

Worship for 22nd March Morialta Uniting Church

Malcolm Gordon's CD, *Into the Deep*, explores expressions of faith in the midst of storms, whilst we affirm that Christ is with me, you and us. His song, *Christ Before Me* explores the sense that we are all in this together and that whilst we look to ourselves for staying safe and well, our call is to look out for the other, to you, and then ultimately to us....community

I invite you to listen to Malcolm's song *Christ Before Me*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJD7HfhVMGc>

Prayers for Today (choose one , some or all. Read slowly and quietly. Or read aloud. Stop and pause between prayers)

Let us pray:

The Hurting Places

There is a world of hurt around me today,
And my heart fills with pain.
Sometimes I hear myself saying,
'All I can do is pray'.
And then I remember that praying
Is no small thing.
Sometimes it is the only thing,
The one true thing for this hurting world.
Healing God, send your wholeness,
Loving Christ, your strength,
Holy Spirit, your comforting presence,
To all who hurt,
To all who struggle,
To all who mourn. Amen.

(Source: Beth A. Richardson, [*Christ beside me, Christ within me*](#))

A Prayer in Response to Coronavirus

Gracious and loving God,
Give wisdom and strength to all those in our community and around the world, who are responding to the coronavirus – health professionals, government officials, aged care providers, school leaders.
May those who mourn the loss of loved ones to the virus, be comforted.
May those in our community who are feeling anxious, find peace and reassurance.
May our congregations, and faith communities be places of compassion, attentive to those who are impacted by the coronavirus.

May we be communities of empathy, love and care, in all we face.
Through Christ, our Lord, Amen.

(Source: Dr Deidre Palmer, President, Uniting Church in Australia)

A PRAYER FOR COMPASSION, WISDOM AND STRENGTH

Loving and compassionate God,

You call us to love our neighbours and to be bearers of your hope and grace in our world.

Expand our hearts and vision to respond with compassion to those around us, who are struggling in this time of uncertainty, anxiety, grief and suffering.

Give wisdom and strength to our health workers, and government officials, as they provide leadership in bringing our country through this crisis.

We bring before you and into our hearts and minds:

- Those whose work and income are uncertain
- Those who are isolated
- Those who are fearful of an unknown future
- Those who live in situations of domestic violence, and whose isolation increases the control of their violent partners
- Those who are homeless, and all those who offer them support and care
- Those who are involved in aged care – our agency leaders, staff and residents and their loved ones
- Businesses whose futures are uncertain – their leaders and staff
- School staff and students
- Those with health conditions that put them at greater risk

Give wisdom and care-filled discernment to all our Church leaders – our Councils, and local congregations, as we seek to creatively live out our worship, witness and service in ways that offer Christ's life-giving love and presence.

Strengthen and sustain us to be your people – shaped by your abundant grace, bearers of your generosity and overflowing love.

Through Christ our Light and Hope, we pray, Amen.

Prayer by Fr. Richard Hendricks, OFM

Lockdown

Yes there is fear.

Yes there is isolation.

Yes there is panic buying.

Yes there is sickness.

Yes there is even death.

But,

They say that in Wuhan after so many years of noise
You can hear the birds again.
They say that after just a few weeks of quiet
The sky is no longer thick with fumes
But blue and grey and clear.
They say that in the streets of Assisi
People are singing to each other
across the empty squares,
keeping their windows open
so that those who are alone
may hear the sounds of family around them.
They say that a hotel in the West of Ireland
Is offering free meals and delivery to the housebound.
Today a young woman I know
is busy spreading fliers with her number
through the neighbourhood
So that the elders may have someone to call on.
Today Churches, Synagogues, Mosques and Temples
are preparing to welcome
and shelter the homeless, the sick, the weary
All over the world people are slowing down and reflecting
All over the world people are looking at their neighbours in a new way
All over the world people are waking up to a new reality
To how big we really are.
To how little control we really have.
To what really matters.
To Love.
So we pray and we remember that
Yes there is fear.
But there does not have to be hate.
Yes there is isolation.
But there does not have to be loneliness.
Yes there is panic buying.
But there does not have to be meanness.
Yes there is sickness.
But there does not have to be disease of the soul

Yes there is even death.
But there can always be a rebirth of love.
Wake to the choices you make as to how to live now.
Today, breathe.
Listen, behind the factory noises of your panic
The birds are singing again
The sky is clearing,
Spring is coming,
And we are always encompassed by Love.
Open the windows of your soul
And though you may not be able
to touch across the empty square,
Sing.

- written by Fr. Richard Hendrick, OFM
March 13th 2020

Scripture

Psalm 46

- ¹ God is our refuge and strength,
a very present^[a] help in trouble.
- ² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;
- ³ though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult. *Selah*
- ⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.
- ⁵ God is in the midst of the city;^[b] it shall not be moved;
God will help it when the morning dawns.
- ⁶ The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.
- ⁷ The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge. ^[c] *Selah*
- ⁸ Come, behold the works of the LORD;
see what desolations he has brought on the earth.
- ⁹ He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields with fire.
- ¹⁰ "Be still, and know that I am God!
I am exalted among the nations,
I am exalted in the earth."

¹¹ The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge

John 9 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

⁹ As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³ Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. ⁴ We^[a] must work the works of him who sent me^[b] while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, ⁷ saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸ The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹ Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." ¹⁰ But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" ¹¹ He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." ¹² They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. ¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."

¹⁸ The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹ and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" ²⁰ His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹ but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." ²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus^[c] to be the Messiah^[d] would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

²⁴ So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." ²⁵ He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." ²⁶ They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" ²⁷ He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" ²⁸ Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." ³⁰ The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." ³⁴ They answered

him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"^[e] ³⁶ He answered, "And who is he, sir?"^[f] Tell me, so that I may believe in him." ³⁷ Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." ³⁸ He said, "Lord,^[g] I believe." And he worshiped him. ³⁹ Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." ⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

Reflecting on Scripture and our lives

We are indeed in and getting further into darker times, times of uncertainty, confusion, even fear and anxiety around the response to the Covid-19 virus. For some it might feel like the shadows are growing larger and we might be feeling that we are having trouble seeing clearly.

The Gospel reading for this week is the narrative of the encounter between Jesus and a man who was blind and how Jesus restored his sight. Stepping aside from a literal reading of the text to that of looking underneath the text I wonder if this is more about hope than physical healing. Hope in the sense of **seeing light in the darkness**. For in the person and ministry of Jesus comes hope, light, and peace. The man's darkness or blindness can be taken as our lives in the current social situation that we all find ourselves in. In the midst of the man's darkness or blindness comes the Light of the World. The Light is present in the darkness.

I am reminded also of Psalm 46 in these days because when I read this Psalm I note the trouble, bad situation, things not going well or right. But then the psalm moves to an affirmation that in the midst of this comes rivers of joy, "the Lord of Hosts is with us" is the cry! Finally the psalmist moves us to prayerful reflection and to take an active prayer attitude of being still, stop, pause, wait and acknowledge that God is in the midst, is with us, or in the lyrics of Malcolm Gordon, *Christ before me, Christ before you, Christ before us*. Psalm 46, in a way echoes Psalm 23, that even in the valley of the shadow of death (darkness, virus) you are with me, with you, with us.

Lent is the traditional time to 'enter' into the 'shadows' and reflect and pray, meditate and engage in practices as we follow the Christ towards the cross and into and out of Easter. What 'spiritual' practices might you find, or even begin through this time of uncertainty? One might be to reflect more deeply on what it means to **Love thy neighbour**. To establish your own network of pastoral care, contact, look out for, communicate with, support and show practical love. Maybe we could go against the wave of panic buying and hoarding.

Where can we be the light of Christ in a darkened world? How do we see? What do we see? Do we see opportunity to be Christ's hands and ears and eye within the shadow times. Do we allow God's light (compassion, love, hope and peace) to change how we see and act?

We are all in the midst of the poor, the blind, the troubled, the anxious, the lonely, the sick, during these times. I pray that the light of Christ, in me and you, will be a source of illumination in me, in you, in us.

Prayer:

Keep us from our self-imposed blindness, Jesus;
hold our heads firmly in your grasp so we cannot look away
from those who are broken;
pull us forward so that we cannot avoid
encountering those who are suffering;
break our hearts, so that we cannot resist
the tears of those who grieve;

Help us, Jesus, to be always seeing;
and seeing, help us to find a way
to act in mercy toward the hurting,
to act in defiance of the corrupt,
and to act in hope for the healing of our world.

Amen. <https://sacredise.com/prayers/type/intercession/seeing/>

From the President of the Uniting Church Dr D Palmer

The message of Easter speaks into all of our contexts. God's grace poured out into our world, through the Risen Christ brings hope and love into the deepest corners of despair and suffering, and brings transformation and new life, through the steadfast love of God for every one and the whole creation.

Concluding act of prayerful worship reflecting on the 23rd Psalm.

Click on the link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cn2zKKhhF3I>

Psalm 23

¹ The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;^[a]

³ he restores my soul.^[b]

He leads me in right paths^[c]
for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk through the darkest valley,^[d]
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—
they comfort me.
⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
⁶ Surely^[e] goodness and mercy^[f] shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
my whole life long.^[g]

WORD OF MISSION

May God our Creator renew in us the creative Spirit that brings healing and life to all creation.

May Jesus the Christ, sustain us in boundless grace and love

May the Holy Spirit fill us with courage to be bearers of God's hope in the world, Amen.