

Whitehorse Uniting Church
Sunday 12 November 2023
Pentecost 24A



Entroit: "Morning has broken" TiS 156
<https://youtu.be/we-n-Zmgt0>

Welcome to worship no matter where you are reading this. 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.

Our service this morning is an introduction to a picnic activity by the Social Justice group where we engage with the War on Waste. Worship has an emphasis on the wonderful gift of creation and our responsibility of caring for it. Our opening Hymn brings us beautifully into the spirit of the service.

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.

Call to Worship:

We acknowledge that we are custodians of the planet we live on.

We live in a wonderful creation, and we realize that we are not alone. We share this life with the heavens and the earth, with the waters and the land, with trees and grasses, with fish, birds, and animals, with creatures of every form, and with all our brothers and sisters.

Together we form strands in the web of creation woven and held together by the all-encompassing Spirit of our Creator.

Together with all creation we join in praising God!

Prayer of Awareness:

Great Creator Spirit of all that exists from the smallest form of life to the uttermost reaches of space. We come in awareness that you surround us completely with your presence and your Spirit engages fully with our spirit. Wow, it absolutely blows our minds to contemplate this eternal truth. We sense your Presence in the tightly curled rose bud in the blooms that awaken our senses and joy of being alive.

At this time of the year when we have the opportunity to visit our golden beaches, we hear you in the sound of wind and waves and in the laughter of happy children.

Your Presence is woven into the life of the world and into our lives and we are glad to sing your praise.

Hymn: "All Creatures of Our God and King" TiS 100
<https://youtu.be/An1BzakUTms>

Passing of the Peace:

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

The Peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

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

Prayer of Reconciliation and Assurance:

Creator of the earth and all living things, author of life, source of all meaning, you made a universe of infinite complexity and beauty and entrusted us humans with the care of a tiny jewel called Earth.

We are your servant people, created out of the clay of the earth itself. We forget that we are your creatures, and we play at being gods.

We neglect the work of stewardship that you have provided for our occupation and our joy. We have used, abused, and abandoned those things that you have created for your delight.

You have created a fragile world in a perfect and delicate balance. Thinking too much of our own importance, we have upset the balance, acting with craven disregard for the complex ecosystems we barely understand.

For unrestrained economic growth,

For conspicuous consumption,

For always wanting more,

For not thinking through the consequences,

For not caring for future generations,

For blind indifference,

We open ourselves to your forgiveness of our failing.

ASSURANCE

Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the wisdom of where the good way lies; and walk in it and find rest for your souls.

We are standing at a crossroads. Together let us seek the good way and find rest for all of God's creation. As forgiven people, help us to walk with a new lightness of step, and give us the resolve to touch the earth lightly in our living in your world. Amen.

Reflection/Offering of gifts. *(These items are brought and placed at the front of the church.)* **At home you could place these items on your table as you reflect. A jug of water, a small container of soil, some seeds from the ground or your shed, a pot plant, and a stuffed animal and finally if you have a cross in some form place that on your table. It maybe that you could make a cross from two items placing them together.**

Water:

Water is the source of all life. It is pure and refreshing. It flows, cleans, and nourishes. Water is a vital element we must take care of. Through the water cycle we are intimately connected to all of creation.

As we offer this jug of water, let us remember how essential it is to all life on our planet. Let us strive to always care for it, use it wisely, and help keep it clean of pollution.

Soil:

We offer up this pot of soil to remind us of all the minerals and unseen resources it holds.

Sometimes we forget that the earth we walk on is, like water, another source of life. From it, plants, trees, and all living creatures are nourished.

We harvest its minerals and rocks to build our homes and cities. Let us remember to care for our earth and harvest its resources in moderation.

Seeds:

As we offer up these seeds, we are reminded of the potential they possess. Seeds, if cared for lovingly and properly, grow, mature, and bear fruit. Like the seed, we too need to be loved, cared for and nurtured by all those around us in order to grow to our full potential as disciples of Christ.

When we look at these seeds let us remember not only our potential, but that we need to love and care for others as well.

Plants and Animals:

In Genesis, we hear an ancient story that has been passed on throughout the generations. Through this story we realize that we are appointed to take care of the earth and the plants and animals. We realize that we are integrally connected to all living things through the food chain and the elements of the earth.

As we offer up this plant and this animal, let us remember to make wise decisions and treat all living creatures with kindness.

Cross:

We offer this cross to remind us of the profound love of Jesus. Through His compassion, He gave us life and made our beautiful world. Let us remember to give thanks to Him by responding in our actions in care for the planet we have the privilege of living within.

We give thanks that God so loved the whole world that he sent us Jesus, the one in which we follow in faith.

Hymn: "O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder" *TiS 155*

https://youtu.be/IA_8sCMDzLY

Reading: Matthew 25:1-13 (NIRV)

The Story of Ten Bridesmaids

1 "Here is what the kingdom of heaven will be like at that time. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went out to meet the groom. 2 Five of them were foolish. Five were wise. 3 The foolish ones took their lamps but didn't take any olive oil with them. 4 The wise ones took oil in jars along with their lamps. 5 The groom did not come for a long time. So the bridesmaids all grew tired and fell asleep.

6 "At midnight someone cried out, 'Here's the groom! Come out to meet him!'

7 "Then all the bridesmaids woke up and got their lamps ready. 8 The foolish ones said to the wise ones, 'Give us some of your oil. Our lamps are going out.'

9 "'No,' they replied. 'There may not be enough for all of us. Instead, go to those who sell oil. Buy some for yourselves.'

10 "So they went to buy the oil. But while they were on their way, the groom arrived. The bridesmaids who were ready went in with him to the wedding dinner. Then the door was shut.

11 "Later, the other bridesmaids also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!'

12 "But he replied, 'What I'm about to tell you is true. I don't know you.'

13 "So keep watch. You do not know the day or the hour that the groom will come.

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Reflection: "Awakened to our responsibilities."

In Pre-Pandemic days Lois and I went for a cruise to Vanuatu and some of the accompanying Islands. One day we were shuttled to an island to be driven by bus to a destination where we would be fed in the custom of the people. Travellers' names were read out and told the bus they were to travel on. After all names were called, we were left out with no seats left on the buses. The tour guide thought for a moment and decided that we would travel by car with her. After moving the children's clothing, shoes and towels we managed to scramble on to the back seat of a very small car. We had a very special day with a personal commentary. We passed many shacks made of bits of wood and tin that the village people lived in but every now and then we came across a thatched hut in the style we had seen in pictures. We asked the guide, who lives in these huts. She said no one lives in them most of the time. The tradition is that when a couple get married, they have their honeymoon there for six weeks before making their own home wherever they can.

Our Gospel story this morning reflects a marriage culture of Palestine at the time of Jesus. A wedding was a great occasion. The whole village turned out to accompany the couple to their new

home, and went by the longest possible road, in order that they might receive the glad good wishes of as many as possible. In the Jewish custom, the married couple did not go away on a honeymoon; they stayed at home; for a week they kept open house; they were treated, and even addressed, as prince and princess; it was the highlight of their lives.

It is important to note that in this custom, there was no definite date for the wedding. One of the traditions of the time was to catch the bridal party napping. So, the bridegroom comes unexpectedly, and sometimes in the middle of the night. A man was sent before him shouting "the bridegroom is coming!" The bridal party has to be ready at any time to go out in the street and meet him. At that time there was a law that no one was allowed out on the streets after dark without a lighted lamp. Also, once the bridegroom had arrived and the door was shut, latecomers to the ceremony were not admitted.

I believe the point of the story was like some of the parables we have heard in past weeks. It was a notice to the Jews. For decades they had awaited the arrival of the messiah. They were preparing for this event, but when it happened, they did not recognize him and were shut out.

Today I believe this story is awakening us to the terrible mess we are making with the gift of creation we have been given by God. Thinking about plastic pollution, the first images that spring into our mind are scenes of plastic-lined beaches, and oceans filled with plastic waste. While the impacts of plastic on wildlife are a terrible consequence of our throw-away culture, we should not forget the human story in this crisis. Plastic pollution and mismanaged waste are polluting drinking water, poisoning the air and flooding communities. All this rubbish is making people sick and causing up to a million deaths each year: that's the equivalent of one person dying every 30 seconds. Plastic pollution is causing a social emergency, as well as an environmental one.

Between 2000 and 2019, plastic-waste generation more than doubled. Today, half of all plastic is designed to be used just once before being discarded. And yet some 2 billion people in low- and middle-income countries don't have access to solid-waste collection. They have little option but to burn or dump it. The results of this plastic pollution are wide-ranging and extremely harmful. Many people living in slums are the most impacted. Without rubbish collection, rubbish builds-up, blocks drains, causes flooding, pollutes water sources, and produces very unhygienic living conditions. Plastic pollution is directly impacting the achievement of over half of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. It is also contributing directly to the climate emergency through plastics production and emissions from the burning of plastic waste. Not to mention that almost all plastics are made from fossil fuels!

On Monday, Tear Fund will be advocating, on behalf of the world's most impacted and disadvantaged people, as governments from 200 nations, including Australia, meet in Nairobi to find a solution to this plastic waste disaster. (These last paragraphs are taken from the Tear Fund resources that are being reflected on in the picnic today.)

When I was a teenager, one of my friends and I would be out driving. He with his girlfriend and me with my current friend. I will never forget the day that he suddenly stopped the car and asked his girlfriend to get out of the car and pick up the rubbish she had thrown out of the window. He had a real passion of keeping the environment clean. This was in the early sixties when there was little awareness of the environmental challenges we have today. When I think about that incident today, my friend was awakened and being responsible for the waste problems.

There is nothing worse than walking or driving in nature and finding rubbish spoiling our view. When bush walking with a friend, we often bring a bag with us to pick up any rubbish we find on the tracks.

I really am afraid that like the unprepared bridal party with no oil in their lamps, we have locked the door after the horse has bolted. While driving down from Queensland earlier this week we were

listening to parliament debating about allowing more mining of resources that create pollution. Those opposing the Bill were stating that the provision of equipment to clean the air was not proven. What a pickle we are in. The door is being shut on our God given world for our children, our Grandchildren and generations to come.

So today let us be awakened to the responsibilities that we are given by the Spirit of God. As Christians, we believe that every person is made in the image of God. The prophet Micah instructs us (Micah 6:8 Do justice, love kindness and walk without pride with your God). We are co-creators with the Spirit of God and we have responsibilities to do our bit in cleaning up our world and caring for those who have no power.

I'm not sure about the council of Whitehorse but Knox council is now giving out additional bins including a small bin to sit on our benches for waste food products. Slowly we are awakening! Twice on the road to Queensland and back we spotted people on the side of the road picking up rubbish. One fellow by himself and another couple with their long pick-up prongs and bag.

I facilitated a funeral service earlier this year of an 88year old lady. In the tributes, one of her family members stated that until two weeks before she died, every day she would walk the streets of her neighborhood picking up rubbish. What a saint! What a wonderful thing to be remembered for.

May each of us have oil in our lamps, prepared to take responsibility to look after the creation we are privileged to live in. Amen

Hymn: "Take my life and let it be" TiS 599
<https://youtu.be/Of4l5bTdZ8M>

Prayers of the People:

Tim Joyce

A prayer by Christian, Jewish and Muslim clergy

Eternal God, Creator of the universe, there is no God but you.

Great and wonderful are your works, wondrous are your ways.

Thank you for the many splendored variety of your creation.

Thank you for the many ways we affirm your presence and purpose,

Thank you for the freedom to do so.

Forgive our violation of your creation.

Forgive our violence toward each other.

We stand in awe and gratitude at your persistent love for each and all of your children: Christian, Jew, Muslim, as well as those of other faiths.

Grant to all our leaders attributes of the strong; mutual respect in word and deed, restraint in the exercise of power, and the will for peace with justice, for all.

Eternal God, creator of the universe, there is no God but you. Amen.

God of justice and peace, we pray for your broken world.

We pray for Israel and Gaza. Lord, let violence cease. Let there be no more bloodshed. We know your heart breaks for those killed and those left behind — for the orphaned child, the injured elderly, those abducted and families desperate for safety. Lord, speak into this crisis.

We pray for those who have lost loved ones. Let your peace and love wash over them.

We ask that you give wisdom and discernment to global leaders who have the ability to impact the course of this war. We lift our prayer to you, Lord we ask for a miracle... let your peace fill Israel and Gaza.

Lord - Help us to be bold advocates and agents of peace in our own communities.

Generous Creator, you feed the birds of the air and clothe the grass of the field. Give to all the confidence to participate in your work to heal and nurture the earth for the benefit of all.

We bring before you all those in our own communities, our state, our nation, our world whose lives are without the dignity and peace.

Where there is war – bring peace.

Where there is suffering- bring comfort and relief
Where there is hate, where there is difference – bring understanding
Lord, We pray for the hungry – that they might be fed
For the homeless – that they might find shelter.
For victims of oppression, exploitation and cruelty – that they might have justice.
For the displaced – that they will be welcomed and embraced.
For the marginalised – that they will be seen.

Lord – we pray for justice. Lord -we pray for peace.

Almighty God we pray for your church. We pray that wherever it may be, and whatever form it may take will be ready and open to confront and respond faithfully and purposefully to the many challenges before it.

We pray for our Whitehorse congregation

That we might navigate the hurdles that are ahead of us with faith, goodwill and good humour
For our team of ministers, and for all those who hold office or responsibility - grant them wisdom, patience and judgement.

We pray that you will guide us as we seek to minister to our members and to the wider community.

And Merciful Lord, we pray for those known to us who are in special need at this time

For the sick - the hurting - the lonely - the grieving.

Grant them Your comfort and Your peace. We entrust them to your care.

Risen Christ. Grant us peace - that we might serve you in the world. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

The Lord's Prayer: (*From A New Zealand Prayer Book (Harper Collins, 1997), 181*)

Eternal Spirit, Earth-maker, Pain bearer, Life-giver,
Source of all that is and that shall be, Father and Mother of us all,
Loving God, in whom is heaven:

The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!

The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world!

Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!

Your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain our hope and come on earth!

With the bread we need for today, feed us.

In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.

In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.

From trial too great to endure, spare us.

From the grip of all that is evil, free us.

For you reign in the glory of the power that is love, now and forever. Amen..

Offering Prayer:

Today we are vitally aware of the gift of life that is afforded to each one of us. We have confessed that we have messed that gift up in the way we live and the selfish disregard for nature.

On this day we recommit ourselves to giving back to the earth responsible ways of living.

We ask for your Spirit of wisdom to guide us and with the graciousness of your blessing we give you thanks. Amen.

Benediction: (Celtic Wheel of the Seasons Blessing)

God of the Easter garden bless in every season of the heart.

May God of the Mountainside bless in time set apart.

May God of the beach bless whether tides ebb or tides flow.

May God of the upper room bless my doubt that I may know

afresh the deep love of God that is stronger than death.

May it rise within me as I set forth this day, may it fall softly within me as I rest in you this night. Amen

Song: "I, The Lord of sea and sky." TiS 658

<https://youtu.be/mgLwH5RdtPk>