

Seacliff Uniting Church: 26 April 2020 – Easter 2

Conducted by Lay Preacher, Susan Plein

Welcome and Call to worship [Maureen]

We gather to worship in spirit with the Kurna people of the Adelaide plains, whose spirituality and ongoing care of country we respect and acknowledge.

Welcome to worship with the Seacliff UC community, wherever you are and whoever you are. A special welcome to our preacher for today Susan Plein, a lay preacher whose home church is Marion UC. We look forward to the message she has to share with us.

The God of open arms welcomes us to this time of community and worship. We are invited to experience forgiveness, community, reconciliation, and an overwhelming sense of the love that God pours out upon all his children. May we feel that love in this time of worship, may we share it with one another, and may we leave this worship time committed to sharing God's love in our world.

In Christ's name we pray Amen

Song TiS 647 – Comfort, Comfort

*Comfort, comfort all my people
With the comfort of my Word.
Speak it tender to my people:
all your sins are taken away.*

Though your tears be rivers running,
though your tears be an ocean full,
though you cry with the hurt of living:
comfort, comfort.

Every valley shall be lifted,
every mountain shall be low,
every rough place will be smoother:
comfort, comfort.

*Comfort, comfort all my people
With the comfort of my Word.
Speak it tender to my people:
all your sins are taken away.*

Though your eyes see only darkness,
though your eyes can see no light,
though your eyes see pain and sorrow:
comfort, comfort.

Every night will have its morning,
every pain will have an end,
every burden will be lightened:
comfort, comfort.

*Comfort, comfort all my people
With the comfort of my Word.
Speak it tender to my people:
all your sins are taken away.*

Together in Song © Words and music Robin Mann
(inspired by Isaiah 40)

Prayers of Adoration & Confession

All-encompassing God, your goodness extends throughout creation, to the edges of the cosmos.

Prince of Peace, your loving arms welcome and embrace all, and comfort us in our need.

Redeemer Jesus, your grace breaks down our defences, and fills our hearts with the joy of eternity.

We praise you for your goodness, your love, and your grace. We open our hearts and hands to you now, and ask your Spirit to breathe into our lives.

Lord, we are in unsettled times. We know you are constant.

We find ourselves out of routine. We know your love endures forever.

We are worried and uncertain. We look to you to calm our fears.

We grieve for our lost way of life. We look to Jesus as the Way, the Truth, the Life.

We praise you for your mercy and your forgiveness. As we live in the valley, we call on you to once again sustain us with your endless grace, and to strengthen our resolve and our will to live in the love of Jesus no matter our circumstances. Amen.

Reflection 1

I'm not an inherently organized individual, but I sure do love the feeling of being organized. And it's pretty essential in order for me to keep my head above water. I'm a mother of two, I work full-time, I study part-time, and I have church commitments, including worship leading and preaching. Throw in keeping in touch with friends and family, and it's safe to say I am pretty busy most of the time.

I find myself relying more and more on my Google Calendar these days. All of its neat, colour-coding glory results in my mind no longer feeling like a kitchen junk drawer!

But I still remember the day a few weeks ago when this whole COVID-19 thing began to well and truly affect all our lives. Going through my calendar and clicking "delete" on nearly every recurring event was rather unsettling.

In such a short amount of time, things have changed quite considerably for us all. We are re-thinking how we perform simple tasks such as going to the supermarket. We are finding creative work-arounds to now-common obstacles. We are discovering new hobbies and activities to replace the ones no longer available to us. We are interacting with our neighbours and friends and families in ways we hadn't before. And we are "doing church" differently.

For creatures of habit (like myself), all of this seems to be proving difficult. If we have always done something a particular way, it can be disorienting to do it differently. "Doing church" differently has been really disorienting for a lot of people. We take comfort in the rituals and the traditions, the familiar phrases and actions, the community.

Now these things, shaped by faith, are good things. But I believe that God, in his dynamic love and limitless grace, is using this situation as a challenge. Have we been relegating "church" to that hour or two on a Sunday morning? To that building? To that group of people? To those particular rituals and words and songs?

What does church look like now? What does community look like now? How do we manifest Jesus in our lives?

Scripture [Maureen] Luke 24:13-35 (NRSV) – The Walk to Emmaus

¹³Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" ¹⁹He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. ²²Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. ²⁴Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but

they did not see him.”²⁵ Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” ³³ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴ They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Reflection 2

These days, the story of Jesus can only be read knowing the ending. The gospels of Matthew and Mark both refer to Jesus as Messiah within verse 1 – talk about a spoiler! We know from the very start that we are hearing the story of the Anointed One, the one sent by God. We know that the story of Jesus doesn’t end on Good Friday.

But those disciples on their way to Emmaus? They didn’t know.

They knew that Jesus was someone special. They knew he was a great teacher and prophet.

And they knew that the religious leaders had him unjustly executed by the Romans. They imagined that the promise they had seen in him faltered and fizzled out when he drew his last breath. And as verse 21 says, they knew that they had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.

Jesus would often discourage people from publicly declaring him the Messiah, and this may have been because the word “messiah” is a loaded term. For the Jews who had been exiled and enslaved and ruled by oppressive forces for so long, the Messiah, to them, meant a grand king on a white stallion, leading the charge, swinging a sword of justice to slay the oppressors and restore Jerusalem to its former glory. *That* was their idea of Messiah. *That* is how the day is saved, *that* is how God will restore his chosen people.

But Jesus was not that kind of Messiah. He came to Jerusalem not on a stallion but on a donkey. He restored God’s people not with a mighty army but with an overwhelming love. Jesus was not a cruel and powerful king, but a suffering servant.

Jesus was not what the world expected, but the everlasting love of God was always firmly at the heart of his ministry, and *that* is how the day was saved. *That* is how God restored his chosen people.

Right now, we are in unexpected times. And we, the people of God, are being called to worship and gather and reflect and love in different ways. That can be a little bit scary or worrisome for a creature of habit such as myself, but I am also excited for this opportunity to see how God will bless and mature us in these uncertain times, as he comes to us not in the old traditions of the past, but in the new traditions we are making now.

Those two disciples on the road to Emmaus met Jesus after he had risen. We don’t know much about them, but they would have spent time with him over the years, listening to him speak and maybe witnessing some of his miracles. But, despite this, and even though they walked and talked with him for some time along the road, they didn’t recognise him at first.

Were they too shaken by recent events to entertain the concept of a risen Jesus?

Did they dismiss the burning in their hearts, assuming the moment would pass?

It wasn't until he broke bread with them later that night that they knew who he was. It wasn't until a moment of gathering, of community, of fellowship. *That's* when they were able to see that the risen Christ had been with them the whole time.

Are we too shaken by what's going on in the world around us to entertain the concept of a risen Jesus giving us strength and creativity to be the people of God in these days?

Are we too dismissive of the new ways, failing to see God's love shining through them?

Gathering for a meal, for fellowship, is not something we can do in the traditional sense at the moment, but I pray that we will recognise the risen Jesus amongst us as we gather together in new and creative ways. I pray our hearts will burn as he reveals more of himself in scripture. I pray we will continue to look for him in unexpected ways.

Song AT 666 – Where love comes to life

God is perfect in love,
breathing his life in us,
sustaining life by a word,
calling us to love his world.
Lord, increase our faith, make us the place

*Where love comes to life
Jesus church in the world.
Where love comes to life
at home, at work, at play.
We are the place, people of grace
where love comes to life.*

Shock of water and word
disarms our hate and sin.
Holy meal of love,
God's life now within.
Lord, increase our hope, make us the place

*Where love comes to life
Jesus church in the world.*

*Where love comes to life
at home, at work, at play.
We are the place, people of grace
where love comes to life.*

Now, Lord Jesus Christ,
increase your love in us
So your love overflows
to all tribes, skins and tongues.
Lord, increase our love, make us the place

*Where love comes to life
Jesus church in the world.
Where love comes to life
at home, at work, at play.
We are the place, people of grace
where love comes to life.*

All Together All Right © 2011 Words and Music:
Adrian Kitson

Recognition of Offering [Maureen]

We are a generous, giving people, whether it be in our contribution to the ongoing life of the church or the special projects that we undertake, like our support for Tarcisius and the WeDream initiative in Bangla Desh and for the Oodnadatta Faith Community. Many of us contribute with e-giving but for those that don't, the church's banking details have been made available in the newsletter, and our treasurer Dave Greig is happy to help if you're not sure what to do.

We thank God that we are still able to share in this way, and ask a blessing on what we give back for God's use in the world.

Intercessory Prayer and Recognition of Offering [Maureen]

Lord God,
we bring to you our happiness and our weariness,
our disappointments and our hopes,
our needs ,worldly and spiritual,
our friends and those we find ourselves at odds with,
our families and all the strangers we pass, day in, day out,
and all the billions we will neither know nor pass,
the places that we most love,
and the places that disturb us most profoundly,
our memories and our visions of the future,
our highest successes and our most miserable failures,
the help we offer and the help we need.

We bring you everything,
and tip it out in front of you.

And now we pause a while in silence,
waiting for you to show us what we need to understand...

Lord God, light up the things we need to see,
brush to one side the things we need to put out of our minds,
show us the doors we need to open
and the paths we need to take,
and be beside us as we go
so that the work we do is your work,
and the roads your roads,
leading to your presence.

We ask it in the name of your son,
and our brother,
Jesus Christ
Amen

Roddie Cowie - New Prayers from the Iona Community, Wild Goose 2017

Song AT 157 – Jesus name above all names

Jesus, name above all names
Beautiful Saviour, Glorious Lord
Emmanuel, God is with us
Blessed Redeemer, Living Word.

All Together Again © Naida Hearn (based on Philippians 2:9)

Blessing

The power of God is not lessened by global unrest. The love of God is not limited by traditions or rituals.
The grace of God is not minimised by fear or uncertainty.

May God's power, love and grace enrich your life. May you know the risen Jesus as you love his people.
May the Spirit move you in unexpected and creative ways. And may you be comforted in the knowledge
that Christ walks the road with you now and forever.

Amen.