

Order of Service 10/10/2021 Pentecost 20

Blessing of the Animals

Opening verse

Blessed are you, our God, creator of all living things.

Call to Worship

Helen

Mother, Father,
we search and long for You. You call us and we are gathered here in Church and in our homes.
In our search we light the Christ Candle to bring the light and life of Christ into the world.
Without his birth, life and death, we would still be living in darkness. Now we are the lights
shining in the darkness, and a voice in the silence.

Song of praise – AoV2: 53 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

Clara

Video: Acknowledgement of country for blessing of animals including thankfulness for the many native animals that are part of our lives.

Welcome

Helen

The world around us is bursting with life. It is the Wurundjeri season of Poorneet, or True Spring, tadpole season, warm, wet, windy, with abundant flowers, insects, and native orchids, and our weather is following this pattern.
Good morning everyone. I am Helen, your liturgist for today, along with Ian, who'll be preaching, and the Livestream operators, it's lovely to be able to greet you all, from the Church. Today we will hear readings from Job: 23, and Psalm: 90. Exploring the mystery of God and Christ in suffering. In the Blessing of the Animals, we will look at the place of pets, and native animals in our lives, and the comfort they bring us.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Helen

Mother and Father of great Imaginings.
You are the mystery of birth, life and death, we come to know through Christ Jesus.
God with us.
Forgive us when we hear your call, but turn away.

You have created a world of infinite variety. We walk and work, your ancient grasslands, mountains, deserts, rainforests, and oceans.
Forgive our blindness, when we fail to recognise the beauty of your creation.

We live alongside amazing and unique animals here on our Island. Kangaroos, koalas, platypuses, echidnas, laughing kookaburras, warbling magpies, all a part of the cosmic comedy of creation.

Forgive us Creator God, when we clear land and destroy the habitat of our animals. Forgive us that we don't recognise the miracles we have until it is almost too late.

In this time, when we are so isolated, we thank you for the company of our furry companions. For the comfort of warm bodies, whatever the shape or size.

God of all things great and small. Forgive us when we do not treat the animals that provide our food, and share our lives, with the love and respect they deserve.

Our First People have lived and cared for your creation for thousands of years. Walking softly on the land.

Forgive us, God of our story, when we fail to learn how to care for this land in its frailty. Forgive us when we do not recognise the centuries of their storytelling, art and history, in our white superiority.

As the world suffers through COVID, we thank you for great minds and inventions. For vaccines, scientists and medical staff, saving lives. For tireless work in governing, testing, contact tracing, injecting. For television and the internet, keeping us in contact with family, friends and our community.

God of comfort and hope, forgive us when we do not share vaccines with poorer countries. Forgive us when we use the internet to exploit, degrade, debase, and to spread lies and hate.

God of wonder and mystery. Light our path when we see only darkness. When we are weary, hold us in your arms. Inspire and help us to see you at work in the world, and the miracle of God with us.

Amen

Word of Grace

Mother and Father.

This is the great and awesome mystery. Although we are undeserving, you became one of us. Laughed, cried, lived and died as we do. God walking with us. And so we can say, through the grace of Jesus Christ.

Our sin is forgiven.

Thanks be to God.

Bible Reading – Psalm 90:12-17

Teach us to count our days

that we may gain a wise heart.

Turn, O LORD! How long?

Have compassion on your servants!

Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love,

so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

Make us glad as many days as you have afflicted us,

and as many years as we have seen evil.

Let your work be manifest to your servants,

and your glorious power to their children.

Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us,

and prosper for us the work of our hands—

O prosper the work of our hands!

For these words of witness and for Christ the Word:

Thanks be to God

An SMP blessing on Zoom, see *Thank you list for details*

Song – AoV2: 45 All Creation Sings

*All creation sings of the glory of the Lord.
Birds and crickets sing to the glory of the Lord.
Kookaburras, magpies, cicadas, frogs and bees,
sing a joyful song to the Lord.*

Refrain

*Sing, sing, glory to the Lord.
Praise, praise, let his name be heard.*

*Let us lift our voices, children of the Lord.
Join with God's creation in praising the Lord.
God has given life to ev'ry living thing.
He has given life so let us sing.*

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Bible Reading – Job 23:1-9, 16-17

James

Then Job answered:

“Today also my complaint is bitter;
his hand is heavy despite my groaning.
Oh, that I knew where I might find him,
that I might come even to his dwelling!
I would lay my case before him,
and fill my mouth with arguments.
I would learn what he would answer me,
and understand what he would say to me.
Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power?
No; but he would give heed to me.
There an upright person could reason with him,
and I should be acquitted forever by my judge.
“If I go forward, he is not there;
or backward, I cannot perceive him;
on the left he hides, and I cannot behold him;
I turn to the right, but I cannot see him...
God has made my heart faint;
the Almighty has terrified me;
If only I could vanish in darkness,
and thick darkness would cover my face!

For these words of witness and for Christ the Word:

Thanks be to God

Reflection - The Love of God in our Companion Animals

Ian

I'm going to go out on a limb today by comparing our companion animals to God. Specifically, the God who meets us in suffering, who enters into the struggle of living with and for us. The God revealed to us in Jesus Christ, but also today in the story of Job.

You may know what happens to Job. He is a really good guy (by ancient standards). He has a loving marriage, 10 dutiful children most of whom are boys, 11,000 animals on his large estate. And what's more, he really loves God with all his heart, soul and strength and his neighbour as himself – Job is exemplary.

One day Job wakes up with a bit of a scratchy throat and a cough, he's a bit shivery, and when he has his breakfast he can't taste his omelette or smell his coffee. "I must have caught a cold," he thinks to himself. And because he is such a good person, rather than lazily going back to bed, he heads out to supervise his slaves working in the fields. Before too long the unvaccinated labourers on his estate have all picked up the virus and the next thing you know ALL JOB'S CHILDREN DIE. And the Chaldeans steal all his animals.

Now at this point the local health authorities say, "Look Job, we're a bit concerned about the pestilence that is infecting your household, so we're going to lock you down until it's been eradicated. Shouldn't take long, it'll all be over by Christmas." And so, Job settles in for the longest lockdown in human history. Maybe you know how he feels.

I'm paraphrasing Job's story, but the basic facts are: his family dies, he loses all his property and catches a nasty disease. And Job's faith is shaken by all this. Why has this great ordeal come to him? God must have made a terrible mistake, thinks Job, because he knows he has done nothing to deserve such suffering.

And surely, the same goes for us? We haven't done anything to deserve this great lockdown ordeal that we are suffering. It's not our fault. If anyone is to blame it's probably China who are to blame for most things these days, or our blameworthy political leaders, or our health authorities with their draconian insistence on the preservation of life. All at the cost of our mental health. Don't we deserve to be happy? This shouldn't be happening to us. But it just is.

Job's friends have a Zoom meet up to commiserate with him. They all live up in NSW and they say, "Oh Job, look at your numbers, they are going in the wrong direction man. You have not handled this well. How can you even think of coming out of lockdown with all that unchecked infection? – pity your health workers. Let us tell you what we would do in your situation."

Yes, thank you, friends.

At least we still have our animals to cheer us up; our pets, or the birds in the garden, or the possums on the roof. And if anyone is doing well out of this lockdown it is them. They are as God to us, I want to claim.

Now, warning, I am talking about suffering today and when Christians talk about suffering and God the conversation inevitably gets around to death. Some of you know that our feline companion of 19 years, Sassy, died a few weeks ago. It's very sad and we miss her, but she died of extreme old age (truncated by euthanasia), after a good life that brought a lot of joy to our household.

Sassy is the kind of name you get when you are named by a 10 year old 19 years ago and she endured it stoically even after the sass wore off which it certainly did over the past year or so.

Now, I have to tell you that I lobbied hard against getting a cat 19 years ago and I lost that argument on the basis that other people would take responsibility for looking after her. That didn't entirely happen and Sassy soon came to know that she got her food from me and her affection from others. Because I'm less of a "cat person", than I am a "native bird in the wild" person. I vividly remember the day that Sassy excitedly and proudly brought an Eastern Spinebill, my favourite bird, in her mouth to the back door of our house in Black Rock. She always somehow managed to get rid of that annoying little bell. And that's the tension we live in with cats, isn't it?

The lockdown suited Sassy, for the same reason as most pets, because there were people around all the time and Sassy just lived for a warm lap and a bit of gentle stroking, increasingly so as she slowed down in old age. I mentioned that she got her affection from people other than

me in our household, but most of those others had moved out by early 2021. And so, for the last year of her life, as cats often do, she fixated on the one person who had the least desire to spend time with her. Me. Whenever I was in a recumbent position anywhere in the house, she would come and demand to be taken onto my lap – even if I was sitting next to that WELL KNOWN cat person Beth. And Sassy and I came to an understanding which was, she got what she wanted, pretty much whenever she wanted it. Zoom meetings were a particular boon for Sassy as many of you saw. She would always come to avail herself of the lap space.

But then came the last few weeks, the time of Sassy's suffering, when she didn't want to be touched any more because it was too painful. Every day as her breathing became more and more laboured, and her movements more and more uncomfortable, we would ask, is she suffering too much? Beth and I engaged in some intensive feline palliative care, washing her bedding every morning when she became incontinent, giving her multiple medications, moving her from warm place to warmer place, and indulging her end of life craving for smoked salmon. Things that I certainly didn't sign up for 19 years ago, but was glad to do in the end.

I don't believe that Sassy deliberately sought me out in my lockdown ordeal to comfort me – I honestly think I was just a warm body and a source of increasingly expensive food to her. But she DID meet me and comfort me in that hard place of endurance – lots of people are doing it harder than me, but we all feel it, don't we? – and Sassy met me there. But she met me with frailty and vulnerability. And her suffering called forth love in me. Like the God who comes to be with us in Jesus, in the vulnerability of a human life, and who came to Job out of the whirlwind, not to fix or explain our suffering, but to change our relationship to it. To love us there and to call forth love in us.

The lockdown prevented all the people who had loved Sassy over the years being present with her at her end. Only one person was allowed, and even that was bending the rules, and so I took her – I wanted to do it, after all we'd been through together this year. So, it was me who held her in that sterile surgery, I gave the vet the nod when it was time, I felt her go limp, I wept and I put her in her grave. Thank you, Sassy, for showing me the love God.

Where have you known that love?

Blessing of the Animals with Song

Ian

SONG: The solid speech of God

*For all beings without speech
For plants that sing their silent song
For wilderness in wordless prayer
The spaciousness for which we long.*

*Who will speak for wild ones now?
And love the more-than-human-world
Earth calls in tumult and in peace
Alive in us like leaves unfurled.*

*Can we hear the voice of God
That solid speech of all that is
In rock and water, flowing air
In warmth of fire, a Spirit Place.*

SONG: The solid speech of God. Words by Julie Perrin, music by Shawn Whelan. © 2013. Used with permission.

Blessed are you, our God, creator of all living things.
You called forth fish in the sea, birds in the air and animals on the land,
and made them our sisters and brothers.
God bless the animals who are our companions.
God bless the animals who live around us, sharing our city.
God bless the animals who feed us.
God bless the animals whose very existence is threatened.
God bless all your beloved creatures.
By the power of your love, enable them to live life in its fullness.
and bless us to value them and praise you for their wonder.
Blessed are you, our God, in all your creatures! Amen.

Prayers of the People

Clare

Mother God, we pray for all who are suffering during this time.

Those struggling with illness; those in precarious work or living situations; and those anxious about the future. May they find strength, support, and calm amidst the turbulence.

We also pray for those who support the sick, isolated and downhearted, whether in paid or voluntary roles. In particular, those on the frontlines of this pandemic. May they be held in love as they hold space for others.

In addition, we pray for refugees and asylum seekers in onshore and offshore detention, who have been locked up far longer than our 252 days. May they be set free soon.

[pause]

Beloved God, we pray for our church here in Brunswick. You alone know what each of us is facing, the secret sufferings of our hearts. Help us to love one another as You love us.

We pray for our local community in the coming time of 'opening up'. A cause for celebration for many. We dream of picnics, restaurant dining in... even haircuts! Yet, many are still anxious. May we continue to hold each other in care.

[pause]

Creator God, we pray for the animals. Our pets at home, those we see on walks, or through Zoom screens. They have weathered the past eighteen months with us, some joining our families during this time. They delight us and love us unconditionally, get us moving and out of the house when perhaps we'd otherwise stay slumped on the couch or in bed. And all they ask for is our love and care in return. Some, like the falcons of Collins St, don't know we exist – yet they brighten our lives all the same. Protect them, oh God.

In the name of Jesus who numbered the sparrows. Amen.

Notices

Saide

Good morning I'm Saide Cameron bringing you the BUC News with Zim.

First up is a reminder that applications are now open for the Olive Way Operations Co-ordination position. Please visit the website for all the details. Share the story with any family, friends or colleagues that you think might be interested. Applications close on 31st October and the position commences at the start of 2022.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart Study group begins tomorrow. This six part series is being hosted by the Walking Together Group and will be offered across six months. The study, recommended by the UCA Assembly is one important way members can better understand Sovereignty and the determination of First Nations Peoples for Voice, Treaty and Truth Telling.

There's lots of Climate Action News in the Olive Press this week. We are invited to join in Sounding the Alarm on 17th October. Contact Linda Wannan to join the Bell Ringing Schedule. Check out the story about Student House Action being undertaken on the same day.

For many years now we have offered two Welcoming Ceremonies each year. These ceremonies provide people who have recently joined our congregation with the opportunity to share their stories and name Brunswick UC as their spiritual home. We were hoping to offer a welcoming ceremony in person this year given that we weren't able to do so last year.

Lockdowns have once again disrupted our plans so we've decided to be creative and offer a Zoom Welcoming Ceremony after worship on 24th October. The worship committee is looking forward to seeing lots of faces at the Zoom meeting to share and receive stories and offer a BUC welcome.

The Emergence Exhibition is fast approaching with Opening Night on Friday 5th November. In this time of uncertainty we have decided to move this event online to an interactive Zoom event. It is likely that the Performance Night on Friday 12th November will also be on Zoom. We are excited about the possibilities of celebrating creativity in this way. Information will be provided to contributors about how this will work and details about joining in on the night will be provided soon. We would love to hear from anyone who has time to volunteer and support possible opening times. A reminder to contributors to send in your detailed submissions by 17th October.

Thank you to everyone who sent in photos of their animal companions. Check out the website for all the details in the Olive Press, Events Calendar and Blog columns. Join Ian for a Zoom chat after worship.

Bye for now!

Sending Song – TIS 728 Jesuchristo Reina ya

(Jesus Christ reigns!)

1. *Jesucristo reina, reina, ya!*

Jesucristo reina, reina, ya!

Jesucristo reina, reina, ya!

Aleluya, amen! Aleluya, amen! Aleluya, amen!

(Jesus Christ heals)

2. *Jesucristo sana, sana, ya!*

(Jesus Christ loves.)

3. *Jesucristo ama, ama, ya!*

(Jesus Christ lives.)

4. *Jesucristo viva, viva, ya!*

(Jesus Christ saves.)

5. *Jesucristo salva, salva, ya!*

SONG: Jesucristo Reina Ya, Anon. (from Argentina),
from Together in Song, Harper Collins Religious, PUBLIC DOMAIN

Blessing and Sending

Ian

Sisters and brothers in your ongoing isolation
may you know the blessing of friendship and peace
the blessing of heart connection,
the blessing that moves you towards justice, towards fullness of life
towards profound joy in communion with all creatures

May you know the blessing of God
Creation's deep source,
Creation's companion
Creation's breath of life
In the name of Christ Amen

Thank yous

Liturgist:
Helen Burnham

Acknowledgement of Country:
Clara Hall

Bible readers:
Gwen Arnold
James Tapueluelu

Children's time
Diggory and the Denholm's
Obi and the Loynd-Miller's
Cleopatra, Nero and Anya
Augie, Patrick and Dave Hall (Pastor:
Children, Youth and Young Adults)

Reflection:
Ian Ferguson (Minister of the Word)

Prayers of the People:
Clare Keogh

Musicians
James Balsillie
Elaine Potter
Courtney Rohde
Natalie Sims
Shawn Whelan

Prelude & Postlude Song
Icon of grace, by Trish Watts & Monica
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Natalie Sims, Daniel Whelan, Shawn
Whelan

Images:
Ray Cameron (Bible readings)
Ian Ferguson
using photos of pets from the congregation
Acknowledgment of Country images:
Lyrebird: Mother Tongue, ABC Open:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8LtwsgU6rH4>
Plight of the Platypus:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MliU2l-fAIs>
Wombat, Bandicoot and Emu:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CLGtIAx9-rl>
Echidna:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ukvf33oQ6PU>
Wallaby: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-VEclqrhj4>
Possum: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ragkqclJaE>
Koala: Native Australia:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6TqFKS8MxFM>
Eagle, Bunjil:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_JokoAOtkU

Woiwurrung animal names sourced from:
https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/alcv/animals_p2_lv5.pdf
https://nrq.org.au/index_files/Gawa%20Trail%20plagues.pdf
<https://www.wurundjeri.com.au/services/language-naming/>

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Philippa Hamilton-Smith
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Shawn Whelan
Ian Ferguson

Closing verse on screen:

Blessed are you, our God, in all your creatures!