

Whitehorse Uniting Church
Sunday 25 June 2023
Pentecost 4



Introit 716 Father I adore you

Chet Valley Churches. Written by Terrye Coelho, published in 1972.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQ_qohUEunY

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

Lord God of Abraham, calling us to journey,
Your pilgrim people, going where you lead us
Sharing your vision, wide as the sky's vastness
Help us to follow

Lord God of Sarah, calling us to trust you,
To remain faithful through the times of silence,
Give us the courage to believe your promise,

Lord God of Hagar, God of the afflicted,
Calling the poor and those despised to serve you;
To the oppressed you come, in saving justice
With love and freedom

Margaret Harvey, Bare Feet & Buttercups (editor Ruth Burgess)

Wild Goose Publications

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Prayers of Adoration (based on Psalm 86)

Loving God you hear the prayers of the poor and needy
You preserve our lives and offer us a joyful future
We are devoted to you, Lord, and trust in you for you are gracious to us
We lift up our hearts to you
For you fill them with gladness
We give thanks to you for your steadfast love to all who call on you

**We give thanks to you Lord with all our heart
We give glory to your name forever**

Jesus our Lord
You hear our petitions and laments when we face troubles
We give thanks for your mighty works and wondrous deeds
You, Lord, teach us how to live and walk in your ways and truth

**We give thanks to you Lord with all our heart
We give glory to God's name forever**

Holy Spirit
Through you we experience the steadfast love of the Lord
You deliver us from fears and troubles and lead us through challenges and darkness
You reveal the love of God to us and God's merciful graciousness
You give us strength and courage for the journey
Comforting and helping us in the midst of our troubles
Until the morning star rises offering us new beginnings

**We give thanks to the Lord with all our heart
We give glory to God's name forever**

Prayer of invocation

Come Holy Spirit come
Come Holy Spirit come

Prayer of Confession

O gracious God we come before you knowing you are good and forgiving
We trust your love and mercy and steadfast love for us

Forgive us if we have hurt another
Change our hearts and teach us your just and loving ways
Set us free from behaviour that makes us less
Expand our hearts
Make us your loving people

Lord in this moment of silence we come before you with all that troubles our hearts
Heal us, set us free and show us how to live a life where we love and bless others

Silence

Hear then Christ's words of grace to us
"Your sins are forgiven"
Thanks be to God

Hymn 655 O Let the Son of God Enfold You

Maranatha Singers

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kjVLUY_dNLk

Readings - Margaret Swain

Genesis 21: 1-3, 8-21

21 The LORD dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as he had promised. ²Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. ³Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him.

⁸The child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. ⁹ But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac.^[a] ¹⁰ So she said to Abraham, “Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac.” ¹¹ The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son. ¹² But God said to Abraham, “Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you. ¹³ As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring.” ¹⁴ So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.

¹⁵ When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. ¹⁶ Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot, for she said, “Do not let me look on the death of the child.” And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. ¹⁷ And God heard the voice of the boy, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. ¹⁸ Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him.” ¹⁹ Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. She went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink. ²⁰ God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness and became an expert with the bow. ²¹ He lived in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

Matthew 10:24-39

²⁴ “A disciple is not above the teacher nor a slave above the master; ²⁵ it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

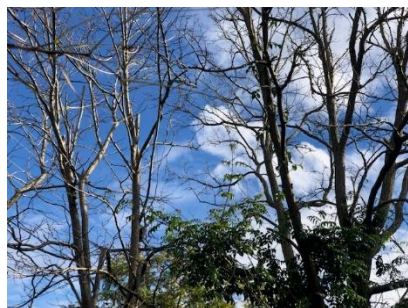
²⁶ “So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered and nothing secret that will not become known. ²⁷ What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. ²⁸ Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, fear the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell.^[a] ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰ And even the hairs of your head are all counted. ³¹ So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

³² “Everyone, therefore, who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven, ³³ but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven. ³⁴ “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace but a sword.

³⁵ For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, ³⁶ and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household. ³⁷ “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me, ³⁸ and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

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Young at Heart - Rev Tina



A friend once said: I love winter. Many of the trees have lost their leaves and I can see branches and nests. All is revealed and it helps me discover the unrevealed beauty of myself.

Next time you’re looking at a sleeping tree in winter, spend some extra time contemplating it and reflecting on the amazing undiscovered world within your soul, its beauty and grace. All souls are good in God’s eyes

398 Come Down O Love Divine

Chet Valley Churches

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=edK3Vv7Qwo4>

Sermon - Rev Andrew

This story of the turning out of the slave-girl Hagar and her and Abraham's son Ishmael is maybe one of the most cruel and gut-wrenching stories of scripture. Abraham appears to be on this occasion, as he is at other times, seems to be weak, fawning and opportunistic. This is a wicked stepmother, fairy tale kind of story. Sarah, released from her bitter-barrenness finally has the longed-for son and so Hagar the surrogate mother is turned out.

Abraham has been promised that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the sky; the sand in the desert. But where is the son who will be the beginning of this great legacy? Still by extreme old age the beginning of the line of descendants has yet to commence. So, he and Sarah plot to begin their dynasty, Sarah passing her slave-girl Hagar to Abraham for him to attempt to fulfill the promise of God. Where is God when you need him?

Maybe this is the first story of scripture where God seems to hang the protagonists out to dry. God promises, time passes; and the promise seems to be empty. From the beginning Sarah didn't trust; her laugh at the door of the tent when the three visitors promised the old couple a son, and a dynasty, gives away her cynicism. She is desperate.

Hagar reaches the point of desperation and casts the child under the tree. And then the promise comes. Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel reaches the point of desperation and again the promise of God comes. The disciples hope for a renewed kingdom for Israel; but then their hopes in Jesus are dashed and all seems lost. And then the resurrection comes.

This is the pattern of faith; that people are brought to the point of desperation before they are able to hear God's promise. Only when all our strength and resilience, our power is stripped away does it seem that the promise of God is able to be heard and then fulfilled.

We inhabit a culture which valorises youth and strength, ego and success; progress. I know I long for my long-lost youth and vitality, sometimes berating myself for not doing more when I was young. Missed opportunities; lack of wisdom; impetuosity. But, as Paul says, when we are weak the power and wisdom of God is able to be seen. Our weakness is in truth our gateway into the mysterious life of God. The church as we have known it is feeling weak at the moment; very uncertain about the future.

Your three congregations have pooled resources together: your members, your shared income, your passion and programs; your property. It's a way of feeling strong again. Sheltered from the anxiety of an uncertain future for the communities you have given your hearts and lives to. But, like Sarah it's easy to be cynical; like Hagar it's tempting to throw it all in. And while we might feel a bit guilty about our feelings about our situation we can be comforted by Jesus' desperation in the garden. Maybe a sign for us that desperation is the entry point to human transformation. It's hard to know how to be in such a time.

As a minister charged with the care of the flock, I tend to the needs of the individual sheep, but I also am charged with tending to the whole flock. The flock is anxious, individual churches and the whole church; and has been anxious for a long time. But we don't talk about our anxiety to each other much. We were raised to keep a happy face; not be honest with each other about how it's really going. And when we are anxious, we are inclined to latch on to solutions and run after Messiahs and hope the next minister or the next program will save our fortunes.

I wonder what it might be like for a congregation to be still and watchful for the life of God, the possibilities of God. The gift of old age is the opportunity to be still and to be watchful for signs of the life of God. Our society is inclined to silence those in old age but the person who speaks out of wisdom and experience and who has passed through desperation to new life is a person of great power; speaking out of the distilled wisdom of the spirit. As Peter reminds the crowd of the words of the prophet Hosea on the day of Pentecost- your old ones shall dream dreams.

I pray that this time for you will be a time where you are able to distil your experience and your wisdom and to contribute and speak out of that space as the spirit has gifted you.

Hymn 681 Lord Let me See tMt video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8z8roH9ocFM&list=PL5dbbdzyKBag-mEd9qTgdyYNQLIsLD2rC&index=8>

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 of the People - Geoffrey Willis

Loving Lord, in our prayers for others, we pray for your guidance for the governments and peoples of the African countries of **Kenya** and **Tanzania**. We pray for greater tolerance between Christians and Muslims as they work together to improve the lives of all people. Lord, we pray with sadness for all victims of violence, especially sexual or gender-based violence, and all who are marginalized or excluded from their communities. Dear Lord, we are conscious of the dangers of climate change, especially in these African countries and we pray for those who are most vulnerable to climate change and drought, that they may have clean water to drink and for their crops and animals to flourish. Our prayers include the young people of these countries. May they not succumb to radicalization but be prepared to sustain their lives and communities. We pray for those organisations who meet the needs of the hundreds of thousands of migrants and refugees from other African countries who seek safety. We share in this prayer from Nairobi.

'God of Hope, whose Spirit gives light and power to your people, empower us to witness to your name in all nations, to struggle for your own justice against all principalities and powers and to persevere with faith and humour in the tasks that you have given to us.

Without you we are powerless. Therefore we cry together: Maranatha, Come Lord Jesus and grant that we may with one voice and one heart glorify and sing praise to the majesty of your holy Name, of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.'

[*"An Invitation to Prayer" at the opening of the fifth assembly of the World Council of Churches, Nairobi, 1975.*]

We also pray, Lord, for an end to the current troubles in the **Ukraine, Syria, Jerusalem** and **Sudan**. Dear Lord, please grant them peace and the realisation that acts of violence will not achieve anything. We pray for the diplomatic efforts by world leaders to bring peace to our troubled world. May the leaders involved be granted level heads so that stability and justice may prevail. We also pray for the many families whose lives have been endangered and whose homes have been destroyed by weather events in India and Pakistan.

In our prayers for churches in our locality, we remember the leaders and people of the **Nunawading and Waverley Lutheran Church**. This church operates as a single congregation at two sites: Rooks Road Nunawading and Cypress Avenue Glen Waverley. In addition to their usual worship program, the Church provides an English Conversation Club and a Chinese congregation. We pray for blessings and empowerment for their ministry team led by Pastor Wayne Muschamp and their children's ministry led by Merrilyn Beaumont.

Within our Presbytery, we pray for the **Open Door Community Church in Monbulk**. This church was formed by the amalgamation of The Patch Church of Christ and the Monbulk Uniting Church. Their members are actively involved in the Open Door Community Pantry which offers food for those who do not have enough. Their Open Door Community Care Op Shop has served the Monbulk community for over 25 years. We pray for their people and Senior Pastor Jason Pilcher and Chaplain Ed Eadon who works in various schools in the Hills area.

We pray too for the ministry of chaplains at **Queens College** at the Melbourne University. Queens, as a residential college, has many students who are far from home and may find it difficult to adjust to their new environment. We pray for chaplains who provide counselling and a religious focus to provide stability and comfort.

Finally Lord, we pray for **ourselves**. We pray for our ministers: Tina, Peter and Andrew. Please uphold them with their gifts of ministry. We especially pray for Peter Cannon as he fights the effects of long COVID. We thank you, dear Lord, for the ministry and friendship of Andrew Boyle as he comes to the end of his supply ministry and for his pastoral care. We pray too for our editors as they help to keep us informed. For Margaret Cosstick, who edits the weekly newsletter, for Heather Brain who edits the monthly newsletter and for Lynne Rosenthal who, with Tina, edits the written worship resources. We remember with sadness and gratitude the lives of our members who have recently passed away. We especially remember Fran Long, one of our long-standing members at Mitcham, and for the countless number of cakes which she baked for special occasions.

And now let us together say the prayer which Jesus taught us:

*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.*

Candle Prayers

Hymn 659 The Lord is My Shepherd

Congregational Singing Metropolitan Tabernacle London

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-MshOPAjfPU>

Blessing

**God has called us to live with integrity and justice
May we love mercy, act justly and walk humbly with God**

**Jesus has shown us how to love our enemies and neighbours
May we seek to be peacemakers and to live in God's light**

**The Holy Spirit has comforted and disturbed us with God's peace
May we be full of joy and courage all the moments of our nights and days**

**May Almighty God bless us all
The Maker, the Son and the Holy Spirit
Amen**

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Hymn 778 Shalom to You Now tMt video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liH_HdkWs74&list=PL5dbbdzyKBag-mEd9qTgdyYNQLlsLD2rC&index=44

Pastoral Care tips - Rev Tina



Prayer is about relating to God. One way of relating to God is through prayerfully reading the psalms.

The psalms contain a warts-and-all revelation of who we are as human beings and of God's love for us. Despite our limitations, God loves us.

When we read the psalms it deepens our understanding of God and life. A whole range of feelings are expressed, feelings just as real as thousands of years ago and from today.

Some of the psalms help us realise how much we struggle and wrestle with many of life's questions and situations, until we have had enough and are ready to surrender and trust God with our life. It is after we surrender that we often discover the peace Jesus promised us.

I invite you to find a psalm that speaks into your current situation and context. Sit with it for a while, prayerfully allowing yourself to be drawn to certain words or a sentence that speaks to you and how you're feeling. Often you will find insights that guide or comfort you.

I remember a man named Fatee from Egypt who died within two weeks from a rare blood cancer. He read the psalms as he was dying, and it helped him die peacefully. He often said: *"Read the psalms and they will keep you."*