

Email Order of Service 17th May 2020 – Easter 6
for St Lucia Uniting Church congregation in their homes.



Greeting: Christ is risen: he is risen indeed!

Call to Worship -

Now we know for sure that God is not very far from any one of us, for in God we live and move and have our being. Wonderful are you, O God, you have never rejected our prayers nor removed from us your eternal love.

Prayer -

We sing to you, God of grace and love. We sing to you, God of creation, sovereign of all the earth. You surprise us with your resurrection power at work in Jesus life and death, bringing new beginnings, showing up in unexpected places. You surprise us with your resurrection power at work in our lives and in our deaths – places where we have given up hope that you would act. You surprise us with your resurrection power, calling us by name, giving us one another, siblings we didn't know we had in your new community of grace and truth. Now in our praise, our prayers, and in our reading and listening, we are waiting for you to enter our lives again with courage to love one another, with hope and peace and joy to share with your world, for we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

HYMN: AHB 115 Let us sing to the God of salvation (TIS 52)

Scripture Readings: Acts 17: 22-31; 1 Peter 3: 13-22; John 14: 15-21

Prayer of Confession-

Sometimes, O God, your ways are a mystery to us. When we cry out in desperation, we do not always expect you to hear or to act for us. When we suffer for doing the right thing, we complain that you do not notice. Each time we deny or doubt your presence, please forgive us O God. Call us back to find our home and meaning in you. Open our eyes to the suffering of our neighbours and move us to act in love for them. Help us to receive your love in all its fullness and remove from us our fear that we will never have enough love for others, for we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Words of Assurance

In God's great love for us, we have been given the Spirit so that we may be transformed by love and for love. We are loved and forgiven. Thanks be to God!



Sermon – If you love me....

If you love me, you will do as I ask – you will do as I command – you will obey me... Have you heard that claim or something similar? It sounds a little like a tired mother trying to deal with her 3 year old who has learned the word NO and is determined to show independence. Maybe you heard it from a teenager trying to cajole a younger sibling to do something for her. It may have been spoken by a young adult trying to persuade a younger teenage girlfriend to accommodate his wishes. More seriously, it may be the controlling mantra as part of domestic violence. It certainly borders on emotional blackmail to a twenty-first century ear.

As young children, we may want to please our parents or older siblings because we DO love them. For our friends and lovers, we may be more

cautious in evaluating our love compared with our safety or personal desires. What prompted Jesus to set this standard for the behaviour of his friends? How hard might it be to obey him and the commandments he decreed?

“Love one another as I have loved you” seems to sum up most of the more detailed ones, but it sounds a bit abstract. “Forgive your brother or sister forty times seven. Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate or abuse you. Take care of those who are hungry or thirsty, homeless or in prison – visit them and ensure their needs are met with food and clothing. Love God and love your neighbour as you love yourself.” These are high standards for fearful, cautious, self-preserving humans to meet in daily life.

Do you find it difficult to obey Jesus’ commandments? How in your daily life do you find you are not loving Jesus and honouring God? What do you want to do about that?

The disciples in John chapter 14 appear to interrupt Jesus’ teaching asking for clarification and this happens again at 14: 22. Jesus’ teaching in verses 23-31 really clarifies verses 15-21, so I encourage you to read that section of John 14 now.

Jesus knows we are cautious, self-interested humans as adults, especially. Children who are in comfortable, loving families are more likely to be more open to others. Therefore, God and Jesus promise to help us by giving us God’s Holy Spirit – ‘*Paraclete*’ in Greek - the Helper, Advocate, Counsellor, Comforter, Interpreter of Scriptures, God-with-us-and-in-us. This divine Presence is not recognised by the world, yet it will nourish and sustain the disciples and undergird their life together. Charles B. Cousar (*Texts for Preaching Year A, Westminster John Knox Press, 1995.p. 308*) writes: “The church cannot expect the world to appreciate or participate in its reason for being, its mandate for mission, its source of strength... The world’s ways of knowing and its criteria for evaluating what is real and important do not allow for such a divine Presence... (The church) cannot expect its way of loving Jesus and obeying his commandments will be highly valued necessarily; that it will receive plaudits when it is most faithful to Jesus’ directive... At the same time, the church knows the divine presence is a gift. ... It is not a reward for the church’s good behaviour or its sincere piety, but an expression of God’s grace that the people of God may enjoy the presence and direction of God.”

In this time of continued uncertainty about our health as a whole global community, John 14: 15-31 is both a challenge and a wonderful comfort. Go on

later to read chapters 15 and 16 for a deeper and broader understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Strengthened by the Holy Spirit, we will be able to do what the evangelist in 1 Peter 3: 13-17 asks of us as Christians now.

This week, may the Scriptures inspire and guide you. My prayer for you comes from Colossians 1: 9-14: “(I) pray that God will fill you with the knowledge of God’s will, with all the wisdom and understanding the Holy Spirit gives. Then you will live a life that honours the Lord, and you will please him by doing good deeds. You will come to know God even better. God’s glorious power will make you patient and strong enough to endure anything, and you will be truly happy.” (*Contemporary English Version. CEV. 1991*)

HYMN: AHB 310 Come down, O Love divine (TIS 398)

Offering: St Lucia Uniting Church BSB: 334 040 acct#: 553 842 259 (St George bank)

Affirmation of faith and commitment

We will listen for the presence of God, the Holy One, in our lives. We will look for the presence of the God of love in the world. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, we will testify to the God who is with us in times of suffering; and we will open our hearts in thanksgiving and praise to the God who assures us we are loved. Amen.

Prayer of Intercession

Gracious God, we give you thanks for being with us during this pandemic encouraging us, challenging us. We come with deep gratitude for those who dedicated their lives to serving in the health sector – the doctors and nurses, the researchers and cleaners, the specialists and administrators. We pray for those who have lost loved ones to the virus and for those who have lost their jobs because of it. We pray especially for John and his wife Anna, as they cope with John’s cancer. Open the hearts and minds of our leaders in government and industry to see where to lead our nations so that justice is provided for all, and exploitation is minimised globally. May there be transformation of all our minds and attitudes so that the spiritual renewal that is possible because we have experienced this crisis, may come to us if we wait and trust in your Holy Spirit of Truth to guide us forward. We pray in the name of Christ who taught us to say: Pray the Lord’s Prayer.

HYMN: AHB 170 At the name of Jesus (TIS 231)

Benediction -

You have remembered God's redeeming love. You have sung of God's resurrection hope and been forgiven through God's grace. Now go to share God's presence in your community.

May the love of God be the strength of your heart and mind.

May the grace of Christ be the salve for your bruises and wounds.

And may the friendship of the Spirit be the joy and peace of your soul, now and forever more. Amen.

Resources used in this service include *Words for Worship* Easter 6 year A **17th May 2020** by MediaCom (subscription of Rev Dr Elizabeth Nolan) and *The Abingdon Worship Annual 2020* edited by Mary Scifres and B.J. Beu, Abingdon Press, Nashville USA (owned by EN); *gathering Lent- Easter Year A 2020*, United Church of Canada (subscription); and *Uniting in Worship People's Book* by Uniting Church Press (JBCE) 1988 Melbourne and *The Australian Hymn Book* multiple copies owned by the St Lucia Uniting Church congregation. Copyright license 217268.

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"Certain of Uncertainty" (Tune: Forest Green AHB 240, TIS 316)

In life with such uncertainty

We long to feel at peace;

But with no proven guarantee

We feel our stress increase.

When in the maze we grope each day,

'Confusion' is our name;

When change can ruin life we say,

"Please, let things stay the same."

Sometimes our journey feeds our fear,

Can lead us to despair,

But in these times we need to hear

From Jesus and his care.

He trusted 'Love' would find a way

To ease his troubled soul;

He found that 'Love' would always say,

"My strength shall make you whole."

Disease, distress can take control

And test our firm resolve

To be a source that would console,

That helps our fears dissolve.

In human ways we play our part

When hearing Jesus' call;

He said "Fear not." He's in our heart

When helping those who fall.

We find our true humanity
When 'Love' directs our course.
Inspired by Jesus' melody
Of hope, with all its force;
He is our guide when life is grim;
He's with us in our strife;
We stride together. Trust in him
Who came to bring us life.

We cannot see what lies ahead;
It mostly is unknown;
But 'God in us' shares every dread;
We need not feel alone.
Together we can help 'Love' grow;
Together stand as one;
Our human love can make it so;
Our future can be won.

Lesley (Beth) Shaw sent this prayer message:

"I have been thinking about neighbours - good neighbours who are there when they are needed- neighbours who are in many ways like the Good Samaritan – not necessarily friends – strangers in many ways, yet ready and willing to give help, comfort and support when it is needed. There are many kinds of love or many kinds in different kinds of relationships.

Extending neighbourly love seems to me to be about caring and about obeying the commandment "to love one another" – to have an awareness of and a response to the needs of others – awareness and a response to fellow human beings – Love of members of a congregation for one another is a special kind of neighbourly love.

And this morning I think of, and am grateful for, the special kind of love that binds old friends together – friends with whom one has shared childhood, and the formative years- events may have separated us; our lives may have gone different ways - taken different directions- but the bonds of love formed when we were childhood neighbours/friends in classroom, dormitory and dining room stay with us.

Forgive me Lord God when I forget to be a good neighbour in my home in my street in my community and in my church. Guide and strengthen me and all of us joining in prayer this morning to be good and loving neighbours to each other; help us to love with a generosity of spirit; help us to remember; For the ones who walk beside us if we love them – we should tell them so."