

ORDER OF SERVICE - Sunday 21st February 2021 – Lent 1

Lectionary: Genesis 9:8-17; Psalm 25:1-10; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:9-15

Preacher – Ian Ferguson

Liturgist – Saide Cameron

Welcomers - Claire Foley, Lucy Hardman, Ralph Eduardo

Bible Reading –Claire Foley, Ralph Eduardo

Prayers of the People – Kirsty Bennett

Musicians – Courtney Rohde, Hannah Denison, Anthony Hinds, Kate Scull, James Balsillie, Michael Cameron

Laptop Operator – Robert Sargent

Sound System - Oliver Sun

Live Stream - David Cameron *with* Bridie Turner

OPENING SLIDE: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

Genesis 9:13

GETTING READY

Welcome to Brunswick Uniting Church, my name is Saide. Just a few housekeeping reminders before we start:

- Sign in
- Spread out.
- Masks on (including for singing)
- No morning tea but stay on to chat or join others at Café Marcella's just up the road from the church.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Saide

God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

Genesis 9:12-13

Come then people of the covenant
Let us worship our steadfast loving God
Bringing all that we have
all our fears, longings, joys and hopes
into this sacred time and space.
Come let us worship God.

SONG: Great is your faithfulness, TiS 154

Saide

Let's sing of God's faithfulness, mercy and love.

1. Great is your faithfulness, O God Creator,
in you no shadow of turning we see;
you never fail and your love is unchanging:
as you have been you for ever will be.

*Great is your faithfulness. Great is your faithfulness,
morning by morning new mercies we see;
all we have needed your hand has provided:
great is your faithfulness, O God, to me.*

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

3. Pardon for sin and a peace that's enduring,
your living presence to cheer and to guide,
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow –
these are the blessings your love will provide.

SONG: Great is your faithfulness, by Thomas Obadiah Chisholm, Hope Publishing Co.
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WELCOME

Saide

Welcome to worship - today is the first Sunday in the season of Lent. Throughout this season we will be exploring the overarching theme of covenant, God's promise of faithful love. The stories offered invite us to reflect on how the covenant is expressed in our life and in our faith. Today we will listen as God establishes the covenant with Noah and sets a bow in the clouds. We will be reminded in Mark's Gospel that Jesus is God's Beloved just before he is driven out into the wilderness.

So welcome to this physical space, the overflow space in the Youth Hall and our online space - a community gathered in relationship with each other and with God. You might notice that we will not be lighting the Christ Candle for the next 5 Sundays, instead we wait for Easter Sunday, the day of resurrection when we will light a new Christ Candle in celebration. I'm Saide, your liturgist for today as we begin the Season of Lent.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge and respect the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, the traditional custodians of this land since time immemorial.

We are learning that the land is not ours to own, but to look after; and that if we listen, we may hear in it the calling of the eternal Spirit.

Responding to this call, we commit ourselves to work for justice, reconciliation, and care of the earth.

PRAYER OF ADORATION & CONFESSION

Saide

including: SONG: [The Promise](#), Elaine Loukes [BUC Songbook project](#), Used with permission

God, maker of covenants
After the great flood you set your bow in the clouds
as a sign of the covenant between you and the earth.
When we see the bow after the storms have passed
We are reminded that we are not alone
That you hold us in your steadfast love

[Do not worry I am with you.](#)
[Do not fear you're not alone.](#)
[Like a best friend I am holding you](#)
[I am here you're not alone.](#)

Jesus, Beloved Son
After your baptism you were tempted in the wilderness
a time for discernment, waited on by angels.
When we find ourselves in the wilderness
You send us angels to remind us that we are not alone
That you hold us in your steadfast love

[Do not worry I am with you.](#)
[Do not fear you're not alone.](#)
[Like a best friend I am holding you](#)
[I am here you're not alone.](#)

Holy Spirit, descending dove
Your voice, your breath, your fire is ever present
calling us home and sending us out.
When we encounter wonder and beauty
we feel your presence in our lives and know
That you hold us in your steadfast love.

[Do not worry I am with you.](#)
[Do not fear you're not alone.](#)
[Like a best friend I am holding you](#)
[I am here you're not alone.](#)

Faithful God, Covenant Maker, Beloved Son, Holy Spirit
We breathe and we sigh, we pour out our confessions
into your steadfast loving heart knowing that you hold us.

We confess that we are weary and yet glad
weary of the impact of the pandemic on our lives
and glad of this community, glad of each other.

We confess that we are saddened and yet hopeful
saddened by the ever widening gap between rich and poor
and full of hope as we join with others to work for justice and peace.

We confess that we are despairing and yet determined
despairing of the rampant destruction of this earth, our home
and determined to stand up and be heard, to be voices for change. Amen

Do not worry God is with you.
Do not fear you're not alone
Like a best friend God is holding you
You are loved and not alone.

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

Saide

Great is God's faithfulness
Pardon for sin and a peace that's enduring
These are the blessings God's love will provide.
Held in this love we can be confident
that in the name of Jesus, the Beloved One
our sins are forgiven.

Thanks be to God. Amen

HEBREW SCRIPTURES: Genesis 9:8-17

Ralph

8 Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹'As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, ¹⁰and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark.' ¹¹I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.' ¹²God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.' ¹⁷God said to Noah, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.'

For these words of witness and for Christ the Word

Thanks be to God

CHILDREN'S TIME

Dave & Ian

Dave and Ian invite kids down the front to listen to the Genesis reading and then have a discussion about rainbows.

SONG: I will set a bow, v1 only x2

Dave/Ian

We'll be adding a new verse to this song each week during Lent. Today's verse reminds us of God's rainbow covenant.

I will set my bow in the clouds
as a sign of my love for you;
as a sign of my promise to all the earth,
visible where grey sky meets blue.

SONG: I will set my bow in the clouds, Words & Music: Daniel Charles Damon,
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GOSPEL READING: Mark 1:9-15

Claire

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved;* with you I am well pleased.'

¹² And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news* of God, ¹⁵and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near;* repent, and believe in the good news.*'

For these words of witness and for Christ the Word

Thanks be to God

REFLECTION

Ian

When I am leading a wedding, there comes that point in the ceremony when I ask the couple the following question.

Will you live together in the covenant of marriage?

will you love, comfort,
honour and protect your beloved,
and forsaking all others, be faithful
to them, as long as you both shall live?

Will you live together in the covenant of marriage? This is one of the few places in my life that I ever normally use the word "covenant" and I never assume that a couple getting married even knows what it means in that context. What about you? When do you ever talk about covenants in your life? Maybe you are a lawyer and you're making covenants left, right and centre. Or perhaps you are in real estate dealing with property covenants. But it's not a commonly used word outside of those contexts is it? What does it even mean? ... a promise, a commitment, an agreement that creates an obligation?

A legal covenant is hardly something to stir the heart of a preacher – in fact, I hear it as an unemotional, legalistic, heady word that shouldn't really belong in a wedding or a bible story. That's my gut response to the word covenant and I place that here as exhibit A. Exhibit B over here is the way the word is used in the bible.

Now it could be the case, I'm not going to go to the wall on this, but it is arguable that Covenant is the most important theological concept in the whole bible. It is arguable that Covenant is the primary metaphor shaping the biblical understanding of who God is and how God relates to humankind. It is, suffice to say, a very important word in the bible, and week by week through Lent this year we are going to hear a series of readings about God's covenant with humanity.

We began today with Genesis 9: Then God said to Noah, "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you... I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth." – a covenant, an agreement, a pledge, a promise, an obligation.

Remember exhibit A here: my feelings about the word Covenant? Those feelings interact negatively with Exhibit B: the use of the word in the bible. I find it hard to get excited, hard to get my heart engaged with the biblical covenant because frankly it sounds so boring – nothing against lawyers or real estate agents – please continue to covenant to your heart's delight. It's just that I'm looking for more emotional umph and less legislative contracts from my sacred scriptures.

So, my task today is obviously to rescue and rejuvenate the word covenant, for myself primarily and hopefully also for you, and to do so I'm going to employ two illustrations. I've already mentioned marriage and I'll come back to that. The other illustration is the key way the word Covenant is used within the polity of the Uniting Church. When people in leadership in our State or National Church talk about covenant, they are usually referring to the relationship between the Uniting Church and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, the UAICC or just "The Congress." The Congress was formed in the early 1980s and they say of themselves: We consist of Aboriginal and Islander members of the Uniting Church and members in fellowship from any other denomination... [all] seeking to fulfill our calling as Christians among our own people. At the instigation of the Congress, in 1994, their relationship with the UCA was formalised in an act of "Covenant under God". The ceremony included the exchange of statements (which I encourage you to read in full, they are very powerful and I'll post a link). The UCA statement, read by the President Jill Tabart, acknowledges, laments and offers an apology for the church's role in dispossession, the lie of terra nullius, the stolen generation, and the other atrocities of colonialism. It expresses a desire to work in solidarity with the Congress for "the advancement of God's kingdom of justice and righteousness in this land." The President's statement concludes: I pray that this covenant will unite us in a multi-racial bond of fellowship which will be a witness to God's love for us all and a constant challenge to the continuing racism which oppresses you and separates us in this land.

In response, Congress Chairperson Pastor Bill Hollingsworth acknowledged the past in heart rending language. He said: Your ancestors ... did not come to us as God's will would dictate. He spoke of the practical obligations that entering a covenant implies including the sharing of assets: it would be wrong, he said, to just say "I forgive", without reaching a commitment to work together ... to address present disadvantages caused by past injustices. He committed the Congress to sharing with us their friendship and the resources of God's creation. He said, Because it is pleasing to God to love one another, and it is our commitment to do so, we invite you on behalf of Congress members to develop a new relationship... He concluded: We pray that God will guide you together with us in developing a covenant to walk together ... a tangible expression of God's justice and love for all creation.

Congress then gave the gift of this sacred painting to the Uniting Church **SLIDE**. It tells the Creation story of the Wagalak sisters and depicts the sacred ground where ceremonies take place to restore relationship and bring reconciliation after blood is spilt.

And that's a covenant I can feel in my guts – one that exists for true reconciliation, justice and peace – one like God's covenant with Noah that brings a new beginning, a new relationship, out of the chaotic flood of invasion and dispossession. That's what a covenant can be for Xns. That's the way God comes and walks together with us through Noah, and through Abraham and Sarah, and through Moses and the Israelites, and Jeremiah and the exiles, and Jesus and his disciples – all the biblical stories of covenant that we'll be hearing through Lent. That's the way God walks together with us and calls us to walk together with one another.

We have a Walking Together Group in this congregation which exists to listen to and build relationships with local First Nations people. It is one expression of the Covenant between the UCA and the UAICC, the Congress, which covenant in itself is a response to the Holy One who establishes a new relationship of promise, a covenant of love with us under the rainbow.

Biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann points out that before the rainbow covenant in the book of Genesis, the relationship between creator and creature is portrayed as one of punishment and retribution. God wipes out life on earth with a flood as punishment for the kinds of evil and injustice that our invader ancestors imposed on the first inhabitants of this land. But, says Brueggemann, in the story of the flood there is a "revolution in the heart of God" so that after the flood God says, "never again" and God seals that "never-again" as a covenant promise under the rainbow. Never again will God respond to evil with retribution and destruction. Instead, the relationship between creator and creature will be "based in unqualified grace." Which is what the UAICC, the Congress, showed to the Uniting Church in entering a covenant with us. Grace leading to new relationship rather than retribution leading to destruction. That's who the God of Covenant is – a God of renewing grace and healing love. And any faith that threatens God's punishment rather than offering God's grace and love (and let's be frank – that is a pretty common species of faith) any such faith is a rejection of God's Covenant with the earth under the rainbow renewed for us in Jesus Christ. Never again, that's the promise.

Now of course covenants only work if we keep them and act on them. A covenant implies faithfulness to a promise. Which is why we began this service by singing that rousing old hymn of the church, Great is your Faithfulness, O God Creator, in you no shadow of turning we see; you never fail and your love is unchanging. Great is your faithfulness. That is the heart of our religion – God's faithfulness to the Covenant, to the promise of a new creation of peace and love built by grace under the rainbow.

Yes, God is faithful even when we are unfaithful, even when we give in to injustice and oppression, even when we invade and dispossess and massacre one another. God is faithful, there is always a new beginning to be made, a new relationship of justice to be built, a renewal of the covenant to be sought. Our covenanting God is faithful to that promise and calls forth faithfulness in us.

And so, when I ask a couple at their wedding: will you live together in the covenant of marriage? Will you love, comfort, honour and protect your beloved, and forsaking all others, be faithful to them, as long as you both shall live? What I'm actually asking is, will you be like God, the divine lover? Will you enter together into a covenant promise of love and faithfulness just like the one between creator and creation? And because that is so hard to do, because it is so hard for human beings always to manage perfect love and faithfulness in our relationships without hurting one another, will you also reflect the grace and forgiveness and healing and if necessary the release which is the divine expression of covenant love to all creation? Will you be like God in that way also, showing self-giving grace, reconciling forgiveness and healing hope? In other words, do you promise to love one another as God has loved us?

Friends, that question transcends weddings, it is a question for all life and if you are game, I'll ask it now and invite your response – the answer, if you dare, is "I do" – may it be a moment of covenant renewal here among us.

Siblings in Christ, do you promise to live in covenant with God, loving one another as God has loved us?

<https://assembly.uca.org.au/images/resources/Covenanting/Covenant-with-UAICC-A2-poster.pdf>

<https://uniting.church/covenanting/>

UCA/UAICC covenanting statements: <https://resources.uca.org.au/resources/covenanting/item/135-covenanting-statement-1994>

<https://uaicc.org.au>

REFLECTIVE MUSIC – *musician's choice*

OFFERING with SONG: In the midst of new dimensions, NCH 391 Tune TIS217i

Saide

We offer our gifts as we sing of the God of rainbow. There is a bowl in the Gathering Space by the font and another will be placed here on the table. Come and place your offering for the work of the church as you wish. We will pray together at the conclusion of the song.

In the midst of new dimensions, in the face of changing ways.

Who will lead the pilgrim peoples wandering in their separate ways?

*God of rainbow, fiery pillar, leading where the eagles soar,
We your people, ours the journey now and ever, ever more.*

*Through the flood of starving people, warring factions and despair,
Who will lift the olive branches? Who will light the flame of care?*

*As we stand a world divided by our own self seeking schemes,
Grant that we, your global village might envision wider dreams*

*We are man and we are woman, all persuasions, old and young,
Each a gift in your creation, each a love song to be sung.*

*Should the threats of dire predictions cause us to withdraw in pain,
May your blazing phoenix spirit, resurrect the church again*

SONG: In the Midst of New Dimensions, Words and Music by Julian Rush (1985),
from New Century Hymnal, Pilgrim Press. Reproduced with permission under ONE LICENCE #604502

Let us pray

God of the rainbow, God of the covenant

We bring our gifts to you today

Our money, our lives, our loving and all our giving

Bless all that we offer in your name

As we live in your kingdom now. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Kirsty

At the conclusion of the prayers of the people, or during the rest of the service please light a taper in the chapel space for the prayers of your heart.

As I lead us in or prayers of the people, I'd like to invite you to focus on our rainbow table or to pause and conjure up an image of a rainbow in your mind.

See its colours, separate, side by side, together ... see its shape, and let us pray.

God of the covenant,

We pray for our rainbow world

for the red earth that First Nations people share with us

and the orange glow of a fire that gives warmth, a place to cook and invites community.

We pray that the yellow sun that lights up the day may power our lives,

and the green grass and the leaves in the trees may sustain life.

We pray for the health of the blue oceans that are home to so many creatures,

for the deep midnight blue of indigo that we see in a night sky when it is free from pollution,

and the violet of flowers whose beauty bring us joy.

Let us celebrate the colour that is all around us,

and the richness that difference offers,

let us hear each other's stories,

let us live with respect for the planet and all who dwell on it.

We see the colours of the rainbow as they sit alongside each other,
each benefiting from the presence of the other,
each colour appearing to be a little different when seen with another,

red a little more orange, green a little more lime,
one colour not dominating the other, but influencing our perception of it.
*Let us be open to be changed, to be influenced by those we are alongside.
May we look for the context, and listen,
seeking out conversations rather than living in silos.*

We see these rainbow colours together,
combining to create a rich tapestry of diversity
and a beauty that is only realised when we can see all the colours.
*Let us live God's promise and create a rainbow community,
one which includes everyone,
with systems and organisations that remove discrimination,
recognising that together, we can do so much more than when we are apart,
that justice and peace for everyone is the only way for any of us to live in harmony with each other, and the planet.*

Steadfast loving God,
we offer these prayers in the name of Christ, Amen.

NOTICES

Saide

It's time now for notices. Please come and line up to my right. Say your name and offer your notice - remember you don't need to adjust the microphone, just stand comfortably and speak clearly.

SONG: Drive us out, Shawn Whelan

When the carpenter's son
Went to the Jordan, was baptised by John
You came down
In the form of a dove
"This is my son" said a voice from above
After you blessed him, you drove him and tested him
Forty days wandering far from the town
Would he seek power and fame? Would he just play the game?
Trusting in your word he stared temptation down...

*So drive us out of our safe little spaces
Lead us to wisdom in wilderness places
Burn like a flame in our stony cold hearts
Blow through the walls of our fear that keep us apart
Oh-oh, oh-oh*

Then he spread the good news:
God's reign approaching, for Gentiles and Jews:
"Follow me"
Both women and men;
Children and sinners and outcasts his friends
Your love flowed out from him, healing, forgiving sin
Challenging rules that kept people apart
Your holy fire drove him, clearing the Temple den
Making a house for true prayer would need a new start

*So drive us out of our safe little spaces
Lead us to wisdom in wilderness places
Burn like a flame in our stony cold hearts
Blow through the walls of our fear that keep us apart
Oh-oh, oh-oh*

When Jesus had gone
Died and then risen, then lifted beyond
You came down
Like a great rushing wind
Set them afire, your church to begin
Give us the words to say here in our world today
Just like the twelve in Jerusalem then
Advocate for us now, guide us and show us how
Help us witness to Love, again and again

*So drive us out of our safe little spaces
Lead us to wisdom in wilderness places
Burn like a flame in our stony cold hearts
Blow through the walls of our fear that keep us apart
Oh-oh, oh-oh
(Repeat)*

SONG: [Drive us out](#), © Shawn Whelan 2015, used with permission

BLESSING

Saide

God, the maker of covenants, offers steadfast love.
How will you respond to this gift in the coming weeks?
How will God's steadfast love shape your relationships,
your encounters, your work, your study and your play?

God drives us out of our safe little spaces to witness to love.
So let us go with blessings of our God who holds us
Jesus who guides us and the Holy Spirit who sets our hearts burning.
Amen

THANK YOU

Liturgist:
Saide Cameron

Children's time
Dave Hall
(Children, Youth & Young Adult
Pastor)
Ian Ferguson
(Minister of the Word)

Bible readings:
Ralph Eduardo
Claire Foley

Reflection:
Rev. Ian Ferguson
(Minister of the Word)

Prayers of the People:
Kirsty Bennett

Musicians:
Courtney Rohde (co-ordinator)
James Balsillie
Michael Cameron
Hannah Denison
Anthony Hinds
Kate Scull
Shawn Whelan (Drive us out)

The Promise (recording)
Elaine Potter
Julia Potter

Production:
Jane Allardice
Ray Cameron
Saide Cameron
Ben Hon
Robert Sargent
Bridie Turner

CLOSING SLIDE: God said to Noah, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.' Genesis 9:17