

**Whitehorse Uniting Church**  
**Sunday 22 October 2023**  
**Pentecost 21 A**



**Welcome** to worship no matter where you are while reading these words.

It is a time to set aside some space to quieten ourselves 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.

We also remember the 1<sup>st</sup> people of our land. We also surround the 74% of Indigenous people who voted for Constitutional Recognition with our love and care after last weekend's result.

For thousands of years Indigenous people have walked in this land, on their own country. Their relationship with the land is at the centre of their lives.

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet and pay respects to the five tribes of the Kulin Nation, past, present, emerging, and their stewardship of this land throughout the ages.

And we recognise and give thanks that we humans are creatures of the Earth living in the ecosystem—flowers, trees and insects; land, waters and mountain range—that is unique to Australia.

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 people evidenced the sacred in the land. The invisible made visible in the land they lived with and cared for. The following Christian Hymn expresses our ways of recognizing what may be hid from our eyes.

**Hymn:** "Immortal, invisible, God only wise" TiS 143

<https://youtu.be/Zd0FyrzVUCM>

### **Call to Worship**

*(Used with permission from **Thom Shuman** Lectionary Liturgies)*

From the corners of worry and fear, from the shadows where we huddle with our doubts  
**God calls us to this place of sanctuary where we can draw from Love's deep wells.**

In every moment where we look for strength to continue, in every time wonder if faith is worth it

**Jesus calls us to this time where we can welcome the peace given to us.**

In every person who embraces us with acceptance, in every touch that offers healing and hope

**the Spirit calls us to see those around us as God's beloved,  
our sisters and brothers of grace.**

### **Prayer of Awareness**

*(Adapted from some words by Alice Berry)*

Great Creator of all that exists, we are children of the earth and sky, we are nurtured, sustained, given warmth and light from above and below. Supported by earth's strong, firm crust, we build our homes, plough the paddocks, plant our gardens and orchards. Daily we give thanks for the living, delightful reminders of your sacred presence in the environment we find ourselves in.

When we stop and take the time to turn from self and seek to be aware, we will find holy light in human faces, in blossoms, birdsong, and sky. Then we become more aware that earth is truly our home, and we are one with all earth's creatures, and parents of earth's children yet to be.

May our awareness of your sacred spirit, enhance and give expression in and through our worship this day. Amen

## 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.**

**Prayer of Reconciliation and Assurance:** *(Adapted from Bruce Prewer Prayers)*

Creator and sustainer of life, here we are with many faults together with our few gifts and loves.

**Here we are with the fruits of some wisdom but also with the weeds of our folly.**

Here we are bearing the gratitude for small victories yet shame for soft defeats.

**Here we are aware of some sins but blind to other aspects of evil in our lives.**

Here we are wanting you to know it all, to forgive the ugly and rescue the beautiful.

**Here we are caught after a referendum with grief and “where to from here?”**

Creator of all, here we are totally dependent on your gift of reconciliation, through Jesus our Lord. Amen!

## Assurance

Jesus' life, death and New Life through the Spirit means that nothing can separate us from the Love of God. We are on a journey towards peace and reconciliation with all people inspired by the Spirit of life.

**Thanks be to God!**

Hymn: “In Christ there is no east or west” TiS 459

<https://youtu.be/TpITJOShix0>

## Reading: Matthew 22:15-22 (NIRV)

<sup>15</sup> The Pharisees went out. They made plans to trap Jesus with his own words. <sup>16</sup> They sent their followers to him. They sent the Herodians with them. “Teacher,” they said, “we know that you are a man of honour. You teach the way of God truthfully. You don’t let others tell you what to do or say. You don’t care how important they are. <sup>17</sup> Tell us then, what do you think? Is it right to pay the royal tax to Caesar or not?”

<sup>18</sup> But Jesus knew their evil plans. He said, “You pretenders! Why are you trying to trap me? <sup>19</sup> Show me the coin people use for paying the tax.” They brought him a silver coin. <sup>20</sup> He asked them, “Whose picture is this? And whose words?”

<sup>21</sup> “Caesar’s,” they replied.

Then he said to them, “So give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar. And give back to God what belongs to God.”

<sup>22</sup> When they heard this, they were amazed. So, they left him and went away. \*

## Reflection: “LIFE between a rock and a hard place.”

We have all heard the expression, “between a rock and a hard place.” It expresses the frustration of not knowing where to turn.

Our Gospel reading today tells the story of Jesus’ reply to a group of Jewish leaders that were trying to trap him. He found himself between a rock and a hard place with their question. In an amazing way, he found a way of answering them that found LIFE between the rock and hard place. Let’s examine this further.



Among the many bizarre stories about the North Korean dictator, Kim Jong-un, was one a few years back reporting that he had given an order that all male university students in the country were to have their hair cut in a style that imitated his own. Such displays of ego often seem a bit comical, but there is a long history of political rulers demanding similar sorts of worship from their subjects. In the ancient world, such leaders just came right out and declared themselves to be gods, and insisted that the people worship them as such, on pain of death. Kim Jong-un’s haircut edict seems relatively tame by comparison.

There is another example going on in the background of the gospel reading about the attempt to trap Jesus with a question about paying taxes to the Romans. The question was a trap because the Romans were a hated foreign occupation force, and the Jewish people deeply resented paying taxes to them, so if Jesus said, "Yes, you should pay your taxes to the Romans," his popularity rating would take a plunge in the next opinion polls. But of course, if he said, "No, refuse to pay the tax," he would probably be arrested by the Romans within minutes, and the Jewish authorities would have got rid of him without having to lift a hand themselves. Jesus found himself between a rock and a hard place.

It seemed like the perfect trap. But Jesus manages to spring the trap without getting himself caught in it. "Show me the coin used for the tax," he says, and they hand him a coin. Snap! He's got them already. This incident took place inside the temple precinct, and you were not supposed to bring such a coin into the temple. That's why they had money changers at the temple.

Jesus's question points straight to the reason you weren't allowed to bring these coins into the temple: "Whose image is this, and whose title?" The image on the coin was the emperor's and the inscription read, "Tiberius Caesar, Son of God, high priest." To any devoutly religious Jew, that made the coin a blasphemous idol, an insult to God. Certainly not something you could bring into the sacred temple that was holy to the one true God of Israel. So, Jesus has already gained the upper hand in the argument when the Pharisees make the strategic error of letting it be seen that they have carried this despised image into the temple.

Then he said to them, "**So give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar. And give back to God what belongs to God.**" When they heard this, they were amazed. So, they left him and went away. The LIFE we find in Jesus' reply is that we believe everything belongs to God. The difficulty arose in earlier years that this saying of Jesus gave credence to the division between State and Church. It has been used by many to say that the church should keep its nose out of politics.

Last weekend's referendum was a case in point. There were those who pointed their finger at the Uniting Church for taking a stance and leading their people towards a "YES" vote for the constitutional change. There were also those who commented that Sports Clubs that identified with the "YES" Vote were wrong. They said you should keep politics out of sport. Such a blanket understanding that differentiates between Christian faith and politics has nothing to do with what Jesus was saying. He found the LIFE between the two hard places. The whole of LIFE belongs to God, even people like Caesar.

Now many of us who voted YES last weekend are understandably in grief at the result. Our 74% of indigenous people who voted YES have had another nock back to their race. I can't imagine how those who were involved in the "Uluru Statement from the Heart" must be feeling. So now our nation is caught between the "YES" and the "NO" hard place. What now? **I believe if we look hard enough the Spirit of Love and Reconciliation can find LIFE between this rock and hard place.** Perhaps never in the Nation's history has there been such a focus on the first people of this land. While there is a lot of hurt, some racism, and political score keeping, the plight of our indigenous people has never been so sharply in the fore front of the media and people's minds. Even those in the "NO" camp believe that we need to do something different than we have done in the past. **NOW is the opportunity for NEW BEGINNINGS in bringing reconciliation and equality to our first peoples.** There is LIFE between the hard places.

A very close colleague of mine disclosed in the last week that her husband was now in care. None of us knew that for three years she had battled with her loving husband declining in health with dementia. He is a lovely, intelligent man who has lived a full and generous life with his gifts and talents. My friend found herself between a rock and a hard place. Coping with grief of losing the husband she knew and loved to this disease, having a 101-year-old mother she supported and trying to find herself amid all the demands. She shared with us that her husband is now in Uniting AgeWell care and very appreciative of the NEW LIFE she is finding for them both.

Many reading this reflection will identify with being between a rock and a hard place sometime in their lives. My prayer is that each one will find the insight to see that all things will change and fade in our lives, but **LOVE, FAITH and HOPE** will never be eradicated. These three things bring us LIFE. Amen.

**Hymn:** "Lord let me see" TiS 681  
<https://youtu.be/ocPvWHIM550>



*Image By freepik*

### **Prayers of the People**

This week I offer you the opportunity to bring your thoughts together while listening to a very talented pianist playing "Great is your faithfulness."

We have many people in our minds and in particular the war that has begun between Israel and the Gaza Strip. Many innocent souls killed, wounded, captured, starving or running for their lives with nowhere to go.

[https://youtu.be/2UB3G\\_9OuXg?si=VXA76qphIS9pH1QT](https://youtu.be/2UB3G_9OuXg?si=VXA76qphIS9pH1QT)

### **Prayers of the People - Jeff Randles**

We come together today aware of the Spirit that moves and motivates life, a source of comfort, forgiveness, compassion, justice and love.

Our hearts are hurting and we stand in solidarity with all the people in Israel, Gaza and the West Bank involved in the violence, death and escalating retaliation –

We pray for healing in the aggression and destruction, (after each we will pause for a short time)

- for the leaders on all sides, that they recognise compassion, compromise, restraint and the long term implications of their actions.....
- for the International leaders - may they find the strength and motivation to work with each of the parties for reconciliation and help with humanitarian aid, bringing about lasting peaceful solutions.....
- for the citizens directly involved in Gaza, Israel and the West Bank, the combatants, their families and friends around the world.....
- For the medical staff and hospitals trying to cope with the extreme volume of aid required.....
- We pray that food, water, shelter, power and essential supplies are made available to all.....

May we and they learn to guard against retaliation and may there be hearts for love alone.

Following the referendum with its confusion and disappointment, we pray that First and Second peoples of Australia may continue to walk together creating right relationships, listening and learning from each other and that there is a will to 'close the gap.'

We feel deeply connected to our natural environment and recognise the gift of living amongst the unique diversity that we enjoy and seek to protect. May we seek to live sustainable lifestyles, review the way we use and dispose of unwanted materials, waste, packaging and wrapping.

We pray for this congregation as it works toward a vision to adjust to the changing world, to enable the church to be relevant to the way society is moving, expanding its outreach, adjusting our worship, managing its properties and helping the world to understand the values we know in the life of Jesus. We pray, amen.

**The Lord's Prayer** *(With permission from Rev Rex A E Hunt, MSc(Hons)website)*

Gracious Spirit, who loves us like a mother,  
Whose realm is blooming among us now and within.

We pray that your compassion guides us in every action.  
Give us what we need for each day,  
and help us to be satisfied with the miracle of that alone.

Forgiver, whose embrace brings us to wholeness without our asking,  
May we reconcile ourselves to one another in humility.  
And may we cancel the crushing debts that imprison our neighbours  
So that communities of joy and health may flourish.

May we neither profit from nor ignore evil.  
But ever work to thwart it with non-violence  
As we co-create the realm of peace in this world.  
Now and each day. 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.



*Image By freepik*

**Benediction**

*(Used with permission from **Thom Shuman** Lectionary Liturgies)*

From this sanctuary of song and silence, we will go to be with God's people.

**We will carry hope to the fearful and worried; we will share light with those in the shadows.**

From this time of healing and hearing, we will go to share Jesus' justice.

**We will bring strength to those who falter, we will walk with those weakened by the world.**

From the companionship of our sisters and brothers, we will go with the Spirit  
into our neighborhoods.

**We will embrace the forgotten; we will work to set the oppressed free.**

**Song:** "Make me a channel of your peace" TiS 607

<https://youtu.be/daGWdbrSGBM>

\* Scripture quotations marked (NirV) are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Reader's Version®, NirV® Copyright © 1995, 1996, 1998, 2014 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. [www.zondervan.com](http://www.zondervan.com) The "NirV" and "New International Reader's Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

## **Love one another**

By Geoff Serpell

We are uniquely different to and from each other, with strengths and weaknesses to be dealt with during our lives.

Love the differences in our spouses, neighbours, and friends rather than wasting time trying to change each other.

Carl Rogers said: "When I walk on the beach to watch the sunset, I do not call out, 'a little more orange over to the right please', or 'would you mind giving us less purple in the back?'

No, enjoy the always different sunsets as they are.

We do well to do the same with people we love."

### **Reflection**

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples. If you love one another."

(John 13:34)

*(Victas.uca.org.au – worship resources)*