



Leura Uniting Church

WORSHIP SERVICE - SUNDAY

13th June, 2021

Pentecost 4

Welcome: Whether this is your 'home-place' for worship, or if you are new or a visitor here, it is good to be together to worship God!

As we gather, we acknowledge the traditional custodians of this occupied land that was never sold or ceded. This land that needs deep healing. We pay respects to elders past, present and emerging and commit ourselves to walking together in justice and truth.

Coming Together To Worship

Welcome: To each Other. (Announcements)
To Worship.

Come everyone, come into this time of worship leave the regrets that weigh you down, leave the grudges and the gripes, bring your open heart, your ready voice, your love, your life.

Come Spirit of God, rest on us all, fill us with the fire of your eternal presence so that we might shine your light for all to see.

L: All around us, God is looking for people
who will join in serving others.

P: It is as if God is planting seeds of compassion in us,
watching for them to bloom in our lives.

L: In our midst, Jesus is walking among us,
tending our hearts, watering us with grace.

P: It is as if Jesus is trusting that our souls
will grow big enough to welcome everyone.

L: From morning to evening, the Spirit is at work,
gently tending this garden called life.

P: It is as if the Spirit has found the perfect spots
to bring forth crops of justice and peace.

Hymn There's a spirit in the air TIS 414

1. There's a spirit in the air,
telling Christians everywhere:
'Praise the love that Christ revealed,
living, working in our world.'
2. Lose your shyness, find your tongue,
tell the world what God has done:
God in Christ has come to stay.
Live tomorrow's life today.
3. When believers break the bread,
when a hungry child is fed,
praise the love that Christ revealed,
living, working in our world.
4. Still the Spirit gives us light,
seeing wrong and setting right:
God in Christ has come to stay.
Live tomorrow's life today.
5. When a stranger's not alone,
where the homeless find a home,
praise the love that Christ revealed,
living, working in our world.
6. May the Spirit fill our praise,
guide our thoughts and change our ways:
God in Christ has come to stay.
Live tomorrow's life today.
7. There's a Spirit in the air,
calling people everywhere:
'Praise the love that Christ revealed,
living, working in our world.'

Brian Arthur Wren
1936-

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Prayer of Praise.

Singing: Behold, behold...

words and music: John Bell AoV2-085

*Behold, behold, I make all things new, beginning with you
And starting from today
Behold, behold, I make all things new, My promise is true
For I am Christ the way.*

Come, Holy Spirit, come to us now.
Plant your seeds of truth and hope within our lives
and reveal to us new ways of walking with you.
Come, Holy Spirit, come. Amen.

We do not know when or how it happened, Holy Gardener, but you planted the seeds of your imagination.

The Spirit gently nurtured them
with the waters and warmth of life;
the Word whispered their names
and called them into being.

All that is good, all that is true,
all that is beautiful sprang forth
in that wonder we call creation.

You shaped us in your image,
breathing hope and life into us,
that we might enjoy your good gifts.
But, tasting the temptations of sin,
our growth was stunted, as we became
a rich harvest for death.

But you do not see us as we do,
and so sent the prophets to sow
the words which call us back to you.

When we continued to follow
only what we could see,
you sent Jesus to be among us,
so we might recognize your love for us.

Singing: Behold, behold...

words and music: John Bell AoV2-085

*Behold, behold, I make all things new, beginning with you
And starting from today
Behold, behold, I make all things new, My promise is true
For I am Christ the way.*

God who makes all things new we come with awe and gratitude for the gift of this day. The winter brings fresh blessings: crunchy frost and clear blue skies, howling winds and soaking rains, snow on the peaks and roaring surf. Our senses are filled with your glory.

In the changing of the seasons,
we witness the parables of Jesus unfolding. Harvest is over, soils are bare,
seeds are being prepared for sowing. The cycles of the year teach us about preparing,
tending, waiting,
then watching for 'the green blade rising from the buried grain'.

We wonder too, at the way you renew us, new thoughts, new experiences of you, new ways of sharing your life.

In the quiet we bring our thanks to you, for all the new things you are doing, within and around us.

(time of quiet)

Singing: Behold, behold...

words and music: John Bell AoV2-085

Behold, behold, I make all things new, beginning with you

And starting from today

Behold, behold, I make all things new, My promise is true

For I am Christ the way.

There are times when life is bare and barren, and we lose hope,
and other times when we struggle to grow, or have bits that need to be pruned, or are too impatient to wait and watch for what you are doing.

Remind us again of your constant forgiveness, your freedom, your renewal. Make us new so that we can walk your way with light steps and a joyous heart.

Make us new, over and over, through and through, so that we can be your church,
fresh and alive, with hope in our sails and your guiding love at the helm.

In the quiet we wait, we watch and we listen, knowing that you will make us new.

(time of quiet)

Singing: Behold, behold...

words and music: John Bell AoV2-085

Behold, behold, I make all things new, beginning with you

And starting from today

Behold, behold, I make all things new, My promise is true

For I am Christ the way.

Friends, from Paul's letter to the Corinthians we read: *So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!*

Thanks be to God, Amen

Rev. Jennie Gordon

Prayer of Confession

Call to Reconciliation

L: We long to live as God's people, yet in the very depths of our lives, we know how we have hurt those around us, through words and actions, as well as from indifference. But God hears us when we call, and answers with the grace we need. Let us pray together, as we confess our lives to our God.

Unison Prayer for Forgiveness

P: How you must grieve over us, God of all. You give us blessings to share with others, but we hoard everything for ourselves. You look for us to join you in serving the most vulnerable, but find us worshipping the wealthy and powerful. You offer us joy and wonder to embrace, but we continue to cling to weapons and things.

Have mercy on us, Anointing God, as you pour your forgiveness into our foolish lives. Plant the seeds of grace, hope, love, and peace in us, so we may blossom and share all these gifts with everyone we meet. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Silence is kept

Assurance of Pardon

L: God's love is not logical and understandable. For God forgives those we never would, and welcomes those we would continue to ignore.

P: This is the One who has mercy on everyone, pouring grace and joy into everyone, including us! Thanks be to God, we are forgiven! Amen.

We Listen For The "Word" Of God

A Reading from the Hebrew Prophets : Ezekiel 17:22-24

Israel Exalted at Last

The prophecy in Ezekiel is one of hope, contrasting sharply with the judgmental themes of the earlier portion of the chapter. But not only is the substance different; the situation of those who heard the message was also radically different. For the earlier message of judgment, those who heard it still had the opportunity to repent. Now the time of repentance has passed, in a sense; for the chosen people. This statement concerning God taking a branch and planting it on Mt. Zion is a statement of total grace. It is declared to exiles who have no hope, for whom there is no future. Its substance remains a mystery, in detail, but gives new grounds to look towards the future.

²² Thus says the Lord God:

I myself will take a sprig
from the lofty top of a cedar;
I will set it out.

I will break off a tender one
from the topmost of its young twigs;

I myself will plant it
on a high and lofty mountain.

²³ On the mountain height of Israel
I will plant it,
in order that it may produce boughs and bear fruit,
and become a noble cedar.

Under it every kind of bird will live;
in the shade of its branches will nest
winged creatures of every kind.

²⁴ All the trees of the field shall know
that I am the Lord.

I bring low the high tree,
I make high the low tree;

I dry up the green tree
and make the dry tree flourish.

I the Lord have spoken;
I will accomplish it.

This is the word of the Lord

ALL: THANKS BE TO GOD

Reading from the Good News (Gospel) Mark 4:26–34

Mark has arranged the parable discourse so that it transports the audience from an initial emphasis on the proclamation of Jesus to a foreshadowing of his passion and its results. Jesus, who was handed over, scourged, and executed, was not the military leader and king that some groups were expecting. Instead of a cedar they got a shrub. Nevertheless, the kingdom of God will become manifest through him. The shrub will be capacious enough for the birds of the air to make nests in its branches.

Two Parables On Seeds

²⁶ He also said, “The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, ²⁷ and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. ²⁸ The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. ²⁹ But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.”

³⁰ He also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it?”

³¹ It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth;

³² yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

³³ With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; ³⁴ he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

L: This is the Gospel of the Lord:

ALL: All praise be to you Lord Jesus Christ.

Hymn (TIS 382) Now the green blade rises

1. Now the green blade rises
from the buried grain,
wheat that in the dark earth
many days has lain:
love lives again,
that with the dead has been:

*Love has come again,
like wheat that springs
up green.*

2. In the grave they laid him,
Love whom hate had slain,
thinking that he never
would awake again,
laid in the earth,
like grain that sleeps unseen.

Love has come again, ...

3. Up he sprang at Easter,
like the risen grain,
he who for the three days
in the grave had lain,
raised from the dead
my living Lord is seen:
Love has come again, ...

4. When our hearts are wintry,
grieving, or in pain,
then your touch can call us
back to life again —
fields of our hearts
that dead and bare have been:

Love has come again, ...

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Address: Rev Paul Cameron

I hope everyone was able to enjoy the snow this week. I hope you kept warm and admired the quiet and shape changing nature of the snowfall.

Dargan Changed considerably. Black stumps assumed new shapes. The rough ground became smooth and crisp to walk on. That which we knew became something else.

Our eyes are trained to see one familiar image. But if someone points out another, all of a sudden, our vision takes in the new image, and our whole perspective is radically changed.

Take a look at these. What do you see?



How many see a face?
How many see a woman walking into a town?
Now that I pointed it out, how many can see both?



What do you see in this photo?
How many see a skull?
How many a little girl in the forest?
Both?

These are relatively easy ones to see. But some are harder. But it's the art of taking one perspective and pointing out another in the same image.

I like to call this re-imagining, although it's really more of a re-imagining of the image at hand. It's the skill to take a familiar image and help people see a different one in the same picture.

In a sense, this is the genius of Jesus. Jesus loved re-imagining scripture. He would take some familiar image or metaphor of scripture, and then suddenly, he would illuminate a new, usually somehow subversive one in its place, and voila! Shock! Confusion! A shaking up of reality, and a shifting of truth!

One of those times Jesus does this is with the parable of the "mustard seed," a tiny but mighty parable (of course!) appearing in all three synoptic gospels. In the parable, Jesus introduces a mustard seed, a tiny seed, but when planted, becomes the mightiest and a tree sturdy and wide enough to house birds perching in its branches. Well maybe?

Now that's a line the Hebrew people will remember This line alone would have taken people immediately to Ezekiel and God's parable of the cedar tree. But with a significant twist!

And there is a big difference between a cedar and mustard!

Here is the cedar of Lebanon.



Here is the mustard.



The cedar is a huge, strong, sturdy tree that grows in the high mountains of Lebanon. Some grow up to 30metres high and 3metres around. They smell aromatic, and they live forever. They tower over everything. They are regal and lofty.

The mustard is essentially a field plant that can grow into a small, spindly tree, low to the ground. They aren't high or lofty.

But they have generation power! The power of numbers, the power to regenerate themselves to the max, and quickly!

Not pretty, not sturdy, and not something you'd put in your beautiful garden maybe. But hardy and can fill field after field, can grow anywhere, can sustain in any kind of weather.

What does that change do to the established image of the sprig planted by God?

²² Thus says the Lord God:

I myself will take a sprig
from the lofty top of a cedar;...

I will plant it,

in order that it may produce boughs and bear fruit,
and become a noble cedar.

Under it every kind of bird will live;
in the shade of its branches will nest
winged creatures of every kind.

In Ezekiel the passages before this promise are a message of deserved chastisement. He then passes to the promise of restoration.

The cedar of Israel is not dead. God would, take the highest branch, tender and slender though it might be, the true heir of David's house, and deal with it far differently than the Chaldean conqueror had done. The latter had carried off the branch to Babylon. God would plant his branch upon the "mountain of the height of Israel" (Isa. 2:2; Micah 4:1). It

was not to be as a willow in a low place, but to flourish, true to its origin as a cedar, so that “all fowl of every wing” should dwell in the shadow of its branches.

As with like prophecies in Isaiah, the words paint an ideal never historically realized, but finding a partial fulfilment in the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple.

The prophecies merge further in the still unfulfilled vision of the kingdom of the Messiah and the restoration of Israel.

As the cedar of Lebanon stands here for the royal house of David, so the other “trees” represent the surrounding nations. (You might remember that as we sing our last hymn today.)

All the trees of the field” will acknowledge Yahweh’s unparalleled sovereignty and power. Worldwide there will be an acknowledgment of Israel’s God. This is the primary goal of Yahweh’s plan to reestablish and glorify David’s line. The great reverser, who brings low the high tree and exalts the low tree, thereby demonstrates that power that transcends every human expectation.

The Nation State of Israel today retains the hope of the physical restoration of David’s Kingdom. “Power and Majesty – exalted God” – The Cedar of Lebanon.

The expectation today and at the time of Jesus

But Jesus tells a different parable. Jesus re-images Ezekiel’s parable of the cedar, and doesn’t just change the focus, but changes the tree itself! Now when we look at the “painting” God provides, we no longer see the tall, sturdy, thick, stable cedar tree on the hill –the symbol of a powerful and Temple centred homeland Israel. In its place, we see a lowly, spindly, wily, common mustard seed, native to the fields of the Mediterranean basin –not a cultivated tree, or a stately tree, but essentially an insidious weed, capable of germinating quickly and pervasively, traveling far and wide, in which perhaps a bird could perch, but definitely not make a permanent home.

This is a traveling plant, a plant with no definite place as its home or root, but a plant that can exist in any place or clime, can put down roots in every soil or culture –in every heart. It’s a “pilgrim” plant. For the “seed” planted is the primary metaphor of God’s inscription upon the heart –the seed of the Torah planted within the human heart. Not on a hill, but in a field, and all spreading wildly from one very, tiny, miniscule seed.

For it only takes a “spark” to kindle the Holy Spirit fire of faith within the hearts of people everywhere, whether rich or poor, Greek or Jew, common or not. For all are “in common” in the Lord’s “vineyard.”

For Jesus, the smallest of seeds (not just Israel, but the smallest of people, the least of these, the outcast, and the lowly, and the common, and the humblest) will germinate the greatest of faith. And the field weed will become the largest of garden plants, a tree in which birds can perch –find “footing” in the scriptures of Israel.

From the Temple of Israel to the Heart of Israel –this is the promise of God. The kingdom, says Jesus, is not the Temple in Jerusalem. The kingdom of Israel is within us and in the people of God’s world.

How is your garden growing? How is your world garden growing? What's its state?

You don't need to be powerful, have great status, or even be of a certain place or people to be a child of God. You need faith, and what was small will grow large within you! The mustard may not be the prettiest tree, or the tallest, or the strongest physically. But it has the generating power of an uncontained virus, and the hardiness of yeast. And it will never be contained. And it will never lose faith or become unrooted from the One True God. But will reproduce that strength of faith in all future peoples and generations.

“And as for me, this is my covenant with them,” says the Lord: “My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children's offspring,” says the Lord, “from this time forth and forevermore.”

The people in Jesus' time were a “mustard” people. Jesus knew this. Jesus re-imagined their perspective to understand that God's love and mercy was to be given to all people of all places and cultures.

Today, perhaps we'd be a thistle people, or a dandelion people, or perhaps we'd be a “viral” people, or a “social media thumbs up” kind of people. But no matter what your metaphor, the image Jesus presents us with is one of God's everlasting love and mercy, known and acknowledged not just by one people, but by a faithful people, people who are called to spread that love to all cultures, all peoples, and throughout all generations in every way possible.

That's a world re-imagined in the image of Jesus.

We are presented in our time with a mission field --a huge mission field, in which our fields are fallow, and faith is sparse. Or faith does not know where to place its roots. We need once more to become sowers of tiny seeds. Or planters of subtle hints, and tweets. Or imparters of vaccines of hope. Or image-makers of faith, who can impact the world with the salvation story of Jesus. For once it takes hold, it cannot be rooted out. But will serve as a healing balm for all people.



Our Response To The "Word" ..

Hymn (Tune ode to Joy?)

1. In the bulb there is a flower;
in the seed, an apple tree;
in cocoons, a hidden promise:
butterflies will soon be free!
In the coldness of the winter
there's a spring that waits to be,
unrevealed until its season,
something God alone can see.
2. There's a song in every silence,
seeking word and melody;
there's a dawn in every darkness,
bringing hope to you and me.
From the past will come the future;
what it holds, a mystery,
unrevealed until its season,
something God alone can see.
3. In our end is our beginning;
in our time, infinity;
in our doubt there is believing;
in our life, eternity.
In our death, a resurrection;
at the last, a victory,
unrevealed until its season,
something God alone can see.

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Verse 1, 'in the cold and snow of winter' changed to 'in the coldness of the winter'
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Offering - money, selves, and our prayers.

As the offering is brought forward we stand and sing – The Doxology

**Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
praise God, all creatures here below,
praise God above, you heavenly host,
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.**

Thomas Ken 1637–1711 alt.
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Prayers of Intercession

Loving Spirit

As we open our hearts and minds in prayer today, we are aware of many changes around us.

Just as dry leaves fall in our gardens so new sprouts begin to break through green spikes announce the energetic cycle of life.

So too our lives are daily responding to the varying cycles of youth, middle age, mature years and health limitations.

Give us hope in the knowledge that these predictable passages can hold renewal through the Spirit lived out around us in daily reflection, fellowship, worship and song and shared fortifying companionship and family and extended family.

We give thanks for the hours of meetings and leadership planning in our church, presbytery and Synod may this work seek to equip us all as Your followers to live meaningful lives in our church and wider community.

We are thankful for the music makers and displayers of song in our congregation who give hours of service to enrich our souls and enliven our worship.

L: Lord Hear us

P: May our lives continue to reflect Your Renewing Spirit

We give further thanks for the variety of gifts within the laity in our church family which enrich and enhance through reflective Retreats and mid-week Reflections and the significant planning and spiritual guidance by Louise Mattay and Carolyn Emilsen and her team.

We are mindful of Lay and Pastoral Visiting Team and for the input given by Mark Hillis. We further acknowledge the value of the Pastoral and Elders input and encouragement in our church family.

For the variety of loving tasks which knit together over time our church family carried out by all of the laity we are graced and sometimes unaware of.

L: Lord Hear us

P: May our lives continue to reflect Your Renewing Spirit

We are thankful for the new life and energy which our minister Myung brings to her ministry as she takes on her wise guidance in ministry and quiet initiatives readily and seamlessly shared amongst us. We are truly graced by her significant experience and insights.

We are genuinely thankful for the ministers and laity who have served during this transition period which has led to Myung's placement in this church and community.

L: Lord Hear us

P: May our lives continue to reflect Your Renewing Spirit

As we bring our best intentions to the new plans and initiatives in Junction 142's ongoing work we give thanks for the voluntary hours served and pray for ongoing funding. Give renewed health and strength to John Cox in the challenging time of renovation. We are further thankful for the years of committed Treasurer's service Kerry brings to the tasks there and in this congregation.

May your Spirit of Love and Compassion continue in the committee guiding this service as they plan outreach and action and community engagement.

Fortify the work of Open Table and the weekly input of Margaret Neville and the volunteer base as an ongoing support to this work and integral part of the life sustaining food services in the Blue Mountains. Strengthen the work of children's and parents' education and nurturing through the consistent work of Denise Cameron and Suzie Christie and the team of volunteers as they engage and equip parents and children in learning and involvement and leadership.

Now we pray for all members of our congregation in their daily and varied work tasks may they be and invigorated in their life journeys. Help us to engage and support each other through ready communication and care.

We focus now on those in our prayers listed in quiet reflection.

L: Lord Hear us

P: May our lives continue to reflect Your Renewing Spirit

We bring thanks for the enthusiasm engendered in the new Leura Uniting Environment Group. May this group find new pathways and insights for our church and community in the urgent struggle to sustain our precious environment.

We are grateful for Myung's leadership in convening and connecting us with the engaging educational screen and zoom material educational content.

We give thanks for Ross's significant prompting and input into Councils strategic planning. May this congregation find renewed hope in future education and action as we also connect with the Blue Mountains Sustainable Community as able.

We are stunned by the extent of domestic violence and as the members of our church involved in the "Enough us" Enough Rally we bring our gratitude for an aware Blue Mountains group of services struggling to address and call out this ongoing tide of senseless abuse. We pray for those amongst us who live with the scars of pervading damage and memories.

May our laws bring more prompt redress to this sad and too often repeated scourge.

L: Lord Hear us

P: May our lives continue to reflect Your Renewing Spirit

Our world at large presents so many frightening and desperate scenes. As fear is fanned by misinformed citizens and old hatred and racial biases surface and erupt, we reel at their entrenchment. There seems so few answers with this horror of war and the disparity of political twists and turns and yet we want to believe in Your message of renewal.

Even in the tatters of broken promises and mismanaged directives prompt us to find in the research and finding of cures new life sustaining hope.

Where there is closed thinking by leaders focused more on outdated sources who persist in pursuing financial gain over human need may we be reinvigorated to turn the tide by engaging in just causes and actions.

In Noel Davis (whose recent death as a friend and erstwhile launcher of insightful poems in this church community) we can discern Your Spirit so needed to sustain us as we move forward in our daily lives.

The Pain of Re-Creation

Transitions are painful times
their outcomes uncertain
Our trust is they are graced times
that we emerge from the womb
of the long dark winter
into the spring of life renewing
more open to the Spirit
freer to choose our heart's way

There comes awareness
of a trusting, life scarred Companion
with wisdom from the Book of Years

'Know as you come closer to God
your dross and pretence are seared away
as you are refined in the crucible of life till all that remains is what has been motivated and nurtured by
love'

The Lord's Prayer

(You might like to use this version, but please use the version that is most significant in your
Christian Journey. It doesn't matter if different versions are heard.)

**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 755 Trees of the field

You shall go out with joy
and be led forth in peace,
and the mountains and the hills
shall break forth in singing.
There'll be shouts of joy,
and the trees of the field shall clap,
shall clap their hands,
and the trees of the field
shall clap their hands,
and the trees of the field
shall clap their hands,
and the trees of the field
shall clap their hands,
and you'll go out with joy.

Steffi Geiser Rubin 1950–
based on Isaiah 55:12

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Benediction: