

Opening verse

“I am the vine, you are the branches” John 15:5

Gathering, Greeting and Call to Worship

Natalie

Christ is risen. **He is risen indeed.**

Good morning. Please stand as we welcome the word and the light.

God has called us here this morning,
To build a community of faith and inclusion,
To express our love for God; Creator, Christ and Spirit,
To strengthen one other on our journeys

Let us worship God together by singing a song of welcome to all.

Song: MV001 Let us build a house (Marty Haugen)

1. *Let us build a house where love can dwell
and all can safely live,
a place where saints and children tell
how hearts learn to forgive.
Built of hopes and dreams and visions,
rock of faith and vault of grace;
here the love of Christ shall end divisions:*

*All are welcome, all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.*

3. *Let us build a house where love is found
in water, wine and wheat;
a banquet hall on holy ground,
where peace and justice meet.
Here the love of God, through Jesus,
is revealed in time and space;
as we share in Christ the feast that frees us:*

4. *Let us build a house where hands will reach
beyond the wood and stone
to heal and strengthen, serve and teach,
and live the Word they've known.
Here the outcast and the stranger
bear the image of God's face;
let us bring an end to fear and danger:*

SONG: [Let us build a house](#), by Marty Haugen, from [More Voices](#), United Church of Canada, Woodlake Publishing Inc. Reproduced with permission under ONE LICENCE # 604502

Acknowledgement of Country

Kirsty

During our worship during this Easter season, we are hearing recorded acknowledgments of country from all around Australia from places where our members live or travel. As we gather here on Wurundjeri Country and acknowledge the original custodians of this place, let us remember all the peoples of this land now called Australia.

We acknowledge and respect
the Arakwal people of the Bundjalung 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.**

Welcome and Introduction

Natalie

Good morning. My name is Natalie. Welcome to worship this morning, whether you are here in Brunswick, or joining us online. All are welcome in this place.

This morning, we continue our Easter journey. Today we will reflect on Jesus as the vine and our call to be fruitful disciples. We will also hear the story from Acts when Phillip meets the Ethiopian Eunuch. And we will bless a newly married couple!

After the service, there will be tea & coffee. And for the first time in more than a year, there will be food! Please join us in the hall after the service.

Prayers of Adoration & Confession and Declaration of Forgiveness Natalie

Vinegrower God,
You have planted us here,
In the soil of your grace,
As witnesses to your word.
We grow in your love.

Nurturing Spirit
You make us fruitful,
Giving us abundant gifts to share with the world
Drenching us in nourishing rain
Ripening us with the warmth of the sun,

Christ, the vine,
You are our strength and our stock,
We are your branches,
Bearing fruits of love and justice.
Abide in us, so we may abide in you.

Vinegrower God, Nurturing Spirit, Christ, the Vine,
We long to be like you, strong and full of courage, sustained by rich fertile soil,
But we confess that
Although we are sometimes full of passion,
At other times we are like dead branches.
While sometimes we feel nurtured by the Spirit,
At other times, we wither and fade.
While sometimes our lives seem fruitful,

At other times, we fail to see that we have made any difference at all.

Loving God, tend us as a Vinegrower tends the vineyard.

Heal our diseases,

Prune our unfruitful branches,

Train our wandering tendrils,

That we may continue to grow as fresh green shoots,
fruitful branches,

and glorious autumn leaves,

Reflecting your love for the world through all our seasons of life.

Sisters and brothers, Hear the words of Christ, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you". Let us leave the old things behind. Like spring growth on vines after winter, we can start to grow again.

Through Christ, in Christ and because of Christ, our sin is forgiven.

Thanks be to God.

Let us stand and sing Alleluia in celebration of our new life in Christ.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

With the Children

Dave and Ian

Dave to invite children down the front. Will have two bunches of grapes – red and green. When we hear the word: "fruit", one child eats a red grape (Dave to coord this group). When we hear the word: "abide", one child eats a green grape (Ian to coord this group).

Bible Reading: John 15:1-8

Maxine

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

Clare: For these words of witness and for Christ the Word

All: Thanks be to God

Clare: Alleluia

All stand and sing: Brunswick Alleluia

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

With the Children

Dave and Ian

Invite Steph and Matt and Josh to the front (continuing eating grapes). They've recently exchanged wedding rings. Yeah, they got married!! Woohoo! Have a look at their rings.

Dave to take his wedding ring off. Ask the kids: where does it begin? Where does it end?

Beautiful image of God's love with Matt and Steph – going on and on – whatever happens in their life. God's love – this big circle of love.

A bit later in the service we are going to gather in a big circle for communion – around the table, with Jesus as the host. A big circle of God’s love.

But before we do, we’re going to surround Matt and Steph, and Josh, in a big blessing of God’s love – with the ribbons we used on Easter Sunday. That was a good warm up for today – gather in a circle around Steph and Matt. Start twirling, Ian to read the prayer by Trish Graham while moving in and through the circle.

Then continue twirling the circles as we sing the blessing:

Ian: words by Tricia Graham

Steph and Matt’s Wedding. 17/04/21.

*This moment marks a point in time,
A line in the sand,
A threshold.*

*At this point an announcement is made,
A union consolidated
In declared Love.*

*Declared Love shines,
 It vibrates,
 It pulsates
 It radiates
It is palpable, tangible, softly solid.*

*We who gather see,
hear,
feel,
witness!
Breathe it in*

All of you who witness.

*Breathe it in and partake of its life.
Share in it as it has been shared with you.
So together we move forward across this threshold
With ¹these two and the blessing of their union **Josh.***

*And together we take this moment in time,
This moment of declared Love out from this place,
To share with the whole Earth Community.
That the Earth and all her Beings might breathe it in,*

Partake

Savour

Be nourished

And grow in love.

*Declared love shines,
 Vibrates
 Pulsates,
 Radiates.*

v
Trish Graham,
March 2021.

Blessing Song: May God's sheltering wings MV214

*May God's sheltering wings,
her gathering wings protect you.
May God's nurturing arms,
her cradling arms sustain you.
And hold you in her love,
And hold you in her love.*

SONG: [May God's sheltering wings](#), by Judith Snowdon, from [More Voices](#), United Church of Canada, Woodlake Publishing Inc. Reproduced with permission under ONE LICENCE # 604502

Kids corner activity: creating a circle object we are hoping Steph and Matt can use most days, as a reminder of God's love. (heat trivet out of corks)

Bible Reading: Acts 8:26-40

Maxine

Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a wilderness road.) So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it." So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him.

Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:

"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter,
and like a lamb silent before its shearer,
so he does not open his mouth.

In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth."

The eunuch asked Philip, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

For these words of witness and for Christ the Word:

Thanks be to God

Reflection – What is to prevent me from being baptised?

Ian

During this reflection I am referring to a couple of people whose personal gender identity is unclear to me. I have chosen to refer to them using they/them pronouns to avoid the risk of misgendering.

Let us pray...

"Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptised?" asks the black, nongender conforming slave who is literate and erudite and works as a high court official for the Queen of the land at the very end of the earth – because they hadn't heard of Australia in those days. So, here is a representative of the far reaches of the known world, an embodiment of intersectionality, someone who does not conform to the mainstream for multiple reasons,

ethnically, socially, gender wise. “What is to prevent ME from being baptised and thereby belonging to God’s family of love?” The answer of course is, or should be, nothing at all.

We currently have a baptism and confirmation preparation group running – it’ll be meeting today after this service – we’ve been discussing things like what does it mean to have faith, who is Jesus, how do we know God, what is the bible and how do we read it, how do I practice prayer and worship and love of neighbour? But the fact is none of those questions will be fully and finally answered by the time the members of that group get to the baptism font, nor for that matter by the time they die. Because these are questions for lifelong exploration and baptism is not a certificate of completion. Baptism is a symbolic ritual in which we enact God’s love for the world, God’s love for you, God’s love for a Eunuch from Ethiopia. Baptism is an enactment of love and belonging and the love of God does not depend upon what I know or don’t know, what I believe or don’t believe, nor as we see today, does it depend upon who I am, how I fit in, what I look like, how my gender and sexuality does or does not conform to whatever norms human society currently imposes upon me.

Here is the Ethiopian Eunuch – presented to us not by name, but by their ethnicity, their colour, and by their gender identity, and, since a court eunuch would be a slave, by their class as well – high in the court, low in the world. They are presented to us as an extreme outsider from the very ends of the earth. What do you see when you look at them? Do you see anything of yourself in them? What aspects of the being of this strange person do you share?

Friends, I confess that my answer is very little. I look at this our ancient sibling in divine love from my place of straight white cis-male privilege and I do not see myself in them – perhaps you do. But the risk for me is that I therefore identify with Philip or even with God in this story saying, “It is up to people like me to embrace people like them into my family, my way of belonging, according to my expectations of what church is.” So, for this reason I want us to hear some voices other than mine now. These voices do not belong people who would necessarily identify themselves with the Ethiopian Eunuch, but they are people whom I have encountered who have very different experiences of being bodies in the world than me, and very different relationships to church than me.

The House of Destiny

On Monday nights I attend a dance group that meets at a place called DanceHouse in Carlton as part of a residency program where DanceHouse gives various fringe dance communities free studio space to practice. Three Mondays ago, all those groups met together to share our different dance styles with one another, and it was fabulous, a peak experience for me.

At the beginning of the gathering we were invited to mingle and introduce ourselves to 3 other people we didn’t know. The first person I met told me they were into the ballroom scene and said they were the Mother of the House of Destiny. Now the Ballroom Scene in this context is not ballroom dancing, but a competitive performance subculture which grew up in New York City among a community which inhabits an acronym I only learnt this week TQPOC – Trans and Queer People of Colour They met and still meet in old Ballrooms to compete for trophies in “fierce and fun” fashion runways and dance battles in a style called voguing (a bit of which we’ll see in a moment). And I’m quoting here from an article in the Guardian by Ashley Clark: *Many of the contestants vying for trophies represent “Houses” which serve as surrogate families and social groups for a predominantly youthful community largely ostracised from mainstream society.* The story of these houses and their mothers and the influence of this subculture on the mainstream was captured in a famous 1980s documentary called Paris is Burning. Here’s a clip in which we meet a couple of the house mothers.

VIDEO: Paris is Burning – House Mothers – 01:32

So there I am, mixing and mingling at DanceHouse, chatting to Kiki the Mother of the House of Destiny. They were expressing their passion and love for their self-selected family, that community of belonging and dancing, and then (without knowing anything about me except that

I do an obscure form of post-modern improvisational dance) they said to me, “It’s my church – the House of Destiny is my church”. And at that very moment we were asked to move on to someone else and as we separated I was left feeling “Hang on, I’m interested in that, I want to know more about that!” and hopefully one day we’ll get the chance to continue the conversation.

But what a wonderful picture of church, a place of love and belonging and healing and work and fun. And when the House of Destiny danced for us that night, Trans and Queer young Australians with heritage in Asia, India, Africa, South America, Indigenous Australia, when they did their voguing with the rest of us in a circle around them clapping and cheering, what an explosion of joy there was in that room.

And for a brief moment I was the outsider welcomed in and I felt what church could be.

The Black Church

Here’s one other voice from a different place to me. This jaunty individual is Willie James Jennings– associate professor of systematic theology and Africana studies at Yale University. I’ve been greatly inspired this week by his commentary on the Ethiopian Eunuch and now I want to invite him to address us directly. I’m going to play a recording of Willie Jennings talking about growing up black in Grand Rapids Michigan USA. His parents were southern cotton pickers who migrated to the northern states where Willie was born. Here are 2 minutes of an hour-long talk.

AUDIO: Willie James Jennings – Invisible Being – 02:20

Today God says to the Ethiopian Eunuch, “I see you”. God sees them for who they are, God seeks them out, chasing down their chariot to embrace their body as it is in the circle of love through baptism – an outsider from the margins of the world brought to the centre.

And in a few minutes, when we gather in a circle around this table, around this church, a circle that encompasses the world – as we gather in a circle to draw nourishment for our faith sharing in the banquet of the baptised, the banquet of belonging, look around. Who do you see? And who sees you?

Let us pray...

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/jun/24/burning-down-the-house-debate-paris-is-burning>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=riLSCStHm9M>

<https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/contributor/willie-james-jennings/>

Reflective Music

Prayers of the People

Geoff

Today’s prayers are based around four key words taken from the readings: Vine; Good News; Abide; Fruit.

Each one of them is the basis for one of the petitions of this prayer.

Let us pray

Vine: We commit to you, O God, all those places where people feel unconnected or barely hanging on to the threads and branches of community. We pray for refugees in this nation’s unjust detention centers. We pray for the people of India living in fear, anxiety and grief. We pray for the people of Myanmar resisting the attempts to destroy community. We pray for the First Nations peoples of this and other colonized lands who have been dispossessed of so many of their connecting threads.

God love and grace, **hear our prayers**

Good news: God of the good news, we pray that all the forces within and beyond the church which obscure your love, goodness and graciousness will be undone. Quieten the voices that spread hate and violence in your name. Open the minds that cheapen or trivialize your love.

Make the freshness of the gospel real to those who only know to fear or doubt you. Remind us that this good news is found in the oddness of the risen crucified Jesus.

God love and grace, **hear our prayers**

Abide: God who welcomes us home, we pray for those who have nowhere to abide. We pray for those who have no source of constancy or comfort. For those who are pushed out of their homes and families, for those who are friendless and alone. We pray that we have the resolve and love to respond to the homeless. We pray for those whose souls and minds are restless, and who cannot settle and who struggle to find anywhere to abide.

God love and grace, **hear our prayers**

Fruit: God who invites us to bear fruit, we pray for ourselves that the love that has drawn us to you may draw us out of ourselves in love for the world. Help us in this church in Brunswick, in the Uniting Church more generally, and in all churches, daily to remember the call you have placed on our lives. We pray that our discipleship, like Philip's, will be grounded in your Son, Jesus, will cross boundaries, will be welcoming, and will provide sparks of hope in this world.

All these prayers we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Holy Communion

Ian

Servers: Ian, Natalie, Dave, Jess, Clare F, Geoff T

Communion Song

Draw the circle wide (Gordon Light) MV145

Draw the circle wide.

Draw it wider still.

*Let this be our song,
no one stands alone,
standing side by side,
draw the circle wide.*

- 1. God the still point of the circle,
'round whom all creation turns;
nothing is lost, but held forever,
in God's gracious arms.*
- 2. Let our hearts touch far horizons,
so encompass great and small;
let our loving know no borders,
faithful to God's call.*
- 3. Let the dreams we dream be larger,
than we've ever dreamed before;
let the dream of Christ be in us,
open every door.*

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Thanksgiving

We are the body of Christ: **His Spirit is with us.**

Lift up your hearts: **We lift our hearts to God.**

Let us give thanks to God who is Wisdom and Love:
It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Holy and life-giving God,
you are Creator of all things,
and Lover of each one.
In Christ you share with us
the joy and pain of our humanity.
We give thanks that through him,
life rises from despair
and all things are made new.

Dying Christ destroyed our death

Alleluia

Rising he restored our life

Alleluia

Therefore,
with the whole creation
we sing in thanks and praise:

Holy, holy, holy (TIS764)

*Holy (Holy), holy, (holy)
holy Lord of power and might.
Heaven (Heaven), earth (earth)
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
All glory to your name.
(All glory to your name.)
All glory to your name.
(All glory to your name.)*

*Blessed (Blessed), blessed (blessed)
is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Blessed (Blessed), blessed (blessed)
is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.
(Hosanna in the highest.)
Hosanna in the highest.
(Hosanna in the highest.)*

Blessed is our brother Jesus,
known again in the breaking of bread;
who on the night of his betrayal took bread,
gave thanks, broke it and said:
***This is my body given for you.
Whenever you eat it, remember me.***

In the same way also he took the cup.
Again he gave thanks,
shared it with his disciples and said:
***This is the cup of a new covenant in my blood.
whenever you drink it, remember me.***

Come now, Holy Spirit of the living God,
love us into the unity of peace
through this bread and wine. For:

***Christ has died,
Christ is risen,
Christ will come again!***

Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ
all glory be to you,
Source of all Being,
Eternal Wisdom and Holy Spirit,
one God and Mother of all creation.

Amen.

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 for ever. Amen.***

Breaking of the bread

Christ is the bread of resurrection:
new life for all.

Christ is the cup of life:
who revives the faint-hearted.

We who are many are one body,
for we all share in the one bread.

Let us receive what we are.
Let us become what we receive:
The body of Christ.

The gifts of God for the people of God.

Distribution

*Communion served in one circle
Music: musicians' choice*

The Peace

The peace of the risen Christ be with you all:
And also with you

Share the peace, return to your seats

Sending Song

Song: Tune In: Community (Dave Brown)

1. *Part of a family, interconnected, this is community
Welcoming strangers, visiting neighbours, this gives us dignity
Care for the earth and sea, we need to keep them free,
So we care for the earth and sea
Care for the ones we meet, love is the face we see,
When we care for the ones we meet*
 2. *Part of a family, interconnected, this is community
Welcoming strangers, visiting neighbours, this gives us dignity
Sharing our joy and pain, praying and keeping faith
By sharing our joy and pain
Singing a song of rights, imaging God in life,
By singing a song of rights.*
 3. *Part of a family, interconnected, this is community
Welcoming strangers, visiting neighbours, this gives us dignity
Talk to the lonely, bind up the broken, this makes community
A glass of water shared with the thirsty, this makes for dignity
This makes for dignity, this is community*
-

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Blessing and Sending

Ian

Go now to love one another,
because love is from God.
Abide in Jesus Christ,
and like branches of a vine,
draw your life from him.

And may God the vine grower tend you
and make you fruitful;
May Christ Jesus abide in you
and give you life;
And may the Holy Spirit cast out all fear
and fill you with God's love.

Go in peace to love and to serve,
In the name of Christ. Amen.

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Thank Yous

Liturgists:
Natalie Sims

Acknowledgement
of Country:
(recording)
Kirsty Brown

Bible readings:
Maxine Loynd

With the Children:
Dave Hall (CYYA Pastor)
Ian Ferguson

Reflection:
Ian Ferguson
(Minister of the Word)

Prayers of the People:
Geoff Thompson

Musicians:
Elaine Potter (Coordinator)
Helen Burnham
Glenice Cook
Joel Hallinan
Maggie Somerville
Shawn Whelan

Recordings:
Make your home in me
Faye White

Welcoming:
Faye Findlay
Maxine Loynd

Holy Communion:
Ian Ferguson presiding
Claire Foley
Dave Hall
Jessica Kvensakul
Natalie Sims
Geoff Thompson

Images:
Jessica Kvensakul
with
Saide Cameron
Ian Ferguson
Claire Foley

Production:
Ray Cameron
Saide Cameron
Philipa Hamilton-Smith
Lauren Reader
Bridie Turner
Shawn Whelan

Closing verse on screen:

“What is to prevent me from being baptised?” Acts 8:36