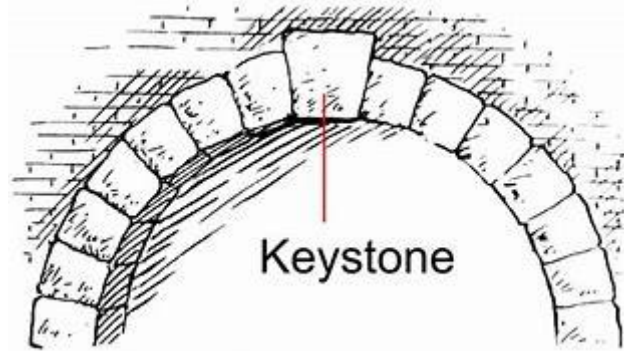
Reading: Matthew 21:33-46

³³ Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. ³⁴ When the harvest time had come; he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. ³⁵ But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. ³⁶ Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. ³⁷ Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' ³⁸ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.' ³⁹ So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. ⁴⁰ Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?' ⁴¹ They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time." ⁴² Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures:

'The stone that the builders rejected has become the keystone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes'?

⁴³Therefore I tell you; the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. ⁴⁴The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls." ⁴⁵When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. ⁴⁶They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

Reflection: "What is the keystone?"



'The stone that the builders rejected has become the keystone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes'? This was a reference that the writers of Matthew use from Psalm 118: 22.

Some translations of the word "Keystone" use the word "Cornerstone" but the Greek word actually refers to the stone in the middle of an arch that holds the whole structure together.

The context of the reading from the Gospel of Matthew today is Jesus talking in the Temple in Jerusalem during the week prior to his death. The Chief Priests and Elders were trying to trap Jesus into making a statement that they could charge him with. In the teaching practice of the day Jesus is recorded as using parables to make a point. This is the second of the two parables in the temple. Both parables have the underlying theme of the Jewish leaders not getting the point about who Jesus was. The parable we have today is very plain, to our eyes, showing that Israel did not get the point when Prophets came with a message. They would stone the prophets and reject their message. Then the Creator of all that exists sent a son to them, and they killed him believing they would now inherit all that they were stewards over.

I wonder how many truths we have rejected. How many times we have missed the point and killed the messenger. An underlining theme here is the tenants in the Vineyard. The vineyard was a familiar prophetic image to the Jews. Isaiah 5:7 has these words "The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel." The vineyard did not belong to the tenants. They were the ones entrusted and charged with caring for it. But they wanted ownership.

How many times do we have the understanding that we "own" things or even people? I have been very guilty of this charge. I talk of my children, my home, my car, my wife etc. None of these statements are true from a faith perspective. We are but stewards over everything. We come into the world with nothing, and we leave this world with nothing and in between we are entrusted with caring for all that is in our lives. Somehow when a little prophet like Greta Thunberg comes, many struggle with her message that we are destroying the vineyard with our pollution. But we look at our cars and say we can't stop driving them. Trees get in the road of our developments, and we cut them down. Windmills look too ugly on our hills, so we cling to burning coal to ensure we have power to drive all "OUR" home comforts.



This parable today can, if we have ears to hear, show us that we do not own anything or anyone.

but we are stewards of everything. **This Keystone is missed at our peril.** The whole structure of life can tumble down if we pull it out.

We have a Referendum coming up in a week's time. As we all know the country is voting on a change in the constitution to include a "Voice" to parliament. It is a way forward shown to us by the prophetic "Uluru Statement from the Heart." A 'fact check' shows that there are those that are rejecting this change. The Uniting Church supports the change for many reasons. These first people have been stewards over this land for centuries and if we are honest, the Europeans have messed the vineyard up terribly. There are many ways that the Indigenous population cared for the land that we have rejected. Somehow, we miss the point. (The Keystone that holds everything together.) Government decisions, numerous advisory committees have tried to solve the problem of incarceration of indigenous youth, health, housing, alcohol abuse, and family violence but somehow, they have all missed the point. The fear is that saying Yes to the "Voice" will do no better. We are all stewards. No matter our race, ethnicity or belief system, we need to pull together so the best harvest is harvested. I wonder if the greater ethnic population has spent time doing things to and for the first peoples rather than working with our brothers and sisters being good stewards of the place we live. I believe recognition of Voice gives us a chance of each recognizing the other and working together as one nation.

As the Christian Church, how do we respond to this parable? Are we rejecting the prophets? Are we rejecting the "son"? If you are like me, there are many times I have missed the point. We are all on a journey of discovering what holds life together. WHEN will we experience peace? WHEN will we experience the LOVE that holds the Keystone of life itself? We have glimpses of it and the experience is wonderful. My prayer is that each one who reads these words will have daily experiences where the "Light of Love" shines into your life and we don't reject it but embrace the Life-giving Spirit in all our circumstance. Amen.

Hymn: TiS 690 "Beauty for brokenness"

https://youtu.be/O5_TVy2gHRg

Prayers of the People:

Today we are listening to a gifted Evans family singing "It is well with my soul". The writer of this hymn, Horatio Gates Spafford, a man who had experienced huge tragedy in his life with the death of all his children through drowning in a shipwreck, but his inner soul was comforted by his faith. We all experience challenges and tragedies sometime in our lives and I invite you to bathe in this song experiencing the Spirit of peace and love ministering to you. Click on the link and may you know the peace that passes all understanding.

Evans Family Youtube

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=crJqAw-Gq_0

(I have been given written permission to use their Youtube videos in worship. They are a family I met 4 years ago. A couple of months ago they gave a pleasant Sunday afternoon concert at Boronia Uniting after me introducing them.)



The Lord's Prayer: *(Source: John Hurst, Glen Waverley UC)*

Our source of love, love streams from your name,
love be here on Earth as it is in heaven.

Give us our daily love, and forgive us when we do not love,
as we forgive them for whom the flow of love is blocked.

Lead us not into situations where we find it too hard to love,
but place us instead in positions of empowering love.

For love comes from you, love empowers your creation,
and love is the force into which we all shall be glorified.

Amen

Offering Prayer:

Lord, the giver of life itself, we have no gift that can go anywhere near the gifts you have given to us. But our worship is to pass on your gifts so others may find the life you offer. Our prayer is that gifts of money, time and talents we offer are quickened by your Spirit to make the world a better place. In thanksgiving we pray, Amen.

Benediction

Let us have the same mind as God.

We will see each person as God's child.

Let us have the same justice as Jesus.

We will stand with each person who struggles.

Let us have the same hope as the Spirit.

We will put others before us in all we do.

Song: TiS 778 "Shalom to you now"

https://youtu.be/liH_HdkWs74