

BORONIA PARK UNITING CHURCH SUNDAY WORSHIP 24 MAY 2020



Preparing for Worship

THIS WEEK, as we head towards Pentecost, I request you to look back at Easter and the Lenten period and its message to you. What do you think of the weeks as they have transpired? Have they left an imprint on you? Nothing in life is as comfortable as being at home. Home is where you understand many things. Home is where your heart can be open and where you can slow down and learn and love and care. I love you to think of that. What does Easter mean to you? What does Jesus mean to you? What does the resurrection mean to you?

Acknowledgement for the First Peoples

We would like to acknowledge and pay respect to the traditional owners of this land and home on which we live the Life that the Risen Lord Jesus Christ has given for us. This land which has been a home for countless generations of the traditional owners has become the place and home of our present congregation as we live and love in this present moment rejoicing in learning the love of Jesus.

Greeting to Members

We greet each other in our congregation, especially those in our hearts who may not be with us anymore and those who were part of our congregation at Boronia Park. We think of those who have recently passed and those who we don't see very often. We need to sometimes

cherish the moments that we have with people we don't see very often.
Please spend a moment to reflect on these special moments.

Opening Prayer

Please join together in the Call to Worship.

The world belongs to God,
the earth and all its people.

Love and peace come together,
justice and peace join hands.

How good and how lovely it is
to live together in unity.

If the Lord's disciples keep silent
these stones would shout aloud.

Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise. Amen.

Assembly Song 1 – Morning Has Broken (156)

Sing the hymn that praises the beauty of God's creation that we cannot
dominant but live as part of it.

Morning has broken
like the first morning;
blackbird has spoken
like the first bird.

Praise for the singing,
praise for the morning,
praise for them, springing
fresh from the word.

Sweet the rain's new fall
sunlit from heaven,
like the first dewfall
on the first grass.

Praise for the sweetness
of the wet garden,
sprung from completeness
where his feet pass.

Mine is the sunlight;
mine is the morning
born of the one light
Eden saw play.

Praise with elation,
praise every morning,
God's recreation
of the new day.

Words and music from Enlarged Songs of Praise 1931 by permission Oxford University Press
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The Peace

The peace of our God be with you.
And also with you.

Let us find ways to share peace and joy with one another. You might like to make a phone call OR send a message to those we thought and prayed at **GREETING TO MEMBERS**. Let us share Easter hope across our friendship this day.

First Scripture Readings Acts 1:6-14

6 Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

7 He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

9 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 11 “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

Matthias Chosen to Replace Judas

12 Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. 13 When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. 14 They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

For those Young at Heart Talk

Kevin Lee

This is a story or game I have prepared some time ago as we have had some time in social isolation. It is related to the Sermon I have prepared for today.

A few weeks ago sitting in my lounge at home, I tried to count the number of countries I had visited in my life so far. I did so because it will probably be some time before international borders will likely be opened and I wanted to see how many places I could remember. I brought out my globe at home to see if it could aid in my memory. Well I only could remember visiting some 28 countries only.

Now I have travelled widely before for business overseas, but when I counted my trips, I tended to visit the same country many times. So here is a task for you this week, maybe see how many countries you have visited or can remember visiting?

Each time you travel, you always learn something new. It's like reading a book or reading the newspaper or even reading the Bible, you tend to see or learn something new each time you read. I keep telling my kids this as well...

We are going to talk about houses. When I was a child, the house was probably one of the first real objects that I probably knew how to draw. A triangle on top of a square and you pretty much have a house with a roof. Add some more smaller squares and a rectangle and you have a house with windows and a door. Maybe I had watched Play School too many times?

So I'd like all of you to think about places you have been to in the past (for some of us, it might be the long ago past). Do all houses look the same? What are some of the unique house designs you have seen?

I'll say some names of houses from far away places and maybe you can see where they come from? I know some in our congregation are well travelled.

TEEPEE, where is a tepee from? How does it look like? How is it made?

YURT, where is a yurt from? How does it look like? How is it made?

RONDAVEL, where is a rondavel from? How does it look like? How is it made?

BURE, where is a bure from? How does it look like? How is it made?

Think about your own house? Does a house make a home? If not, what makes a house a home? Is a flat screen TV or a fancy modern kitchen and bathroom help make a home? What do you believe in your own circumstances that makes a house a home.

My answer, is the love and care of relationships of the people within your household. It could be the family and maybe your relationship with your

neighbours. Maybe the home could be extended to the street. Maybe the home could be extended beyond the street, to your local community? Love, peace, harmony are all the building blocks of building a home. For some, a home could be a spiritual link to a place or gathering? Home could even be our own church.

Let us pray! Dear God of love and care, let us build homes not only in our house but beyond. In our current challenging times, let us find love and peace in our own homes and find our ways to extend our care for loved ones we miss and cannot see in person wherever they may be. Let us be reminded to have open hearts in all that we do and all that we face. In Jesus name we pray AMEN.

Assembly Song 2 – Amazing Grace (129)

1 Amazing grace (how sweet the sound)
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
was blind, but now I see.

2 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
and grace my fears relieved;
how precious did that grace appear
the hour I first believed!

3 Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come:
'tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
and grace will lead me home.

4 The Lord has promised good to me,
his word my hope secures;
he will my shield and portion be
as long as life endures.

Second Scripture Readings

John 17:1-11

Jesus Prays to Be Glorified

17 After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed:

“Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. 2 For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. 3 Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. 4 I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. 5 And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

Jesus Prays for His Disciples

6 “I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. 7 Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. 8 For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. 9 I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. 10 All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. 11 I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you.

Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Reflection on the Scripture

Kevin Lee

What a year 2020 so far has been! Out of the frying pan into the fire. Australians have had a lot to endure with the bushfires of 2019/20 and now we are experiencing a global virus pandemic. So many Australians are struggling with jobs, struggling with isolation, worrying about so many things on so many fronts. But there are people who are also striving even amongst this pandemic, those who seem immune to the huge distractions of society and the economy, those who enjoy the clean air, clearer skies, those who watch the re-greening of a scarred landscape from the bushfires now enjoying a return of the rains. Life is hard sometimes and uncertain and in these recent times, problems which we used to watch in foreign lands and in the comfort of our lounge rooms are now here.

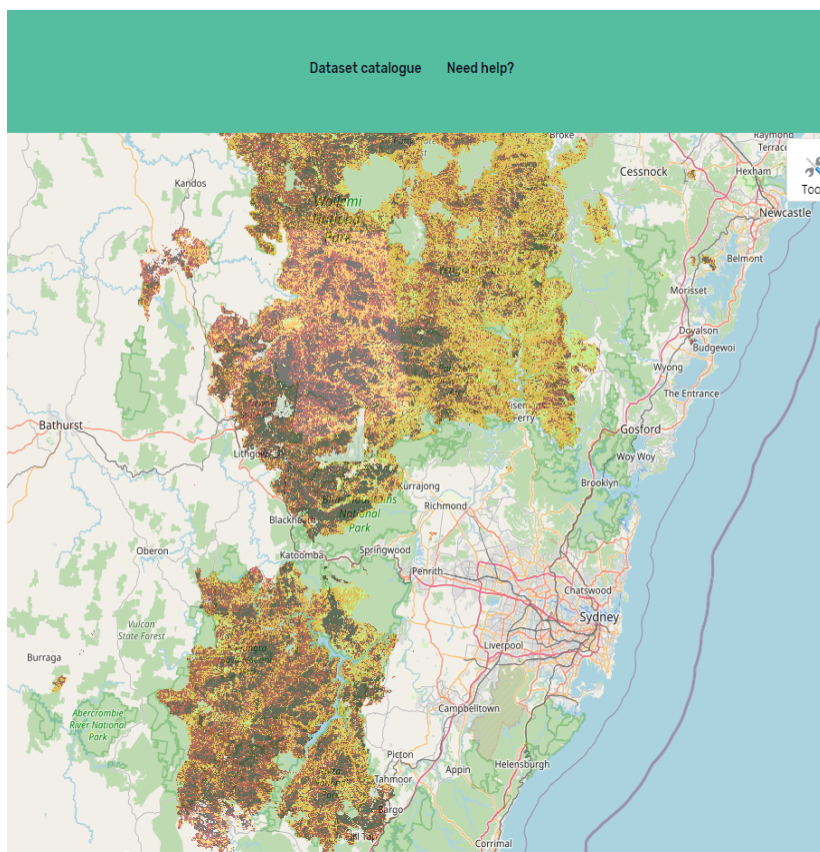
This entire 2020 period has also been a period of déjà vu for me. It is almost like I am living in a dream. Life is turned upside down. A dream which I feel I have lived before.

Back in January/February 2003 the NSW/ACT bushfires were a massive fireball wiping out half of the ACT and into the Snowy Mountains. At this time I was working in the CBD for an Australian/HK joint venture company and was part of the decision making process to send Australian technical staff into Hong Kong during the SARS virus outbreak for urgent engineering work. It was a terrible summer of early 2003 with smoky

bushfires affecting Sydney air quality as well as health concerns for our Australian staff who had to self- isolate themselves for 14 days on return from Hong Kong at certain hotels before they could return to their families at home. It was stressful. Does it sound familiar?

Like many Australians this year, we have pretty much been contained at home. Home. A single, simple word, meaning an abode, a house or even a place where people gather. It can mean a household or a family, an institution or a place of care. I like this latter meaning, a place of care. We like to think our own homes are places of love and care.

This last several months we have seen many people lose their homes and even their lives. Fire started in northern NSW even as early as September 2019 and worked its way down south through Christmas and the New Year to the South Coast and even burning into the Australian Alps.



The big fire near Sydney one was the Gosper Mountain fire and then the Green Gully fire which threatened to burn the entire Blue Mountains National Park in and around the famous towns of Katoomba and Blackheath. You can see the scale of the fire damage (and environmental damage in the satellite imagery) compared to the size of the Sydney metropolitan area.

Homes for us are so central to our existence and how we live, love, learn and be nurtured and how we grow. So the home is more than a house or a building, it is a place where there is care for family and even friends. So seeing so much bushfires over the summer and the destruction to property and homes is quite hard to take BUT also was the devastation to homes of wildlife both flora and fauna. Hearing wildlife losses numbering a billion lost to the bushfires is almost unimaginable to conceive.

For over forty thousand years, the Australian indigenous people have survived this often brutal but beautiful landscape and made it their home, across the vastness of this land. From coastal abundance to deserts, to tropical rainforests and the seasonal abundance of alpine areas. To the indigenous people, the land is their home and their spiritual connection. They did not need a roof or walls like a building. Sure they occupied caves, but the land was their home, the land was their grocery store, their water supply, their life. It was like the land was a home where the door was always open and was free to be shared by those who visited. I feel for the First Peoples whose land was taken and were then dispossessed. Loss of home is loss of love and care and loss of culture and traditional education.

For someone like me who loves the landscapes of Australia and always keen to go bush (all year round), not only do you get to see and visit some amazing places but you do see the evidence of the First Peoples wherever you travel in the bush. Whether it is ancient rock art on sandstone cliffs, ancient rock grindings or tree carvings, even ancient bush trails following native animals, you can sense a connection that the land has to its people and the reminder that the past links to the present. You can feel a sense of home, a place where there are spiritual links and cultural links. It is almost like the equivalent of the spiritual home or church for the indigenous people was the land.

Since European settlement in Australia, many of the European settlers who started to love the bush and wanted to make a living in the bush forged an existence from its natural resources whether it was grazing, gold mining, timber farming or even in more recent years great national projects like the Snowy Hydro Scheme where huge numbers of local Australians and immigrants were employed to divert the huge water catchment of the Snowy River and its numerous tributaries and divert it west to the farming regions of the western interior (the Murray River), in turn generating electricity.

The Snowy Mountains are my favourite place to visit within NSW where we go bushwalking or trekking for days on end in the mountains and valleys. With winters reaching temperature lows of -20C and summers hitting almost 40C, there is not much more extreme places for weather than the Snowy Mountains. One of the cultural highlights of the Snowy Mountains are the 250 odd old huts that dot the entire Kosciuszko National Park and neighbouring Namadgi National Park in the ACT. These old huts are relics of yesterday from a mining, farming or of an early science heritage which serve as a reminder of the bond that the early settlers had with the land. Unlike indigenous people who only visited the alpine areas during summer, early European settlers left reminders of time long ago with these timber, stone or metal huts. Some have been rebuilt after many fires and some have withstood over a century being battered by the most severe Australian weather.

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Here are some photos of these homes without permanent residents. Today the NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service manages the land around the hut but most of the caretaking of the hut itself is undertaken by cross country ski clubs, bushwalking clubs or even private families maybe connected to the original owner or builder. It is now illegal to inhabit these huts as they are for casual visiting or for emergency purposes.



Each time we visit the huts of the Snowy Mountains, we would leave a small message in the old worn dog-eared diary and for huts we have visited before, we would trawl through back many years in the diary looking for our handwriting from yesteryear. It is like reading a story written by numerous visitors (some from overseas) all with a love for the bush. It is a story woven by the travels of many. Mountain huts are like the bush for the indigenous people, it is a home, a refuge from the extreme cold and a lifesaver for some but it leaves a mystery trail of memories from people of all walks of life and all different stages of their life all with a common interest of a love of nature. We have read diaries

of people stuck in these huts for 3-4 days as a continuous snow blizzard raged outside for so long. More than 90% of the huts are 4 hours or up to 3 days walk from a road so there are some really remote huts in very vast places which hardly see any foot traffic at all. Each time I visit the Snowy's in some respects it feels like returning home (a place I love to spend much time).

The sad part of this story are that two of the huts or buildings I have shown above were destroyed just this last summer (razed to the ground or left with one wall standing). Some were world heritage listed and almost 140 years old but will most likely be rebuilt over time. Remember these are huts or crude buildings where no one lives in and can only be used for severe blizzards or for those who are ill on a remote trip. Two of the huts I last visited in November and December 2019 (just weeks before the inferno destroyed them). Like the bush that surrounds them, a small hut amidst the wonderful cathedral of nature outside cannot withstand the elements at every single occasion without our intervention. Like this summer huts are destroyed by fire but a true and loving home will endure in memory of many who will restore these places in time.

Which brings me back to the Gospel reading from John 17 today. Jesus going home. I ask myself, does Jesus have a home? Is heaven a home and our end goal?

I have struggled in the past to understand the notion of heaven and only in the last 10-15 years have I sought to understand a little more. What is this home Jesus is referring to? What is this home where there are many rooms? Is heaven really the afterlife for believers? Is heaven home?

So many questions I have had in my adult life? I even recall back in the late nineties that I consulted the then Catholic parish priest of Hunters

Hill this question as I pondered a move to the Uniting Church. His answer, well it is one of the many sacred mysteries of the church.

In the Hebrew Bible, the first unambiguous reference of an afterlife only occurs in the last chapter of Daniel (around 165 years BC). So for many centuries, people in ancient Israel did not believe in life after death. Yes, authors of the Psalms and other books of the Hebrew Bible often prayed for deliverance from death, but there was no real affirmation of an afterlife till Daniel.

In the time of Jesus' ministry some two centuries after Daniel, a majority of the Jewish people did believe in an afterlife. This stemmed from the continuing persecution and oppression they were experiencing from the powers of the day (like the exiled times of Daniel).

Although the early Christian authors mention Jesus referring to heaven on occasions, Jesus always emphasised the two main tenets of his ministry (i) being reborn and (ii) building the Kingdom of God. I always find the concept of heaven (or an afterlife) a little outdated and maybe a literary expression. I still feel today even with much study on the Bible and contemporary interpretations that many Christians and even non-Christians still see Jesus and Christianity within the framework of what happens after death.

This however was not the mission of Jesus to get people to the afterlife. His mission was to reveal the character of God and to build the Kingdom of God in the now (the present). You can imagine The Kingdom of God would be basically a world where Jesus would be the ruler. It is therefore a challenge for all of us to ensure justice, peace prevails in our unfair world ruled by people of different interests. The Kingdom of God is not about heaven; it is for the Earth. This should not surprise us as we pray

the coming of God's Kingdom on earth everytime we pray the Lord's Prayer. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is already in heaven.

The Book of John also uses the expression "eternal life" as in our Gospel reading today. John 17:3, "Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." This is an English phrase "Eternal life" translated from a Greek phrase that in turn expresses a Jewish notion. Maybe more accurately, "eternal life" actually means "the life of the age to come".

Eternal Life is not referring to the afterlife or a time beyond death BUT to know God and Jesus Christ in the present. Note it is written in the present tense. "Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." I really believe this is so central to our belief in Jesus' notion of the Kingdom of God that eternal life is something we can achieve in the here and now. It only makes sense that what Jesus wants us to achieve is for the here and now. It is a present reality for John, even as it involves a future destiny.

As a Christian that loves to research, I must profess I belong to the group who believes that God does not art in heaven (where the heaven has a void between God and everyone else) but I see that God is a Spirit that lives within us and amongst us. Hence I prefer the language of Paul as in the Book of Acts, We are in God, we live in God, move in God, have our being in God.

So where is Jesus going? Where is the home of Jesus?

The answer? We are also vessels of God's love. A home for God to live in us. Hence the only place where a home for us would only make sense is a room or a home in our hearts.

AMEN.

Let us pray!

Dear God of All Creation, let us follow Jesus in all that we do in our daily lives. Let us consult him daily in our challenges, our wishes and aspirations. Let us be reminded to being reborn to have God central to our lives and cast away our selfish tendencies. Through Jesus we will know God and God will make a home within our hearts. AMEN.

Prayers of the People

Grace Song

Join in the deep reflective prayer that Phoebe prays on behalf of the congregation.

Let us pray:

Lord,
we give you thanks.

We pray to you, Lord,
that you receive praise, thanks and honour
that we offer to you.

We hope that
each and every word of prayer is given
as our peace offering
to your Throne in Heaven, glorifying your name.

In those days,
we have been in very difficult time.

Despite of these changing times,
we give thanks to you Lord
that there are Christ's communities and its people
who seek to find your will for us to be faithful
as Church and Christian.

Lord, we ask you Lord in these times
that you help us to continue our faith journey
by giving us your wisdom and hope
with perseverance and endurance.

We pray that
under this difficult circumstance,
we will continue to try hard
not to be discouraged by the time
that we never experienced
but to be faithful by holding
our brothers and sisters in prayers.

Lord, this moment,
we want to give you thanks more in the prayers.

We thank you,
For letting us see all new things with faith anew
and places where we have had no interest.

We thank you
For making our ears to hear stories untold
and people's voice unsung.

We thank you,
For giving great opportunities to see the values
of sharing what we are given by you,
your gifts and talents
in our daily life.

And we give thanks to you,
that in these changing times
we have learnt a lot about
how much you love the world
and reflected on
what you have done for us and for many.

Lord,
we don't know
when an end of this pandemic comes,
so that we continue to hope that we will live
as Church in our community.

We will be faithful
until your Son Jesus comes back again.

We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ
who is Hope until the end.

Amen.

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 in the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours
now and forever.

Amen.

Assembly Song 3 – All People that on Earth Do Dwell

1 All people that on earth do dwell,
sing to the Lord with cheerful voice:
him serve with mirth, his praise forth tell;
come ye before him and rejoice.

2 Know that the Lord is God indeed;
without our aid he did us make:
we are his folk, he doth us feed,
and for his sheep he doth us take.

3 O enter then his gates with praise,
approach with joy his courts unto;
praise, laud and bless his name always,
for it is seemly so to do.

4 For why* the Lord our God is good;
his mercy is for ever sure;
his truth at all times firmly stood,
and shall form age to age endure.

* 'For why' means 'because'

Words: William Kethe | CCLI #260394

Offering

Let us pray:

Blessed are you,

O Lord our God,

We love your generosity of your creation

Help us to preserve your natural wonders
which are home to so many of your creation

Help us to serve your name and word
as is lived by Jesus with our own generosity
to those less fortunate than ourselves.

Sunday, 24 May 2020

The offering will be used for the congregation's continuing mission and ministry in these changing times. Please make your offering through a Bank Deposit or a personal cheque whichever is convenient to you.

Account Name: Boronia Park Uniting Church

BSB: 634-634

Account: 100023784

Reference: Offering

Please contact Robyn Harvey, Treasurer on 0418 783 290 or robyn.49@bigpond.net.au for more information about how to make Direct Debit.

If you are in a position to help others, Sydney Community Services, where we have donated foods and goods to support the need in our local community, may ask us to donate **ANY pasta sauce or chunk soup cans**. SCS has passed their appreciation for our donation.

And many thank those who have donated for your sharing love and generosity.

Blessings.

Assembly Song 4 – Great is thy Faithfulness

1 Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father;
there is no shadow of turning with thee;
thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not;
as thou hast been thou forever wilt be.

Refrain

Great is thy faithfulness!
Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see:
all I have needed thy hand hath provided--
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

2 Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,
sun, moon, and stars in their courses above
join with all nature in manifold witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.

Great is thy faithfulness!
Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see:
all I have needed thy hand hath provided--
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

3 Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide,
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

Great is thy faithfulness!
Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see:
all I have needed thy hand hath provided--
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Source: Trinity Psalter Hymnal #245
CCLI #260394

Blessing

May the love of God
bless you and keep you;
the mercy and faithfulness of Jesus Christ
be born in your hearts;
and the Holy Spirit create and bring dreams
to reality in your lives.

Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace;
refreshed and renewed
in the eternal love of God.

In the name of Christ.

Amen.