

Order of Service 25/7/21 Pentecost 9

Opening verse

'I pray that ... you may be strengthened in your inner being with power though the Spirit'
Ephesians 3:15-16

Gathering, Greeting and Call to Worship

Kirsty

Let us worship God!

The God of possibilities, who makes all things new.

The God who goes before us and beside us, and invites us to sit down and be fed.

Let us sing.

Song

Heaven and earth

*Heaven and earth, join to worship your Creator!
Sing to the Lord, praise the One from whom you came.
Sing a new song to the God who goes before us.
Making all new, leaving nobody the same.
Sing a new song to the God who goes before us.
Making it all new, leaving nobody the same.*

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Acknowledgement of Country

Gwen

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.**

Welcome and Introduction

Kirsty

Welcome to worship at Brunswick Uniting.

Welcome if you regularly join us on-line or in person. Welcome if you are on-line for the first time.

We are live streaming from our worship space this morning and I am here with Fran our preacher, and Ray, Shawn and Alistair who are running the sound, slides and livestream to bring this service to you. Beth, Bronte, Dave, Geoff, Gwen, Lillian, Mal, and (spoiler alert) Matthew and Michael have pre-recorded their parts.

Today we will be looking at stories: how we understand stories and how we can change a story, change our expectations, and discover new possibilities.

We will focus on two stories in particular.

The first is John's telling of Jesus' feeding of the 5000 with loaves and fishes.

The second is the story of David and Bathsheba in 2 Samuel. We are delighted to have Fran Barber preaching for us today, and she will be exploring this confronting text in some detail and talking frankly about its content.

Now, let us listen to the Word as we prepare for our prayers of Adoration and Confession.

Bible Reading Ephesians 3:14-21

Mal

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

For these words of witness and for Christ the Word

Thanks be to God

Prayers of Adoration & Confession & Word of Grace

Live Kirsty

Let us pray:

God whose breadth and length and depth knows no bounds,
You strengthen us and invite us to join with the saints,
You are grounded in love and
work within us in more ways than we can imagine.

Jesus, prophet who is come into the world,
You welcome us as we come to you.
You are not deterred by the enormity of the scene you face,
You feed us and make us whole.

Spirit of Life,
You empower us to rise,
To rise and above the limitations and barriers we see,
To grow, and become something new.

We adore you.

Forgive us when we put limits on you,
When we do not love,
When we are not open to your possibilities.

Forgive us when we do not offer welcome,
When we turn away because what we see is too enormous for us to face and we do not know
what we can offer.

Forgive us when we are held back by our what we perceive as limitations
When we see only barriers,
When we do not see a way to make things new.

Amen.

Word of Grace

Sisters and brothers in Christ
God sees a new future in us all.

She invites us to come,
To sit down and be fed.

And so we can say with confidence that
Our sin is forgiven.
Thanks be to God.

Bible Reading John 6:1-15

Bronte

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world."

When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

For these words of witness and for Christ the Word

Thanks be to God

Song

Invitation (Tune In)

- 1. God has laid a feasting table
All her guests are gathered 'round
From the highways and the byways
All the lost have now been found.
When we hear the invitation
Will we lay our burdens down?
When we hear the invitation
Will we lay our burdens down?*
- 2. At this table all are welcome
No-one need be left behind
God is greater than our difference
Christ can see where we are blind.
When we hear the invitation
Will we love all humankind? (repeat)*
- 3. God is crying out for justice
Christ is weeping in the street
When will be the time for laughter?
When will all have food to eat?*

When we hear the invitation
Will we make God's will complete? (repeat)

SONG: [Invitation](#), by Shawn Whelan, from [Tune In](#), Brunswick Uniting Church Songbook,
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With the Children

Dave and Lillian

Chatting with Lillian about electing the latest Uniting church President, women of colour in the Bible.

Bible Reading 2 Samuel 11:1-15

Beth

In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.

It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful. David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, "This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite." So David sent messengers to get her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she was purifying herself after her period.) Then she returned to her house. The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant." So David sent word to Joab, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab and the people fared, and how the war was going. Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house, and wash your feet." Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king. But Uriah slept at the entrance of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. When they told David, "Uriah did not go down to his house," David said to Uriah, "You have just come from a journey. Why did you not go down to your house?" Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah remain in booths; and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field; shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do such a thing." Then David said to Uriah, "Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day. On the next day, David invited him to eat and drink in his presence and made him drunk; and in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house. David Has Uriah Killed

In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. In the letter he wrote, "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, so that he may be struck down and die."

For these words of witness and for Christ the Word

Thanks be to God

Reflection

Fran

Imagine Jesus appearing on the SBS genealogy program *Who do you Think You Are?* Think about it. Jesus has all the right credentials: forgive the flippancy, but he's got the celebrity factor, and, as the old testament reading today highlights so starkly, Jesus has got the requisite skeleton in the closet. *Who Do you Think You Are* (or WDYTYA to hard core fans like myself) tends only to take celebs who are found to harbour a scandalous or tragic story in their ancestry: think convict origins, polygamy, fraud or, ideally, murder and suffering. But there are exceptions: the episode on Cameron Daddo recounted a pattern of beautiful, epic love stories going back 600 years, and Lisa Wilkinson's family line is dotted with strong, defiant women who survived against the odds of poverty and domestic abuse.

As WDYTYA guest Jesus would fit right in. As well as today's story, which we'll get to in a moment, we know from Matthew's genealogy of Jesus that he's got way more than one

skeleton lurking in his line. Somehow God's redemption absorbs appalling histories like Amnon and Absalom's, just two who lurk in the background of Matthew 1 - where deception, abusive imperial power, and fratricide feature amongst Jesus' kin.

Today I want to focus on the disturbing account in 2nd Samuel about David's rape of Bathsheba. That's strong language, but I'm using it deliberately because too often the word 'adultery' has been used of David's sin, which is only very partly what's going on: Bathsheba is certainly married, and so is David - to 6 women, actually, according to 2 Sam 3. African American scholar Will Gaffney refers to David as a 'collector of women'. What's happening here, though, is not 'merely' adultery but an egregious abuse of power that is coercive. No consent from Bathsheba is indicated anywhere. Neither, incidentally does the story suggest she is deliberately enticing David, which dubious interpretations wanting to save his reputation, have suggested. And all of this is before we get onto the calculated murder David ordered to save himself after getting Bathsheba pregnant. Who says faith is about escapism?!

Although we revel in the scandalous stories at arm's length on WDTYA, I'm going to take a punt that many of us have skirted past this violent episode in David's life because it's an uncomfortable problem in the biblical narrative. OR, more seriously, because we find it distressing. It is a distressing text. It is difficult. It's also a tale we see repeated into the 21st century: I'm thinking of Brittany Higgins and Grace Tame; the Bathshebas of our own time. If you read further into Bathsheba's story, you find she wields considerable, political influence, as Grace and Brittany do now.

Or there's Harvey Weinstein, to name one contemporary man of enormous wealth, power and influence, who echoes David's arrogance and entitlement. What's going on inside David that permits him to act the way he does? What is the story David tells himself? What stories do we tell ourselves?

David, the king, is at the height of his power when we encounter him - his palace is well established, God has promised Israel an eternal kingship and the ark is securely in Jerusalem. The clear suggestion in the text is that David SHOULD be on the battlefield. Instead, however, he has delegated to his generals so he can stay behind in Jerusalem lounging around on his rooftop couch. To all intents and purposes, David is a man of leisure. There is something sparing and inevitable about the way the event is recounted; David engages in no second-guessing or self-reflection. He simply sees Bathsheba, delegates his dirty work to his messenger to *get* her then he lies with her. Note that the word 'get' is translated from the Hebrew verb "to take", and is a deliberate echo of Samuel's warning to Israel about the nature of kings earlier in 1 Samuel 8. "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take . . . your sons, your daughters, your fields, your wealth". According to Samuel, coercive power will be characteristic of the "ways" of the king.

David takes what he wants when he wants it because of who he is, king and ruler, beholden to no one. He behaves as if the only story that matters is the one he tells himself. Central to that story is his own sense of freedom from all convention or moral obligation, including any awareness that he is writing Bathsheba a devastating story of herself in the process. The fact that he goes to the lengths of murdering Uriah to cover up Bathsheba's pregnancy shows David knows the story he's telling himself will be contested by others. He fears fall out. But he still gets away with it.

That is, until the prophet Nathan arrives on scene in chapter 12. I'm taking you outside the lectionary reading for today in spoiler for next week (!), and I'm indebted to colleague Craig Thompson for this phrasing of what Nathan does to David here: he *re-stories him*. *Who do you Think you Are, David?* Let me tell you, and Nathan recounts a shrewd parable: There is a rich man with vast livestock, and a poor man with just one precious ewe lamb, lovingly reared by him and his family. A hungry traveller approaches the rich man for one of his many sheep, but the rich man refuses, giving him instead the poor man's only ewe. David is outraged - "As the Lord lives, this man deserves to die!" Nathan's response: YOU ARE THAT MAN!

What a lesson in how scripture can read us and not the other way round! In entering Nathan's parable, David momentarily forgets both himself and what he's just done. He assumes the story is about someone else, indignation at the ready, and, as it happens, rightly judges the rich man. To David's horror, however, the story turns 180 degrees on to him. As recognition dawns, David confesses and begins his troubled path of repentance (more of which, next week!)

A key aspect of David's story of himself up to this point is that God does not appear to be in it. Until Nathan's parable God is not mentioned at any juncture in the story of David and Bathsheba. Instead, human action dominates – desire, fear, manipulation and political manoeuvring. It's tempting to dismiss all this as the failings of one man, which they undoubtedly are, and David doesn't escape punishment. But are we right to resist the gnawing sense that we might participate in internal processes like David's in some form? In his letter to the Romans, Paul talks about us wanting to do the good but being unable to: stuck in some internal bind that only God can get us out of, her Spirit interceding on our behalf with sighs too deep for words.

We don't need to confine ourselves to extreme stories of corruption and abuse like David's to see a kind of **functional atheism** plays out in our lives too. We tell our own stories effectively leaving God out all the time – often with the best of intentions. I know I do. We are so well-schooled in stories of independence, autonomy and 'coping' that society tell us are good stories to tell about ourselves. What a weight we carry when we do this. Look at Philip in today's gospel reading about Jesus feeding the 5000. Jesus asks Philip a question to test his grasp of God's faithfulness – where will we buy food sufficient for all these people?! This is a question born out of human scarcity, a story in which Philip and we all are well-versed, Jesus knows. Philip replies as we would, logically, from what he knows about how the world works - 'That much food would require half a year's wages of dozens!' Impossible!

There is a story bigger, roomier story given to us. When we hear the gospel proclaimed, what's happening is that we are being 're-storied' by a story that, to put it clumsily, embraces our David-ness and our Bathsheba-ness – our complicity with death, *and* our suffering at the hands of deathly forces; yes, including the suffering and triumph in all those WDYTUA histories. John's gospel today tells the story with Jesus, not a king who grasps power, prestige or privilege at any cost, but one who by emptying himself on a cross gives abundantly to the whole world – feeding the hungry people to more than fullness, such that a dozen brimming baskets are left over! Paul in Ephesians tells the story, too, in terms of expansive abundance. For Paul, what God has done in Christ re-stories the *whole cosmos*: *I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

The beating heart of this story is the grace-filled good news that God promises goodness out of our failure and limitation. And not in some simple way but, radically, through his literal death, so that we might be healed. Let us be re-storied by this radical love, **so that our endings** are thrown open and we embody God's fullness in the world.

Song

In the shape of the cross

*O Spirit God to you we pray
For the healing of the nations
Within this space extend your grace
For the healing of our neighbours.*

- 1. Love enter our shattered world of tears
Soothing the pain of all our loss
Breaking the locks on all our fears
Forging the truth inside our years
In the shape of a cross.*

3. *Love enter our lives at darkest hour
Be with us as we count the cost
Wanting to follow where you lead
Painting the picture of your power
In the shape of a cross.
In the shape of a cross.
In the shape of a cross.*

SONG: [The shape of the Cross](#), © David Brown, 4/2004, from [Tune In](#),
Brunswick Uniting Church Songbook, Used with permission

Offering

Kirsty

I invite you now to pause and make an offering for the work of the church in God's world. If you able to make a financial offering, please use the direct debit details on our website.

Let us ask ourselves:

What can I offer?

What can I give,
of my money,
of my time,
of my skills,
of my love?

Let us commit together to give,
remembering that five loaves and two fish became baskets of leftovers,
that every offering can be lifechanging.
Amen.

Prayers of the People

Geoff

Today's prayers take up some of the themes of the readings and the sermon's theme of story.

The God of Israel and of Jesus is a story-making God. Let's pray to God seeking to hear the story afresh and faithfully to live our role in it.

Let us pray

In his treatment of Bathsheba and Uriah, David twisted and rejected God's story of justice and compassion.

So story-making God, we pray for all who are the victims of those who distort, misuse and twist your story for their own gain.

We pray too for those who tell God's story in public places and whose role in your story is to call truth to power. May they be bold, courageous, and able to see through and call out the lies and deceit of those who claim your name but live by falsehoods and lies.

In your mercy, Lord: Hear our prayer.

Jesus fed the crowds abundantly, displaying the generosity of the story he was telling.

So, we pray, story-making God, for ourselves and all who are disciples of Jesus, that the way we live our lives may be generous: generous to the poor, to the downtrodden, to the marginalized, to the victims of the abuse of power. May we also become every more generous in word and deed to the peoples of Australia's First Nations.

We pray too for generosity with each other in this and other nations as we endure the disruptions of the pandemic. We especially pray for those whose already fragile lives are made

even more so by these disruptions. Help us, we pray, to help each other; and help leaders of nations to see and respond to the needs of their people.

In your mercy, Lord: Hear our prayer

In Ephesians were reminded of the scale of the story we are called into: the breadth, length, height and depth of God's love.

So story-making God, we pray for the church world-wide, nationally and locally. Help us enter into this story in all its breadth length, height and depth, and finding our unity as a church in our various roles in your story of love.

Help us always remember that the story you entrust to us is a story not only for us. Keep our focus on the world that you call us to serve. Where we are too strong make us vulnerable. Where are anxious, make us trusting. When we forget your love, remind us to love.

In your mercy, Lord. Hear our prayer.

We pray too for those known to us who are lonely, ill, or fearful, for those who mourn or who know they are nearing the end of their lives. We commit them to your care and compassion.

These prayers we pray in the name of your Jesus Christ. Amen.

Notices

Matthew and Michael

I'm Matthew Cameron

And I'm Michael Cameron

And this is the BUC News

And we're back.

Yes, we definitely are.

So let's get started.

Okay then so the big news this week is the 16th Assembly

Ah yes I saw Mum & Dad watching the Opening Service

Yes it was quite a big weekend.

I can imagine - what were the highlights?

Well, Rev Sharon Hollis was installed as President and Rev Charissa Suli is the new President-Elect.

Fantastic, anything else?

The theme was Dwelling in love which Sharon reflected on her sermon and retiring President Deidre Palmer reminded us of the abundant grace of God and liberating hope we have in Christ

Sounds like an amazing weekend.

For sure, there's links to the highlights and other important information in the UC Assembly News in the Olive Press.

Great now on Tuesday a very important series is starting up.

Now let me think ... I know the Eco-theology conversations.

Correct the 7 session series is being led by Jan Morgan & Graeme Garrett.

Umm, we're in lockdown. How's that going to work.

Ah it's obvious really the first session will be on Zoom

Fair enough, hopefully we'll be out of lockdown for the rest of the series.

Definitely, check out the Eco-theology event on the website for the Zoom link.

Here's some important news about direct giving

Okay let's hear it

So if you have a Direct offering arrangement with U Ethical you need to set up a new direct giving arrangement.

Good to know, is there a deadline?

There definitely is - 31st July.

That's not far away, are the details in the Olive Press?

Yes and if you need any help contact our Treasurer, Shawn.

And now two quick things before we cut to a video about Emergence

Ah yes Emergence, our biennial art exhibition

So the August & September roster is out and there are gaps in the welcoming & morning tea rosters.

What do people do if they want to join the roster.

Easy click on the link in the Olive Press and then give Mum, that's Saide, a call.

What was the other quick thing?

The August Olive Branch is being prepared this coming week, email your contributions by Monday, details are in the Olive Press

Great now let's watch the Emergence video prepared by Courtney and James.

Video plays

Join Dave after worship for the Sunday chat session.

Details are in yesterday's worship email and the Olive Press.

Keep up to date with all the news in the Olive Press, website and Facebook group.

Goodbye and thanks for listening.

Song

In Spirit we rise (Sheree Anderson)

*In Spirit we rise, rise, rise
to be bread for the world
In Spirit we rise, rise, rise
to be bread for the world*

1. *Planted, the seed within:
Image of You we bear;
life as Your blessed ones,
love the gift that we share. Chorus*

2. *Christ is the pattern sown
in moments of trust known deep.
Knowledge of You we grow;
faith the harvest we reap. Chorus*

3. *Tumbled by life we come,
love's holy grain worked through.
Spirit, the yeast so wise
proves our power in You.*

*In Spirit we rise, rise, rise
to be bread for the world
In Spirit we rise, rise, rise
to be bread for the world
In Spirit we rise, rise, rise
to be bread for the world
bread for the world.*

SONG: [In Spirit We Rise](#), Sheree Anderson April '07, Used with permission

Blessing and Sending

Fran

Word of Mission

Open your stories to God's expansive story...., so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.

Blessing

May The Spirit

who hovered over the face of the waters

at creation, at your birth and your baptism,

grant you the gift of the freedom of Christ:

In the name of God,

who created you, who formed you, and who loves you.

Amen

Thank You

Liturgist:

Kirsty Bennett

Acknowledgement of

Country:

Gwen Arnold

Bible readers:

Bronte Potter

Mal Rowe

Beth Shelton

Children's time

Lillian Sanders

Dave Hall

(Pastor: Children, Youth
and Young Adults)

Reflection:

Fran Barber

(Minister of the Word)

Prayers of the People:

Geoff Thompson

Notices:

Matthew Cameron

Michael Cameron

Songs:

Make your home in me:

Faye White

Heaven and earth:

Invitation:

Natalie Sims

Shawn Whelan

In the shape of a cross:

Dave Brown

Gabriel Brown

In Spirit we rise:

Sheree Anderson

Shawn Whelan

May you go well:

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Images:

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Bible reading images:

Ray Cameron

Bathsheba:

<https://www.blackhistoryinthebible.com/the-hamites/bathsheba-kings-solomons-african-mother/>

Prominent women of the Bible:

<https://www.pinterest.com.au/MsDivaInRed/the-noir-bible/>

Photographer:

James C. Lewis

Charissa Suli:

<https://www.insights.uca.org.au/the-exercise-by-men-and-women-of-the-gifts-god-bestows-upon-them-celebrating-women-in-leadership-in-the-uniting-church/>

Closing verse

I pray that you may ... know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge' Ephesians 3:18-19.