

**Whitehorse Uniting Church**  
**Sunday 23 July 2023**  
**Pentecost 8<sub>A</sub>**



**Introit - 745 Seek ye First the Kingdom of God**  
**Chet Valley Churches 2021**  
<https://youtu.be/FFxZeY2D5tc>

**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 – Psalm 139:1-4**

<sup>1</sup> **O LORD, you have searched me and known me.**

<sup>2</sup> You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.

<sup>3</sup> **You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.**

<sup>4</sup> Even before a word is on my tongue, O LORD, you know it completely.

**Prayers**

*Neil Paynter, Acorns, and Archangels, (Edit. Ruth Burgess), Wild Goose Publications, Glasgow. [www.ionabooks.com](http://www.ionabooks.com) Used with permission.*

God, help me to grow,  
 like a garden  
 like a song  
 like a tree.

Like a great tree, like one of those great, old trees,  
 you meet sometimes and hug,  
 wandering lost or enchanted  
 in a deep, dark forest,  
 in an empty field.

A great, old tree with roots that reach down to the heart,  
 roots that reach down  
 but break through the ground around the trunk and lift,  
 as if the earth can't contain the yearning.

A great, old tree  
 with arms that shelter and shade  
 and house such love.

A great, old tree  
with breaks and scars  
but dancing and clapping its hands,  
like a beautiful old woman at a summer wedding.

A great, old tree  
still and centred  
drawing on the living warm core of God  
though left stripped of everything.

God, help me to grow,  
like a garden  
like a song  
like a tree.

Like one of those great, old trees you meet sometimes.

In a crowded forest in an empty field.



**418 She Sits like a Bird**  
**Victoria Methodist Bristol 2021**  
**John Bell 1949- & Graham Maule 1958-**  
<https://youtu.be/yPb5gO8ASvM>

## Readings

### Genesis 28:10-19a

<sup>10</sup> Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. <sup>11</sup> He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. <sup>12</sup> And he dreamed that there was a stairway<sup>[a]</sup> set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. <sup>13</sup> And the LORD stood beside him<sup>[b]</sup> and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring, <sup>14</sup> and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and all the families of the earth shall be blessed<sup>[c]</sup> in you and in your offspring. <sup>15</sup> Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land, for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." <sup>16</sup> Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place—and I did not know it!" <sup>17</sup> And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

<sup>18</sup> So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. <sup>19</sup> He called that place Bethel,<sup>[d]</sup> but the name of the city was Luz at the first.

## Romans 8:12-25

<sup>12</sup> So then, brothers and sisters, we are obligated, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— <sup>13</sup> for if you live according to the flesh, you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. <sup>14</sup> For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. <sup>15</sup> For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba!<sup>[a]</sup> Father!” <sup>16</sup> it is that very Spirit bearing witness<sup>[b]</sup> with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs: heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if we in fact suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

<sup>18</sup> I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God, <sup>20</sup> for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be set free from its enslavement to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> We know that the whole creation has been groaning together as it suffers together the pains of labor, <sup>23</sup> and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup> For in<sup>[c]</sup> hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what one already sees? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

### Young At Heart - The Hill of Angels



RCL

Iona has many legends. One of them is about Saint Columba who went and prayed on a tiny little green hill and while he was praying, he saw angels going up and down a ladder. Another monk was watching him and saw the angels. Saint Columba asked him not to tell anyone about what he saw, but eventually word got out and the ordinary green hill became known as the hill of angels. When I visited Iona, I went and sat on the hill and prayed. I didn't see any angels, but I did see a circle of stones and one of them was a heart shaped stone. Many have heard about the legend and consider this simple little hill a sacred place and they come and sit on it and pray. Many people over the centuries have claimed hills and mountains as sacred places where they feel closer to God, or someone has had a spiritual experience.

### 626 Lord of all Creation

Isle of Man Methodist Church 2021

Jack Copley Winslow

<https://youtu.be/Z3jh7sEFHvo>

### Sermon

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



I was involved in street ministry during the late 1990's and one night I was sitting outside St Pauls' near Flinders Street station on the metal benches, along with a group of young women who were homeless and squatting in an old building. A man came along in a large overcoat and sat down with us and as he sat down, I heard the clink of a bottle against the metal bench. I made a snap judgment of him, and I'd say he read my face. In a slurred voice he told me that a priest from the Cathedral had given him a bible and he took it from his other pocket and sang, word for word, all of psalm 139, including these verses.

*O LORD, you have searched me and known me.*

<sup>2</sup> *You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.*

<sup>3</sup> *You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.*

<sup>4</sup> *Even before a word is on my tongue, O LORD, you know it completely.*

<sup>5</sup> You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.

<sup>6</sup> Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.

<sup>7</sup> Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?

<sup>8</sup> If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

<sup>9</sup> If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

<sup>10</sup> even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.

<sup>11</sup> If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and night wraps itself around me,"<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>12</sup> even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.

His name was Vladimir. Whatever his story was or wounds or addiction, he loved the word of God, and I went home fed by his sharing of the word and so did the young women.

He knew no darkness was too great and, in his loneliness, he knew God was with him and loved him. It was like he had an overwhelming confidence and trust in God and perhaps like the psalmist, he dwelt comfortably and happily in the light he found in God. He seemed to know God fully knew him and accepted him for himself.

We can't hide anything from God, for God searches our hearts and knows us. We all long to be known and loved for who we are. God does this for us.

We are a beloved child of God, a joint heir with Christ, in an intimate relationship with Christ and we are reminded from time to time that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. In this we can rejoice, in being wonderfully known and loved for who we are, by God.

We need not fear. Today's reading from Romans 8 reminds us we are set free from anxiety and fear. We did not receive the Spirit of God to fall back into fear.

Now may be a time of suffering and anxiety for the church in the West, with the decline of Christianity and aging of congregations. It is also a time of loneliness for many within the community who are losing contact with others due to working long hours and working from home. The church still has a role in offering community and hope and comforting those who are suffering in our community. Imagine if we offered the three w's. A warm winter welcome to the lonely, hungry and cold members of our community who are doing it tough this time of the year due to rising costs of living with food and heating. Imagine the comfort we could offer.

A recent ABC news online article spoke about chronic loneliness being as bad for our health as smoking and obesity. Loneliness is supposed to increase the risk of death by over 25 per cent.

Perhaps this age of suffering is creation's labour pains where God's creation and Spirit groan within us for a way of new life and a fresh new beginning. Then again new life follows labour pains and birth. What is being born in us at the moment and what kind of new life will we give birth to in the future.

We can reject the bondage of decay because our salvation is cosmic, and Christ is bigger than this world. Consider how the universe is expanding, and black holes in space that swallow up planets and nebulas that birth them. There is a cycle of life greater than what we see and know. God is greater than what we perceive.

Perhaps all of life is groaning and we are caught up in it, along with God's Spirit groaning in labour pains for the birth of new churches. Perhaps we are called to wait and hope for salvation for all creation and for us. Perhaps God has a plan for our church, and we are being drawn into the labour pains of new birth and new life in Christ within God's plan.

## 276 There's a Light upon the Mountains

Holyoak (mKariobangi 2013)

<https://youtu.be/yuvbW7gVwal>



T. Lyndon

### **From a Statement of faith called: We are a pilgrim people.**

We are a pilgrim people always on the way towards a promised goal.  
On the way Christ feeds us with word and sacraments,  
and we have the gift of the Spirit.  
In order that we may not lose the way.

### **The Ministry of God's People**

Today, as we gather, we celebrate here.  
The service of all who are called to share,  
in the task of God's ministry, serving this place,  
we rejoice that God fills those he calls with his grace.

As Peter and Andrew first heard Jesus' call,  
then Dorcas and Lydia who worked beside Paul,  
and Francis and Clare, helping others to see,  
that together we share in Christ's ministry.

We give of ourselves to God in all we do,  
as we listen, and share hospitality too,  
to pray and to preach some are chosen and sent,  
so our work and our worship become sacrament.

To God, our Creator, we now dedicate,  
Our lives, our worship and here consecrate  
our work for God's Kingdom and offering all,  
in the strength of the Spirit, we respond to Christ's call.

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### **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**

Say the prayer, then pause for a moment, then add your own concerns, then say the response.

#### **World Peace**

Lord, we pray for world peace, for the end of wars and conflict.

*Silence*

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**



*Leunig – used with permission.*

#### **Environment**

Lord, we pray that nations join together to fight against climate change and all those who cause it, by creating, agreeing, and ratifying treaties, conventions and laws and enforcing them.

*Silence*

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**



*T Lyndon*

## Nation

Lord, we pray for all Aboriginal people in Australia.

*Silence*

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**



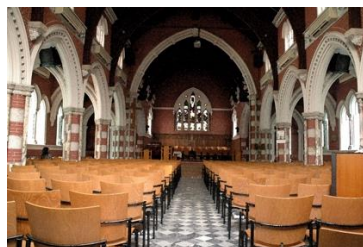
*T. Lyndon*

## Church

Loving God we pray for your church, in the world, in this nation, in this neighbourhood and in this place.

*Silence*

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**



*T. Lyndon*

## Those in need of Prayer

Loving God, we pray for those who are doing it tough this winter. For those who are going without food and heating. For those who have COVID or the flu. For the lonely and forgotten, the homeless and the unwanted. We pray for those who have lost loved ones and are grieving, for those with cancer, those recovering from operations and receiving treatment and for all those experiencing health issues and who are struggling.

*Silence*

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**



*T. Lyndon*

## 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 forever. Amen

## 602 O Love That Wilt Not Let me Go

Keith & Kristyn Getty, Dana Masters

(KeithandKirstyn Getty 2021)

[https://youtu.be/vt1Us8Ryt\\_s](https://youtu.be/vt1Us8Ryt_s)

## Hymn 779 May the Feet of God

Robin & Dorothy Mann 2017

<https://youtu.be/WfOFIWxGaP8>

## Dismissal

*Ruth Burgess, Acorns, and Archangels (Edit. Ruth Burgess)*

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Send us out.

Send us out to seek wisdom.

**Send us out in peace.**

Send us out.

Send us out to do justice.

**Send us out in hope.**

Send us out.

Send us out to be loving.

**Send us out in joy.**

## Pastoral Care tips – Rev Tina

### Reflection on Psalm 23



*T. Lyndon*

Psalm 23 begins with the statement: *I shall not want*. Most people long for a sense of deep gladness, belonging, stability, and happiness and here is a psalm which speaks of all of these feelings.

Most of the time we live a life where there are ordinary patterns of daily activities, with a few surprises and challenges along the way. We may wonder from time to time what it's like to not want. Most of us know what it feels like to feel satisfied and grateful for family, life, God, church. It offers us a glimpse of this deep sense of contentment.

I grew up with sheep and are fascinated by their behaviour. When I visited Iona, Scotland, I stayed at the community house and one afternoon I had the room to myself and time to sit and look out the window at the scenery, a large paddock, and hills in the distance. I noticed a flock of sheep sheltering from the wind by gathering behind the hills, the previous night. Now they were in the middle of the paddock and the lead sheep was walking backwards and forwards along a small creek in the middle of the paddock, calling out constantly, as they looked for a narrow bridge or bit of land where they could all cross to the other side of the paddock closer to the house, where there were green pastures. My friends returned and we watched the lead sheep find the right spot to jump over to the other side, and all the others followed. Later that day the lead sheep went through the same process to find the way back to the other side and was followed by the flock. Then the lead sheep led them back to hills for the night, to shelter from the wind. That was the pattern of their day, and they seemed content.

For most of us, our life follows a pattern that includes ordinary daily living and routine, where there are important and profound moments in our life. For those of us who follow Jesus, we need our church community and to be led by Jesus and his teachings, where each of us contributes and makes a difference, where we bless others.

There are also times when we need to feel safe when travelling through dark valleys and to know the Lord is near to us. Times when we feel afraid, anxious, or overwhelmed. It is good to know Jesus is there with us restoring our soul so we can find the courage to keep on following him.

It is reassuring to know that in the midst of challenges God offers us a banquet of choices and blessings that feed our soul, such as green pastures, and the overflowing cup of goodness and blessings and deep stillness within our soul.



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