

# CELEBRATING FORTY-THREE YEARS

Leura Uniting Church  
21 June 2020

*Please bring a copy of this service to Sunday's ZOOM meeting. For those on ZOOM there is no need to read it beforehand; an abbreviated form of it will be read. During the service would you please respond quietly with the words in bold print. There will be time for general discussion of the questions arising from the homily and Gospel reading immediately after*

## GATHERING OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

### CALL TO WORSHIP

L: The Lord be with you.

P: **And also with you.**

Tomorrow, the 22 June, the Uniting Church marks 43 years since the Congregational, Presbyterian and Methodist churches in this country came together and established the Uniting Church in Australia in 1977.

Today we celebrate that anniversary.

L: Praise to God for the gifts of the past:

P: **for the witness of the people of God who have gone before us.**

L: Praise for the gifts of the present:

P: **in all our struggles to be true to Jesus Christ.**

L: Praise to God for the gifts in our future:

P: **the Spirit will lead us in ways which are old and new  
as we travel toward the reconciliation of all things. Amen.**

HYMN: 'Here in this place new light is streaming' (TIS 179)

**Remembering who we are**

*(The candle is lit.)*

L1: We light this candle for our heritage in the Congregational tradition  
with its commitment to freedom  
and the power of the priesthood of all believers.

P: **We will stand in that great tradition.**

*(The candle is lit.)*

L2: We light this candle for our heritage in the Methodist tradition  
with its commitment to social justice  
and its enthusiasm in communicating the gospel.

P: **We will stand in that great tradition.**

*(The candle is lit.)*

L3: We light this candle for our heritage in the Presbyterian tradition  
with its respect for scholarship  
and its understanding of the sovereignty of God.

P: **We will stand in that great tradition.**

*(The candle is lit.)*

L4: We light this fourth candle

to celebrate the rich contribution of other traditions  
that are now joined in the life of the Uniting Church  
and expressed in the Leura Congregation.

**P:** We will stand in these traditions too.  
*(The candle is lit.)*

**L5:** We light this fifth candle  
to celebrate our life together  
in the Uniting Church in Australia.

**ALL:** In Christ we are one.  
Thanks be to God!

#### **PRAYER OF PRAISE**

From Cape York to Port Arthur  
May God be praised.

From Norfolk Island to Port Headland  
may God be praised.

From coastal beaches to the red centre  
may God be praised.

By people of every race and tongue  
may God be praised.

By all in heaven and on earth  
may God be praised.

One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
creating, redeeming and sustaining  
your world and your church;  
To you be all honour and worship,  
Glory and power, now and forever. Amen

#### **PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Let us confess our sins before the God of Mercy  
*(Silence)*

**L:** Despite your faithfulness, O God,  
Despite the loving care you have showered upon us,  
Despite countless gifts of grace,  
We have sinned.

**L:** We have committed ourselves to live as one people in the Spirit of Christ

**P:** and yet we are still divided.

**L:** We have committed ourselves to be a pilgrim people

**P:** and yet we so doggedly refuse to move and change.

**L:** We have committed ourselves to use our gifts for the kingdom of God

**P:** and yet we refuse to offer them to you.

**L:** We have committed ourselves to be servants to the whole world

**P:** and yet we turn away in our concerns.

**All:** Forgive us, O God,  
And help us to renew our commitment  
to live out the hope to which we are called. Amen.

*(Silence)*

L: Hear the Good News of grace:  
In Christ, our sins are forgiven.

P: Amen. Thanks be to God.

## SERVICE OF THE WORD

### BIBLE READINGS

Psalm 86:1-10, 16-17

Matthew 10:24-39

### HOMILY 'Fearless Agents of Truth'

Running like a thread throughout today's passage is a call to fearlessly proclaim what we know and believe about Jesus Christ. Jesus must not remain hidden away behind our timidity but confidently proclaimed in word and deed. So, when God whispers to you in your prayers, Bible reading, meditation, worship and daily exchanges, rise above your natural fears and tell it, proclaim it, make it public. Don't be afraid. Represent and acknowledge Jesus wisely whenever the opportunity presents itself.

But many of us are afraid. Like many churches we are afraid of the "e" word—*evangelism*. Evangelism has become the great 'turn off'. In the early decades of the Uniting Church, there was an Assembly Commission for Evangelism and Boards of Evangelism in the various Synods. No longer, I'm afraid. Why? At least in Australia it is not because of persecution, suffering and death as it was for the first disciples and still is in many places in the world. In Egypt, for example, if a Muslim person converts to Christianity, it is highly probably that that person will be killed. In India, if a Hindu converts to Christianity, they are often totally disowned by their family. So what are *our* fears? Is it because we don't want to be seen as religious fanatics or fundamentalists? Is it because we believe that it will turn people away and reject us? Is it because we are so caught up doing other things? Is it because we are afraid we might offend people of other faiths? Or is it because our faith is so lukewarm that it doesn't seem important enough to share it with others?

Perhaps, if we saw our faith like a precious gift, we might think differently. Surely, God's revelation in Jesus is extraordinarily special. Surely, having a way of living well is important. Surely, belonging to a local and an international community is a gift. Surely, having a sense of being "called"—a sense of purpose in the world is a pearl beyond price. If these things are important to us, then why is it that we are so unwilling tell others about them? The great 'heresy' of modern-day Christianity is that we treat our faith as one's private possession. It's not. It is a mistake to separate the private from the public. Despite the temptations to do so, it is a mistake not to engage with the wider community and do what we can to make the world a better place.

A way forward: Think for a moment of the best gift you have been given by someone else. It probably isn't a physical object, for that only fades or is broken with time. For me, best gifts have been relational and spiritual: the gift of a loving family, shared experiences, generous conversations, the gift of a marriage partner, children, and good friends. As Christian people we want to claim that these gifts, too, ultimately come from God. They are so important to that we want to tell other about them. This witnessing doesn't have to be preachy or dramatic or elevated. It simply needs to be sincere, truthful and authentic.

So it is with our faith. We all need to find ways to share our faith in a way that has integrity for us. But the bottom line is we must share it!

## NOTICES (John Cox)

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What is the most important truth you have learned as a disciple of Jesus?
2. What important truth needs to be proclaimed during the pandemic?
3. How have you tried to witness to that truth?
4. What challenges have you faced in communicating that truth?

### LITANY OF THANKSGIVING

We give thanks  
for the first people of this land,  
and for all those who have come to these shores  
we lift up our hearts.  
**God, we give you thanks.**

For this wide brown, beautiful land  
with its coloured fauna and flora,  
We lift up our hearts.  
**God, we give you thanks.**  
For all who have seen your vision of unity and peace  
in this country and across the world,  
We lift up our hearts.  
**God, we give you thanks.**

For those you call to leadership  
In the councils and congregations of the Church,  
We lift up our hearts,  
**God, we give you thanks.**  
For every faithful person  
who serves you in humility  
we lift up our hearts.  
**God, we give you thanks.**  
For the mistakes through which you have taught us  
and the challenges which have stretched our faith  
we lift up our hearts  
**God, we give you thanks.**

For your readiness to be with us  
As our way, our truth and our life,  
We lift up our hearts.  
**God, we give you thanks.**  
**And with all your people**  
**We bring praise and honour,**  
**Glory and blessing, now and forever,**  
**Through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

### PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE (*Prepared and led by Peggy Goldsmith*)

L: In June 1977, the Uniting Church came into being. The path to unity was long and at times difficult, but we believed this unity was a sign of the reconciliation we seek for the whole human race. We particularly acknowledge our responsibilities as one branch of the Christian church within the region of South-East Asia and the Pacific.

**P: We give thanks for the embracing and enriching Uniting Church to which we belong.**

L: Many in our country have been jolted from quiet lives at home living with the threat and fear of catching Covid19 to expressing their solidarity with those proclaiming 'Black Lives Matter'. In our readings this week, we are confronted by the life of Ishmael, a life born in slavery to his mother Hagar and father Abraham. This is what it means to be the 'other'. Can we not listen to the story of Ishmael as our teacher, as much or more than we can listen to the story of the insider, Isaac?

In this day and time, it is Ishmael whom we need to hear, for it is Ishmael who can help us oppressors see the reality of our oppressive acts, to try to correct the multiple systematic ways that we have created and perpetuated that oppression. We think of our First Nations People and their call for a Voice in the Constitution, a say in matters that involve their peoples, asking that we listen to *The Statement from the Heart*.

**P: God, help us to change.**

**To change ourselves and to change our world.**

**To know the need for it.**

**To deal with the pain of it.**

**To feel the joy of it.**

**To undertake the journey without understanding the destination.**

**The art of gentle revolution. (Leunig)**

L: Our leaders in Government and commerce have a huge responsibility to seek new paths to lead us out of unemployment, through a response to climate change, to firm confrontation and negotiation of other nation states that would threaten our security and livelihoods. Give our leaders wisdom, listening hearts and minds, and a leading of the Spirit to a better way for this nation and its states and peoples.

**P: Creator God, lead us.**

L: Let us pray for those in our congregation who especially need our prayers: Shirley, Chrysanthe, Betty, Marilla, Isabel Barrell, Phil Gleitzman, Glenda & John Blakefield, Gwen Wilson, recovering, Kate Hendy's baby, Stani, for his father and sister, and grandparents, Bron and Bob Hendy. Be with Mark and Merrill this coming week, as Mark faces an operation on Tuesday. We also pray for those we hold in our hearts not known to others.

*(Silence)*

**P: If our days do not begin and end in you, O Lord, they come to nothing. Bless our efforts at faithfulness; work through us despite our supposed strengths. Establish the work of our hands, O God, and be merciful. Amen.**

L: Let us say together the prayer our Lord 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**

**And 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 'Lord of our days' (*Songs for the People of God 4* (1996))**

**Chorus:**

Lord of our days, Lord of yesterday.

Lord, our Lord, forever,

Your people we are.

Lord of our days, Lord of yesterday.

Lord, our Lord, forever,

Your people we are.

1.

From many pasts you fashion one  
history—  
a people of God Created to hold  
for all who live the myst'ry of faith.  
Lord of our days your people we are.

2.

From many wills you fashion  
community—  
a people of God created to love;  
being for all the promise of hope.  
Lord of our days your people we are.

**CHORUS**

3.

From many calls you fashion one  
destiny—  
a people of God created to be  
for all who live the body of Christ.  
Lord of our days your people we are.

4.

From many dreams you fashion a  
unity—  
a people of God created to serve;  
bringing to all the witness of love.  
Lord of our days your people we are.

**CHORUS**

('Lord of our days' from *Songs for the People of God 4* (1996))

**BENEDICTION**

May almighty God bless you,  
The Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

**DISMISSAL**

Go in peace,

go in hope,  
go in joy  
to love and serve the Lord.  
**We go in Christ's name. Amen.**

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