

Please bring this Order of Service with you to the ZOOM meeting on 31.5.20

Leura Uniting Church

Order of Service

Pentecost

31st May, 2020

In mystery and grandeur
we see the face of God
in earthiness and the ordinary
we know the love of Christ
In heights and depths and life and death:
the spirit of God is moving among us.
Let us praise God

In faith
let us come before the Holy God
and know who we are:
We are the people of the New Heaven
and the New Earth
but we fall far short of that hope

We are the people who receive
the grace of God
but we fail to offer it to others

Ask and you shall receive,
seek and you shall find,
knock and life will be
opened before you.
Rise up and live
in freedom and faith

If we confess our sins
God is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins
and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
Hear then Christ's words of grace to us
'Your sins are forgiven'
Thanks be to God

A reading from the Book of Acts Chapter 2:verses 1 – 21 NRSV *Perce will read*

The Coming of the Holy Spirit

2 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6 And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. 7 Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? —in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." 12 All were amazed and perplexed,

saying to one another, “What does this mean?” 13 But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine

Peter Addresses the Crowd

14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. 15 Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. 16 No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

17 ‘In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.

18 Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.

19 And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

20 The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,

before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day.

21 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

Hymn 409

O breath of life, come sweeping through us,
revive your church with life and power;
O breath of life, come cleanse, renew us,
and fit your church to meet this hour.

O wind of God, come bend us, break us,
till humbly we confess our need;
then in your tenderness remake us,
revive, restore: for this we plead.

Sermon

“The Christian feast of Pentecost developed late in the fourth century, but it did not mean the feast day fifty days *after* Easter. It meant “the great 50 days” or “the 50 days *of* Easter”. So writes Sr. Joan Chittister, a well known US author of more than 50 books. “ This was an entire period of rejoicing. It was Paschaltide or Eastertide, not one day among many but many days of wonder and joy and new life all in a row. In this period of time, the Christian community has witnessed the Resurrection, the Ascension, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Mary and the apostles. It was a time of great loss and great sorrow, of great demoralization and even greater confirmation and certainty – of Jesus with them still - but differently.

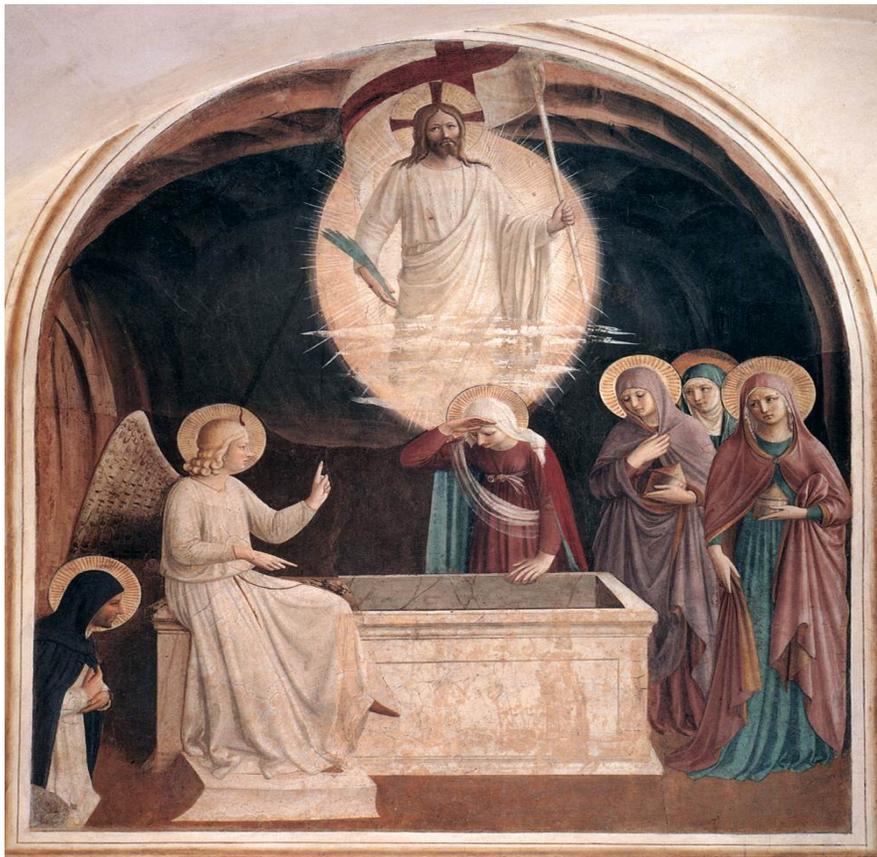
It is a delicious time. A shaft of light has come to pierce the uncertainties of the seeking. We are living now with a torch in our hands, however dark the darkness.

It is the 50 great days of illumination meant to carry us across the darkness of life’s divides.”

Fra Angelico’s ‘Resurrection of Christ and women at the Tomb 144-c

Of course nobody knows exactly what went on at the Resurrection, but many artists have endeavoured to bring this tremendous event into focus for the people in their centuries and so we have this very fine painting from the 15C to nourish our perceptions of this unique event.

Let us spend a moment contemplating this famous work.



Fra Angelico Resurrection of Christ and women at the Tomb 1440 c.

Gathering ... scattering. Gathering ... scattering. The apostle Luke used this very important image of gathering and scattering as a way of summing up the whole story of Jesus and of his followers. Luke is the only one of the gospel writers who records Jesus as saying, "Whoever does not gather with me scatters." (Lk 11:23b) Short and sweet and to the point: "Whoever does not gather with me scatters." Gathering ... scattering.

Luke wrote the Book of Acts, too, and, essentially, this is what his story of Pentecost is all about! Scattering ... gathering. Those who are scattered are gathered. We might say that this is the number one effect of Jesus' words of forgiveness from the cross. On Pentecost God works a reversal of what happened at the Tower of Babel, when people were scattered over the face of the earth with their different languages. With the Spirit of Christ — a Holy Spirit which his resurrection has let loose on the world — we see the scattered peoples of the earth gathered back together, with a new common language of understanding, the language of forgiveness.

If you've ever searched for a simple way to describe what the Christian faith is all about, I think this may be it! Jesus died on the cross, offering us forgiveness, so that we could have a new way to gather together and stay together, truly as one. Scattered ... Gathered. Think of it! Think of all the ways we are scattered, all the ways we tear each other apart, all the broken relationships, all the bitterness, all the terrible hurt. Think of the wars and the killing and the terrible racism that scatters us as peoples across the earth, with so much tragic killing and so much unspeakable grief. This is what Jesus came for, to gather us together again in loving forgiveness. Luke's story of Pentecost shows us that just 50 days after Easter, that powerful Holy Spirit began to blow and to gather God's people from the corners of the earth. It brought them together in a new oneness called the Church, which, strife-torn as it has been, has still persisted for almost two thousand years now."

When it was evening on that first [Easter] day, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of [their leaders], Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” — John 20:19

What were the disciples feelings that first Easter evening? And what kind of peace was it that Jesus came into their midst to bring them? “Peace be with you,” said Jesus, twice. But what was the nature of the unrest that the disciples were feeling?

The text tells us that they were afraid. They were afraid of their leaders, the same ones who had killed Jesus and could very easily be looking for them, too. Fear. Yes, that’s understandable. But I think we can imagine many other kinds of feelings, as well. Grief, for instance. Incredible sorrow for the loss not only of their teacher and leader but also of their hopes for the salvation from God that they had come to expect. It’s hard to imagine the depth of their loss. It must also have come with a great deal of confusion: “Why?” they wondered, “why would God let this happen?” They must have been terribly confused. Guilt. The feelings of guilt must also have been tremendous. They had all run away, abandoned their teacher at his hour of greatest need. Peter had even denied Jesus three times. Yes, afraid, grief-stricken, confused, guilty, the disciples had a great need for Jesus to come into their midst and bring them peace.

Did you think of this kind of peace? That Jesus would come into their midst and help them to finally put aside their rivalries and jealousies and anger? That Jesus would help them to begin to live in a new way so that they could work together and bring this kind of peace into a world that so sorely needs it?

It is the same kind of peace that Jesus comes to bring us again today. All the feelings of unrest that you and I might bring with us today: fear, grief, confusion, guilt, and, yes, the anger and envy. Jesus comes into our midst and says, “Peace be with you.” As we break bread and share a cup of wine. Jesus comes to us to feed us with a new way to live, a way to live that gets us out of those jealousies and angers that make for unrest. He comes to us with a word of forgiveness that gets it all started

God’s Fire of Love came, that first Pentecost, into the still cold places of grief and hard-heartedness in the apostles’ lives and began to warm them in God’s loving forgiveness so that they might share with others the Good News in Jesus Christ
50 days from the Resurrection to Pentecost. This is the same Pentecost fire that we continue to pray for today to thaw out those coldest places in our hearts, a Fire of Love that sends us out to share it with others.

Offering

*You are invited to offer a gift to God –
a song
a thought
a sense of gratitude for
a feeling of joy
any gift you feel God has given you*

To the Holy Trinity of Love
be all honour and glory and praise,
now and for ever. Amen

Prayers of the People (attached)

We come now to the Prayers of the People and Merrill is going to offer them on our behalf

God, we bring to you our prayers.

We ask that you will give guidance to those who lead us in government. Help them to see the needs of everyone, not just the few. Help them to be fair and not to discriminate.

We are thankful for all our healthcare workers. Give them your peace in all that they do. We pray for healthcare workers in impoverished countries with little protection against Covid19. Be with them always. Give them wisdom and strength.

We ask that you will be with us and all who are worshipping you today. May your spirit be present in everyone's lives, so that God is made known to those around us.

Be with those who are not well and those who have concerns for others in their families as well as neighbours and friends. Bless and strengthen all those that are on our minds.

Guide us through this very different time. Help us to see where you are leading us. Keep us open to your Spirit's guidance.

(Selections adapted from a Prayer in "Be Our Freedom Lord", Terry C Falla)

Come, Holy Spirit, renew the whole creation.

Send the wind and flame of your transforming life to lift up the church in this day.
Give wisdom and faith that we may know the great hope to which we are called.

Confront us with our greedy consuming of your gifts. Stand before us as we pillage and destroy.
Call us forth into new harmonies of care for all that lives and breathes and has its being.

Open our ears that we may hear the weeping of the world. Open our mouths that we may be a voice for the voiceless. Open our eyes that we may see your vision of peace and justice. Make us alive with the courage and faith of your prophetic truth.

Give us the wisdom to hold onto what we need to be your church. Give us the grace to lay down those things that you can do without. Give us a vision of your breadth and length and height that will challenge the smallness of heart and bring us humbly together.

Spirit of life and power, transform our dreams that we may be your people. Give us the gifts we need. Walk with us on the road as we risk living your way in spirit and in truth.

Come, Holy Spirit, renew the whole creation.

Amen

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.**

Hymn 411

Filled with the Spirit's power, with one accord
the infant church confessed its risen Lord:
O Holy Spirit, in the church today
no less your power of fellowship display.

Now with the mind of Christ set us on fire,
that unity may be our great desire:
give joy and peace; give faith to hear your call,
and readiness in each to work for all.

Widen our love, good Spirit, to embrace
in your strong care all those of every race:
like wind and fire with life among us move
till we are known as Christ's and Christians prove

Blessing

And now,
may the blessing of the Holy Trinity of love
be upon you
the fire of the Spirit to ignite you
the love of God to encircle you
and the wisdom of Christ to enliven you.
Amen

