

CAMPBELLTOWN UNITING CHURCH

14 APRIL 2024

EASTER 3

CALL TO WORSHIP

How shall we live when lavished with love?

“We are God’s children, but it has not been revealed what we are to become in the future.” (1 John 3:2)

Just as in our origins, our future is tied to our planet.

The Creator has given us partners for mutual flourishing.

Let us worship God, who makes all things new.

WELCOME

Welcome to worship at Campbelltown this morning.

My name is Rebecca Purling,

and the worship leader is Jonathon Adams.

Please join us in the hall for morning tea.

SING TIS 738 ‘My Jesus, my Saviour’

OPENING PRAYER

God of joy, repentance, and comfort, we need you today.

As we continue to celebrate the good news of the Resurrection,
we remember times when it was hard news to believe.

As we come and worship you this day,
may we leave our doubts and fears with you,
and enter into a time of joy.

May we see your love come to life in all we do today. Amen.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

God, we break your laws all the time.

Sometimes intentionally, sometimes unintentionally.

We do not care for one another as you taught us to do.

We prioritize the things of this world over the things of your world.

We are afraid even though you tell us not to be.

We forget to be joyful when you show up when we need you.

We say we are sorry, and sometimes aren’t.

God, help us to be sincere and authentic when we are sorry,

Grant us a spirit of courage in the face of fear.

May we change our ways and live out your love,
as Christ lived and taught. Amen.

WORDS OF AFFIRMATION

As Easter people, we know what Christ has done for all.

We celebrate this good news with joy and delight!

Thanks be to God. Amen.

TIME WITH THE CHILDREN

Jesus Appears to the Disciples

Make a pretend campfire and gather the children.

Have you ever been camping?

A fun activity when camping is to sit around a campfire at night and telling ghost stories.

Sometimes those stories can be quite scary, and it can be hard to go to sleep later that night.

I have been thinking about ghost stories because back in Bible times people believed in ghosts and were afraid of them. There is a story in the Bible about some people who thought they had seen a ghost.

After Jesus died some of his friends were having a meal together when a stranger appeared, they didn't recognise Jesus. But it was Jesus and he said to them "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it's really me. Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don't have bodies, as you see that I do."

Then he asked them for something to eat. As He ate some fish, they watched. And it showed them He wasn't a ghost because a ghost doesn't need food.

The disciples realized Jesus had come back to life, and they spent the next month or so with Him. After Jesus returned back to heaven, those same disciples went all over the world, telling people about Jesus' crucifixion, His death, and His resurrection. They never stopped talking about what happened.

You and I have been called to tell others about Jesus, just like those disciples. We must be a witness for Jesus, too. We must tell the world that Jesus is alive.

God, we serve a risen Savior. He is alive! Help us to be witnesses of what He has done in our lives. In Jesus' name, amen.

SING TIS 382 'Now the green blade rises'

BIBLE READINGS

Acts 3: 12-19

Luke 24: 36b-48

In this is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

SERMON

The children's book *'The Tiger who came to tea'* has been in print since it was first published in 1968. It was a favourite in our family a decade ago because one of the characters is called Sophie. The story is about a mother and daughter who were preparing to sit down for afternoon tea when the doorbell rang, when Sophie went to the door she found an unexpected visitor, a tiger. The little girl invited the tiger in and asked him to join them for afternoon tea.

The tiger was very polite, but he was hungry and thirsty, he ate all the food on the table, and he drank all the tea in the pot, and then he drank all the water in the taps, and then the tiger left the house. When the husband and father came home from work, he suggested the family go out for dinner. The next day when Sophie and her mother went to the shops to buy more food (because the tiger had eaten everything) they put a tin of tiger food in their basket, just in case their visitor returned.

In the gospel accounts we find many stories of resurrection appearances; some have the risen Jesus appearing when the disciples were gathered and sharing food. Like the tiger who arrived at Sophie's house, the risen Jesus is an unexpected guest who is made welcome, who sits with the hosts and then leaves again (but unlike the tiger, Jesus doesn't eat a lot). These resurrection appearances are always unexpected and happen in different places.

In Luke's gospel account it is a group of women who go to the tomb on the first day of the week and discover that the stone had been rolled away and that Jesus' body was missing. The women were shocked and confused; when two angels spoke to them, they were terrified! The angels reminded the women that Jesus had predicted what would happen to him, that he would be raised from the dead by God. The message from the angels helped the women calm down and they began to understand.

The women left the garden, they found the other disciples and told them what they had seen and heard. The men thought that their story was nonsense, it was an idle tale, the women must have been seeing and hearing things because they were sad and grieving, overwhelmed by all the events of the last few days. It was just too ridiculous a story to be taken seriously, bodies don't just disappear, and angels don't just appear and talk to people!

The disciples had not had time to process all that had happened to Jesus, it has only been a few days since they watched as Jesus was arrested, tried and crucified, and his broken body laid in a tomb, and now these women are suggesting that he has been raised from the dead, it was too much to take in and to process. So they continued to sit together discussing what they had seen and heard and contemplating their future.

Later that same day two of the disciples were walking to a village called Emmaus, as they walked, they talked about what had happened on the Friday and then the story from the women about a missing body and an angelic message. As they walked and talked a stranger appeared and joined their conversation about the events of the past few days, the stranger helped them in their understanding by drawing on the ancient scriptures.

When the travellers arrived in Emmaus they went to a home where they shared a meal with some of Jesus' followers, they invited the stranger to join them. During the meal the stranger took some bread and broke it, and at that moment the disciples understood that the 'stranger' was the risen Jesus.

The conversation on the road now made more sense, Jesus had always been a teacher, he was often interpreting the ancient scriptures and telling stories. Now, in this new reality of life without Jesus physical presence his followers needed help to make the connections between the ancient writings and all that had happened and would happen in the future.

There was a sense of excitement around the table, the disciples had to tell the others, this was news that had to be shared, so they hastily made their way back to Jerusalem. The disciples who had been in Emmaus wanted to tell the eleven about their unexpected travelling companion and later dinner guest, they wanted to share their insights and understanding about Jesus of Nazareth, who had been dead but was now alive, and was continuing to teach and inspire his followers.

Back in Jerusalem there was another gathering, another meal, and the unexpected guest appeared again. Those gathered in a house in Jerusalem thought they were seeing a ghost, and they were terrified. This was a group of people who were feeling vulnerable, they had seen their leader arrested and tried, and then crucified because he was considered a threat to the authorities. Now his followers are lying low because they were afraid that they might be next!

And Jesus' followers were grieving, grieving their many losses, their leader has died, their new lifestyle of travel and meeting people, of witnessing miracles and sitting at Jesus' feet to learn, has all come to an end. They have been left wondering what their future would look like? The disciples have invested heavily in this new movement of Jesus' followers and now it is ending, and they don't know what to do next.

Judith Kerr, the author of *'The tiger who came to Tea'* was a refugee from Germany who arrived in England as a 10-year-old in 1935. Kerr's family were Jewish, and her father was vocal in his criticism of the emerging National Socialist Party. While living in Germany the family were afraid of being persecuted, but they managed to escape just in time. They learnt later that not long after they escaped the Nazis visited their home and burnt their books.

As a child Kerr would have known the fear associated with an unexpected knock on the door; who will it be and what will happen to us? Over the years there has been speculation about the influence this fear-filled childhood had on her writing. A tiger is a big and fierce animal, that could tear a human apart very quickly and easily. Any stranger knocking on the door, especially the door of a persecuted people, would invoke fear.

As it happens Kerr stated that the inspiration for the book was a visit to the zoo with her young children, watching the captive tiger pacing around sparked her imagination and became the kernel of an idea for a children's book. Of course, in her children's book the tiger is polite (greedy but polite) and brings great joy to young Sophie. The 'stranger' who visited the disciples on the road, who shared a meal with them in Emmaus and later another meal in Jerusalem was a kind stranger, who encouraged and challenged the disciples to continue what the earthly Jesus had begun.

A group of disciples were gathered in a house in Jerusalem, they were anxious and afraid after the execution of Jesus, they are confused about the story of the women at the tomb, and they have heard another peculiar story from the travellers who have returned from Emmaus. When a stranger appeared, even a ghostly stranger, they became more anxious and afraid.

The 'ghost' then spoke, asking them why they were afraid and why they doubted that he could be alive. The risen Jesus invited the disciples to look at and touch his hands and feet, he

invited them to discover for themselves that they are not hallucinating, he is real, and he is here to talk with them. The disciples gathered in the house in Jerusalem were experiencing lots of feelings and emotions, they were happy, and disbelieving and wondering – a lot is happening in a very short space of time, and it's all a bit overwhelming.

The ghostly figure asked them for something to eat, he took the piece of fish offered and ate it, the disciples were coming to see that the unexpected visitor was not a ghost, but they still did not fully understand. As with the two disciples who met the risen Jesus on the road to Emmaus, the ghostly stranger began to explain that he was the risen Jesus, he reminded them of his teaching during his earthly ministry, and he helped them to understand the ancient scriptures. And then Jesus commissioned the disciples to continue his ministry in the world.

Two of the resurrection appearances in Luke's gospel account are very grounded, the writer wants us to know that Jesus is not the same as he was, but he is also not a ghost. In these accounts the disciples can touch him, they can see his body parts and he could eat with them. The risen Jesus is a very grounded figure, who asks his followers to continue his ministry and mission in the world, also in very grounded ways.

The story is told of a missionary going to Burma, Adoniram Judson went to the King of Burma to ask him if he might have permission to go to a certain city to preach. The King, a pagan, but quite an intelligent man responded, "I'm willing for a dozen preachers to go but not you, not with those hands. My people are not such fools as to take notice of your preaching, but they will note those calloused, work scarred hands."

The preacher was going to have to prove himself as a committed disciple of Jesus before the people of Burma would listen to his message. To truly be a disciple of Jesus, to bear witness to the good news means living the life, not just talking about it. The people the preacher wanted to convert needed more than words, they needed to see the sacrifice and humility of the missionary.

When the disciples realised that the ghostly stranger was the risen Jesus, he began to teach them, and he commissioned them to continue his ministry in the world. they are to be witnesses to the good news of God's love and mercy, they are to share this message in Jerusalem, and to all the nations of the world. It will not be easy to leave the safety of the

house, it will not be easy to resist the persecution of the authorities and to compete with other religious beliefs and philosophies. But this is what you are called to do and be, now is the time to leave the house and become witnesses to the good news through word and deed.

As a young man, Mahatma Gandhi studied in London. After learning about Christianity, and reading the Sermon on the Mount, he decided that Christianity was the most complete religion in the world. It was only later, when he lived with a Christian family in East India, that he changed his mind. In that household he discovered that the word rarely became flesh -- that the teaching of Jesus rarely became the reality of Jesus.

The risen Jesus appeared to the disciples in a variety of places, he appeared amongst them and spoke with them so that they knew they could trust in all his teachings. I told you I would suffer and die and be raised in three days, and here I am, so now trust in and learn from the other things I preached and demonstrated. And know that I will always be with you, not in my earthly form because I will soon return to the Father but be assured that you will always have a divine presence with you, guiding and encouraging you in your faith and discipleship. Amen.

SING TIS 613 ‘Lord of all hopefulness’

OFFERING

Invitation to the offering

When we worship, we offer our whole selves to God. We offer our hopes, our dreams, our wants, and our needs. We make our offerings to God with prayers and praise, song, and story, in hearing and responding to the word. Not one part of us is hidden from God. This includes our material selves. When we offer ourselves to God, we also offer the first fruits of our labour. We offer our tithes and offerings with joy as a way to worship the risen Christ.

Prayer after the offering

Receive our gifts, almighty God. We offer them as we offer ourselves, fully. We pray that they would enable this community of faith to serve all of your people. May it make us better friends, may it make us better able to open up seats at the table and offer breakfast to those who need it. Amen.

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

COMMISSIONING OF CHURCH COUNCILLORS

Sentences

There are diverse gifts:

but it is the same Spirit that gives them.

There are different ways of serving God:

but it is the same Lord who is served.

God works through people in different ways:

*but it is the same God whose purpose
is achieved through them all.*

Each one of us is given a gift by the Spirit:

and there is no gift without its corresponding service.

There is one ministry of Christ:

and in this ministry we all share.

Together we are the body of Christ:

and individually members of it.

Presentation

Vows

The minister asks the candidates:

The minister addresses the congregation:

Will you, the members of this congregation, accept these sisters and brothers as Church Councillors?

We will.

Will you encourage them in love and support them in their ministry, serving with them the one Lord Jesus Christ?

We will.

May God give us all strength to fulfil these vows;
and to God be the glory in the church
and in Christ Jesus forever. ***Amen.***

Act of Commissioning

Sung Blessing TIS 779 'May the feet of God'

Declaration

Prayer

SING TIS 422 'Come Holy Spirit come'

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Loving God, how thankful we are
that You hear us when we call out to You.
When troubles come, You give us strength.
When our distress seems never-ending,
You are our quiet centre.
When injustice rages,
You offer Your peace.
When nights seem endless,
You still our frightened hearts.

When we feel weak and lame,
You raise us up to new life in You.
You put gladness in our hearts,
You give us a hope and a future.

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

SENDING OUT

“Love will come to perfection in us
when we can face the day of judgment without fear –
because our relation to this world is just like Christ’s.
There is no fear in love,
for perfect love drives out fear.” *(1 John 4:17-18)*
The grace...