

Whitehorse Uniting Church
Sunday 18 June 2023



Introit – 703 As the Deer Pants

Robin Mark. Citrail 2011

<https://youtu.be/FBppKZ0eJIQ>

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 worship

Suffering produces endurance
 and endurance produces character,

**Character produces hope and
 hope does not disappoint us.**

For God's love has been poured into our hearts
through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Romans 5:3-5

Prayers

Adventurous God,
 You guide our leaps of faith,
 our daring to be different.
 Please give us the guts to take it on the chin.
 Help us when all of the above deserts us.
 When the desire to blend in
 and not raise a ruckus
 or an eyebrow
 overwhelms us.

Loving God,
 steer us out of our comfort zone,
 lest it overwhelm us,
 and show us the pitfalls,
 and pratfalls
 and dizzy heights that make up the whole of your world.

God of our journeying
 inviting us to travel with you,
 Forgive us when we cling to outworn security,
 afraid to let go of what is safe and familiar.

Give us courage,
 To take the risk
 Of answering your call
 Into joyous adventure.

Alma Fritchley and Jan Berry from Bare feet and Buttercups Ruth Burges. Wild Goose Publications, Glasgow, Scotland. 2008, www.ionabooks.com. Used with permission.

560 All my Hope in God is Founded
 St Albans, Bristol. Hymn Channel 2023
<https://youtu.be/W3LCGh02Vew>

Readings

Genesis 18:1-15 NRSV updated.

18 The LORD appeared to Abraham^[a] by the oaks^[b] of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. ² He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them and bowed down to the ground. ³ He said, "My lord, if I find favour with you, do not pass by your servant. ⁴ Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. ⁵ Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." ⁶ And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah and said, "Make ready quickly three measures^[c] of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes." ⁷ Abraham ran to the herd and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. ⁸ Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared and set it before them, and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

⁹ They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he said, "There, in the tent." ¹⁰ Then one said, "I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. ¹¹ Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. ¹² So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I be fruitful?" ¹³ The LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' ¹⁴ Is anything too wonderful for the LORD? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son." ¹⁵ But Sarah denied, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. He said, "Yes, you did laugh."

21 The LORD dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as he had promised. ² Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. ³ Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him. ⁴ And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. ⁵ Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. ⁶ Now Sarah said, "God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me." ⁷ And she said, "Who would ever have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

Matthew 9:35-10:23

³⁵ Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; ³⁸ therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest."

10 Then Jesus^[a] summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. ² These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee and his brother John; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and

Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus and Thaddaeus;^[b] ⁴ Simon the Cananaean and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Do not take a road leading to gentiles, and do not enter a Samaritan town, ⁶ but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷ As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’^[c] ⁸ Cure the sick; raise the dead; cleanse those with a skin disease; cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. ⁹ Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, ¹⁰ no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff, for labourers deserve their food. ¹¹ Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. ¹² As you enter the house, greet it. ¹³ If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. ¹⁴ If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. ¹⁵ Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.

¹⁶ “I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. ¹⁷ Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues, ¹⁸ and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the gentiles. ¹⁹ When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you at that time, ²⁰ for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. ²¹ Sibling will betray sibling to death and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, ²² and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. ²³ When they persecute you in this town, flee to the next, for truly I tell you, you will not have finished going through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

YAH - Travel lightly.



Travelling lightly means letting go of anxiety and having hope and faith for the future.
Anxiety is a heavy burden that weighs us down. Hope and faith are lightweight.

474 Here in this Place

Marty Haugen – Virtual Choir from Devana Parish Church of Scotland Aberdeen. 2021 accompaniment Kevin Haggart & Sophia Johnston. Used for morning worship at Fairyhill parish Church.

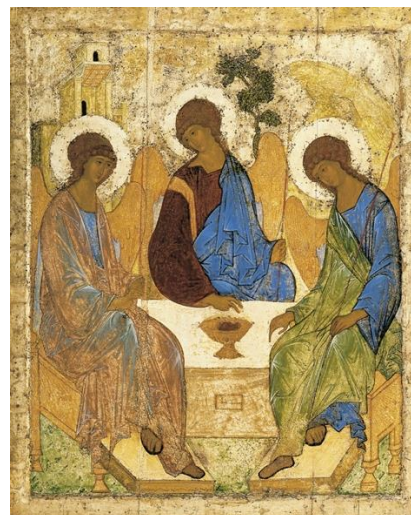
<https://youtu.be/kTbOxrlQ0zo>

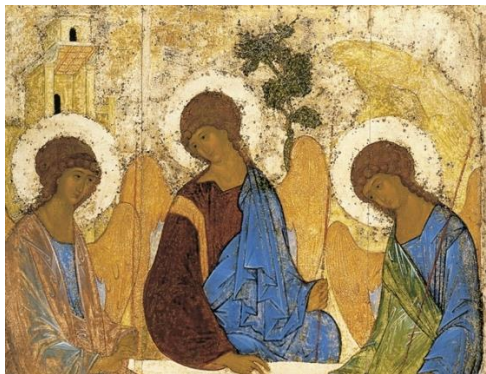
Sermon- Rev Tina

“The Kingdom of God has come near.”

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

Try to imagine what life was like for Abraham and Sarah and how the Lord appeared to them by the oaks of Marne. You can see God as Trinity sitting at a table near the oak trees.





Sarah and Abraham are elderly, and their lives have been limited by barrenness. Imagine the shame and stigma of barrenness and the hopelessness of their situation, Not having a child in their culture meant not having a future.

Then God appears and it changes everything for them.

Abraham's first response is to bow down at God's feet, to worship God and then offer God hospitality. God who has come as three persons.

While sitting at the table, God becomes host and meets Abraham and Sarah's heartfelt needs and longings. God promises them a child and a future.

Sarah laughs in disbelief.
Abraham is silent in disbelief.
In their eyes it is impossible.

God says: *Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?*

When Sarah laughs, God hears and says: *You laughed.* She is afraid and denies laughing.

God leaves them saying, when I return, you will have a child. God promises new life.

Imagine what people would say if they knew. Sarah and Abraham are too old. This is impossible. It is beyond what they knew. They would have laughed at them.

Sarah has a child. What was impossible is now possible through God's blessings and Sarah and Abraham respond with wonder.

They name him Isaac, which means laughter. Sarah proclaims who would believe this!

God said: *Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?*

Perhaps Sarah and Abraham's situation was similar the situation of many churches, where members feel a sense of barrenness and anxiety.



Perhaps some people are aware of a sense of barrenness, and they long for nourishment and new life. Perhaps they have been inward looking so long they don't know what to do.

While others may be feeling excited and ready to set off on the journey. Some may believe God has promised to abundantly bless their congregation with new ventures or others may believe God is forming them into a new congregation that is alive to the Spirit. Some value harmony others value being open minded. Some want a radical vision rather than what they have always done. They want to take a risk and do things that are not easy. While others want to stay in the box and others want to look outside the box.

The gospel from Matthew is about mission. Jesus has been the sole missionary and decides to make his disciples his partners in mission and sends them out into the world two by two with instructions.

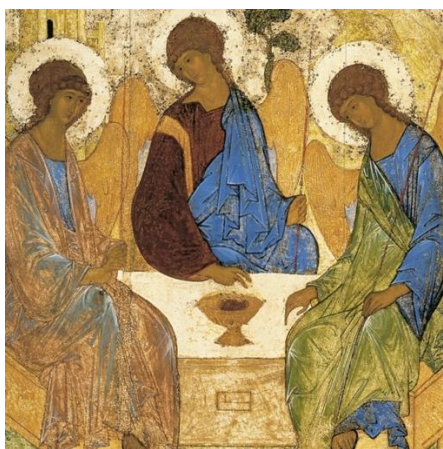
He tells his disciples to heal and proclaim the good news: *"The kingdom of God has come near."*

Jesus' instructions may be helpful for us and include:

1. Travel light. Don't carry the baggage of inward looking and the anxiety it generates.

2. Seek the lost sheep. For us that may be over forty percent of the population in the community who have no faith or have given up on having a faith.
3. Accept hospitality and generosity from others, this is how relationships grow, around a table while people are eating.
4. Be generous and respectful, keeping in mind people read the Christian not the bible.
5. Endure hostility for Jesus' sake and responding as he responded, with perseverance and trust in God.
6. Our society is increasingly becoming more secular. We may find ourselves experiencing rejection and hostility. Jesus said: *Behold I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves*. Things may be challenging, and we may need to be wise as serpents and gentle as doves, where we stand firm in our faith and shake the dust off our feet.
7. The Spirit will give us the right words and courage at the right time.
8. We are encouraged to believe in our call and God's abundant generosity, love, and power and believe God will bless us.

Look again at the icon.



At the front of the table, just below the cup of blessing, is a small square. This square symbolises our place at the table. We are invited by the host to sit at the table and be in partnership with Jesus in ministry. A place is set at the table for each one of us, so we can receive God's abundant blessings and new life.

I wonder if Sarah and Abraham sat at the table. Perhaps their disbelief prevented them, until God's promise came true for them.

Sarah laughs and Abraham is silent. They don't want to believe and accept the promise from God.

Perhaps when they spoke of God's promise to them, people laughed at them, and no one could believe in what seemed impossible.

The kingdom of God had come near but they were too afraid to receive its blessings. Why? Perhaps because the radical gospel of God requires shattering and discontinuity. An ending of how things once were. Perhaps Sarah and Abraham had become accustomed to their barrenness, resigned to their closed future, and accepted the hopelessness of their situation, as normal. They think God's promise is nonsense. Sarah laughs, despite knowing it is the Lord.

The Lord says: *Is anything impossible for the Lord?*

Jesus says preach: *The Kingdom of God has come near.*

All our assumptions are shattered when Sarah has a child and God works through the disciples.

For them and for us, some things may be too hard, too impossible, too late, too scary, and too challenging. Better the known than the unknown. Better a closed world where everything is safe and comfortable. Yet God breaks the parameters of reason, wisdom, and common sense and shatters our values, questions our motivations, confronts our definitions of reality and questions us by touching the ground of our being.



Many of us have come to know this through a crisis in our life or loss or sickness or spiritual experience that shakes our beliefs and changes our direction in life. God breaks open cages and sets people free to embrace a future.

So, take heart. God will not fail us. God will bring about all that's promised to each one of us.

We may choose to laugh and think we are too old, like Sarah and Abraham.

Or we may accept the invitation to set off with an open heart, trusting in God's promises, for nothing is impossible for God. Our response can be one of faith and trust and perseverance as we follow Jesus into the future.

Quiet moment of reflection



628 In Faith and Hope and Love

Cantus Choro from the CD Songs & Praises Al B's Muisic 2014.

Directed by Peer Chapman, Organ Geoffrey Cox and Norman Kaye

<https://youtu.be/Plz5kq834M>

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 People – John Gerrard

God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we bring to you now our prayers for others. As we consider the wonderful world in which you have placed us to live, we are reminded of the gross inequalities which we have allowed to persist in the world. We pray particularly today for the people of the **Malawi and Zambia**.

We are **thankful** for:

the biodiversity and natural wonders in these lands

church leaders who have spoken out and countered sexual violence and human rights abuses.

those who are dealing with challenges of migrations within, and to, these countries.

stable governance and economies, and rising living standards for many people in recent years.

We **pray** for:

greater food security for those most vulnerable, especially in times of climate change

an end to political and economic corruption

rising standards of living, particularly for those most poor

an end to exploitation of resources and of the people, especially those who are young and/or female.

In our **ecumenical** prayer cycle we remember today your people worshipping and serving at **St Edwards Anglican**, Blackburn South. May they know your presence with them as they seek to show your love to others in their neighbourhood. The people of St Edwards are operating a wide range of community activities, both onsite and online worship, a craft workshop, Prayer by Phone, Online Bible Study, men's breakfasts, and exercise classes. We ask your blessing on these outreach programs offered by the church, and on those who participate and lead.

Within the **Uniting Church** we pray today for the worship and work of the city based Uniting congregations of Gospel Hall (Chinese congregation), St Michael's Church and Wesley Church. These congregations have special opportunities as city churches, and different challenges because of that. We ask for your strength and guidance for them as they both lead and serve in the City of Melbourne.

We pray, too, for the work of Presbytery's Tertiary Ministries Working Group as they seek to understand the changing demographics of our community and propose strategies for keeping the church and its activities relevant in society.

Here in the Whitehorse Uniting Congregation, we seek your blessing on our people, on our worship and our work together. We ask your blessing on each member of our ministry team as they lead us in worship, service, and growth. May this be a time of encouragement, wise decisions, and growth for us all.

We pray today for comfort and healing for those close to us who are unwell or who need your guidance and strength, and we remember and pray for them now in silence.

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 for ever. Amen.

687 God Gives Us a Future. tMt video

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL5dbbdzyKBag-mEd9qTgdyYNQLIsLD2rC>

Blessing

In this new place

May we be blessed,

in the opening of our doors to the stranger.

May we be filled in the sharing of our bread,
with the hungry.

May we be enriched in the giving and receiving,
of love and laughter.

And may the God of grace,

gift us with all grace,

and an abundance of blessings,

as we build his kingdom here on earth.

Pat Bennett from Bare feet and Buttercups Ruth Burges. Wild Goose Publications, Glasgow, Scotland. 2008, www.ionabooks.com. Used with permission.

779 May the Feet of God tMt video

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL5dbbdzyKBag-mEd9qTgdyYNQLIsLD2rC>

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Images from lectionary materials and from Rev Tina Lyndon Ng

Pastoral Care Tips - Gardens and music can lift our spirits – Rev Tina

I wasn't feeling the best the other day, after having Covid. Everyone has their own self-care strategies, especially with recovering from Covid. My strategies include a good sleep, watching my favourite television show, walking, and spending time in my garden. There are lots of weeds this time of year and the roses need pruning and as I moved about, little finches darted in and out of the bushes. Later that day when the red sunset filled the sky, possums made their way to the Lilly-Pilly trees in my backyard, to eat their fruit, instead of my lemons. I find my garden a peaceful place that lifts my spirits.

Quiet gardens, community gardens and gardens for wildlife can be like bridges between the community and many churches, where the community is invited to come onto church property to enjoy the gardens. Some churches have put in seats. Overseas churches are open and people come in and pray or there are places to reflect in gardens where people often place prayer cards and written prayers. It's like a perpetual open garden and bridge between community and church.



The beauty of many gardens can be enhanced. I heard from Belinda Moody, who is a local, that it is possible to make a home or church garden a garden for Wildlife. There are a lot of natives down the bottom of my garden that attract all kinds of beautiful birds. She told me people can contact Whitehorse Council for details about adding native plants to gardens. This is a link she gave me that has information about making native plants a feature of gardens.

<https://www.whitehorse.vic.gov.au/waste-environment/trees-and-gardens/gardens-for-wildlife>

I've been aware of the Quiet Garden movement that's international and has many members and churches as part of their initiatives.

<https://quietgarden.org/>

Many churches have installed wooden upright garden beds with herbs and vegetables that the community can pick or care for and this is another way of growing relationships.

Music for the Soul

Music is good for the soul. If you're feeling down, try listening to comforting and inspirational music. I found these by accident while looking for hymns.

The Toronto Physicians choir.

You'll never walk alone. 2022

<https://youtu.be/xdNoHRIVvaQ>

You'll never walk alone. A virtual choir from 15 countries with 300 people made in the middle of all the lockdowns in 2020. We have come such a long way.

<https://youtu.be/6gpoJNv5dlQ>