



Order of service
Date: Sunday June 28th, 2020
Pentecost 4A

We acknowledge that we are worshipping on the traditional lands of the Boon Wurrung people, of the Kulin nation, and pay our respects to elders past and present.

DON'T FORGET YOU CAN LOG INTO THE CHURCH WEBSITE AND SEE MUCH OF THIS BY VIDEO ON THE FRONT PAGE!!!!

INTROIT – Come all you people

*Come all you people
Come and praise your Maker!
Come all you people
Come and praise your Maker!
Come all you people
Come and praise your Maker!
Come now and worship
The Lord!*

CALL TO WORSHIP

God's love stretches wide, ready to embrace all with love.
You who are thirsty for the presence of God, welcome.
May your thirst be satisfied.
You who long for a caring touch, welcome.
May you know God's love through the care of this community.
In the name of God, welcome to all;
let us drink deeply of God's presence and share this grace with one another.
Come, let us worship God.

Sing – TIS 491

*Refrain
Father welcomes all his children
to his family through his Son;
Father giving his salvation,
life forever has been won.*

1

Little children, come to me,
for my kingdom is of these;
life and love I have to give,
mercy for your sin.

*Refrain
Father welcomes all his children
to his family through his Son;*

*Father giving his salvation,
life forever has been won.*

2

In the water, in the word
in his promise, be assured:
those who are baptized and believe
shall be born again.

Refrain

*Father welcomes all his children
to his family through his Son;
Father giving his salvation,
life forever has been won.*

3

Let us daily die to sin,
let us daily rise with him,
walk in the love of Christ our Lord,
live in the peace of God.

Refrain

*Father welcomes all his children
to his family through his Son;
Father giving his salvation,
life forever has been won.*

WELCOME

May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God
and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with you all!

And also with you!

Opening prayer

God of steadfast love, today remember Jesus' words:

"Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me
welcomes the one who sent me."

We pray to welcome the outcast as we would welcome you,
to do what you can to provide water to the stranger,
and to trust always that you will be there.

We pray to know that kindness is brave, but always worthwhile,
and that where love is, there you are. Amen.

Prayer of confession

Holy God,

Jesus taught what it means to welcome and showed a beautiful and beloved
community where there is room for all.

For times when we have created our own closed communities, forgive us.
For times we have excluded others because of who they are,
or what they believe, forgive us.
For times when we think that our way is a better way than
other ways, forgive us.
For the times, we don't want to find things in common with,
or love, others who are different from us, forgive us.
For the times we have become so comfortable in our lives,
that we don't want to be uncomfortable by welcoming
people who are beyond our doors, forgive us.
May we extend the welcome we receive through your Spirit,
and may we remember that in the holy act of welcoming
others, we welcome you. Amen.

Words of affirmation

We are born in love, and we live in love. Each day, the spirit of love speaks anew
and guides in a love that transcends the world's coldness and fear. Hear again the
words of grace:

Your sins are forgiven.

ALL: Thanks be to God! Amen.

EARLY WORD – Welcome mats.

If there are any children present, ask how they are going.

So today I have, as usual a question.

Do any of you have a welcome mat at your front door? Wave your hand if you do.

Welcome mats are pretty common, and people are more and more trying to make
them say something about the people who live in the house, as if the word welcome
by itself isn't enough.

I want to show you a few images of welcome mats I have found that I find interesting
or amusing.

This first one might be considered a simple, yet very Aussie welcome mat.



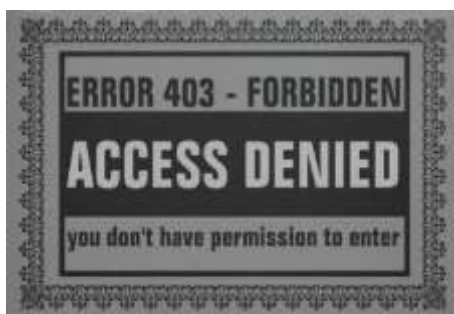
This would be a classic at any Australian
beach holiday house.

Ok these next three probably say something about people who live in the house. Can you guess which one I would have?



Whilst I would be comfortable with any of these, my first love is of course...the Avengers.

Here are some more. These two reflect something about our life with computers.



The second one has a URL on it which I typed in, and it went nowhere. I think it is the address for someone's home computer.

These next two are just silly.



And this last one, well, I think it speaks for itself.



Now, my question is to you, why do we have welcome mats?

Chat with your parents or other adult about that and pause this if you need to.

I will assume you have had that chat and have said things like, well duh Scott they are for welcoming people. I know obvious. You might have said they are for people to wipe their shoes on before they come inside, or to indicate something about the people who live there, and maybe how welcome others really are!!

Why am I talking about this this morning?

In the gospel reading this morning, we read about how Jesus was talking to his disciples and preparing them for going out on their mission work, or the work of good Jesus wants them to do.

He tells the disciples what it means for them to be welcomed by the people they visit.

Because Jesus is sending them to do this job, he says that if people welcome the disciples it is like they are welcoming Jesus and are open to the things Jesus is talking about. And a way they used to welcome in those days was to give people some water. Because water was not easy to get, it was valuable, then if someone gave you water, it meant you were welcome.

You might like to think about ways that we welcome people we meet or who come to our homes, or ways that our church welcomes people. If you come up with some ideas, please send them to me during the week.

Well that is all for now. I will be back next week. I hope you have a good last week of term two and have something cool in the school holidays to look forward to. Bye.

SING: We welcome people in.

(Written by my former organist at Ferntree Gully UCA, Pat Rivett, to the tune "Hokey Pokey")

*We welcome people in,
Let's help them settle down,
Let's help them feel that
they're welcome in our town.
And then it's "okey dokey"
as we turn this place around.
'Cos that's what it's all about.*

*Altogether in community.
Altogether in community.
Altogether in community.
'Cos that's what it's all about!!*

SHARING OUR STORIES – Solidarity.

READINGS:

Before we hear or read this passage, I am following the advice of another, particularly if you have children listening in on this. I want to say that this story is probably the scariest story in the Bible, but it does have a happy ending, much like

many of our beloved fairy tales. Maybe as you read or listen, parents and children might like to hold hands with each other.

Genesis 22:1-18

After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ²He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you."

³So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. ⁴On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. ⁵Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you." ⁶Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. ⁷Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" ⁸Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together. ⁹When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

¹⁰Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son.

¹¹But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ¹²He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." ¹³And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴So Abraham called that place "The Lord will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided."

¹⁵The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, ¹⁶and said, "By myself I have sworn, says the Lord: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, ¹⁸and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice."

Before we hear or read the next passage, again on the same advice I want to say, particularly for children, that Isaac was never in danger. God had other plans (there was a ram hidden in the bushes). In fact, in those days other religions insisted that parents sacrifice their first child to their god. Our God, however, does not, never did, never will. Given that, this scary story is actually a wonderful, happy story. Give each other a hug before we move to the gospel story.

Matthew 10:40-42

⁴⁰"Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will

receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; ⁴²and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”

PREACHING - Choosing a braver faith

Today's theme of “choosing a braver faith” might sound a little vague, like, how do you even do that? Fair question.

This week's readings share a meditation on the difficulty of remaining true to God's command of love and have faith in the face of the world's dangers and contradictions. Many voices, from Abraham to the psalmist, to Jesus, to Paul, urge that we cling to a deeper, braver faith in God that insists on love.

But still, what does that even mean, and what might it look like?

Well, to be honest, there's a whole book in that, might even be one out there.

So for the sake of keeping this short and simple, let's explore this idea of a braver faith through the lens of the practice of welcome.

I want to start in an unexpected place, by showing you a clip, which in itself is not unexpected, but the direction I am going in is.

This is from an English BBC program from a few years back. It is called “Outnumbered”. It is about a middle-class family, mum, dad, three children, living in one of those suburban London homes that are very close to neighbours. It takes us through the day to day events of their lives from school issues to looking after aging parent issues to things like going on an overseas holiday with the family including an aging parent with a level of dementia, where on the way home going through customs the youngest son when asked if you have anything to declare says he has a bomb in his bag.

This clip shows a conversation between the parents and the youngest daughter Karen about why she wants to become a Catholic, and the second part about why she changed her mind.

(For those of you looking at the text only order of service, here is the dialogue from the episode)

KAREN - Can I become a Catholic?

This stops MUM and DAD in their tracks

DAD - You want to become a Catholic?

KAREN - Yes. I can, can't I? The Pope's inviting people to join.

MUM - Well, yes, but –

KAREN - But what?

MUM - Well, it would be easier for you to become a Catholic...if you believed in God.

KAREN - I only stopped believing in God because he was annoying me cos of sending earthquakes or tsunamis or like whenever I asked for something or anything he would always just ignore me.

MUM - Right...look, why do you want to be a Catholic Karen?

KAREN - Because I want to go to the same big school as Tanya, and Tanya's applying for a Catholic school.

MUM (*struggling to contain her irritation*) - Tanya.....Well, we've talked about this before, haven't we, darling, y'know, just because Tanya's doing something doesn't mean you have to do it.

KAREN - I like Tanya, she's my friend, don't you like her?

Later...

KAREN - If I do become a catholic, will I be allowed to eat bacon?

MUM... Yes.

KAREN (*exiting*) - Oh well that's alright then

A little later again...

KAREN- When I'm a catholic will I be allowed to drink alcohol?

DAD - It's virtually compulsory...now get your shoes on.

That night, MUM is saying goodnight to KAREN.

KAREN - Mummy....you're right. Tanya is a right cow.

MUM - I never said that.

KAREN - You did.....to Daddy, when you didn't know I was on the toilet. I think I need some new friends. I'll go on Facebook tomorrow and get some.

MUM - Er.....Ok

KAREN - So I don't want to be a Catholic any more...Anyway they've all these silly rules about women.

MUM - Right.

KAREN - It would have been hard for me to become Pope.

MUM - It's their loss

This clip, hilarious as it is, typifies an attitude of many towards God and the church, and why they want nothing to do with either. It must be said that the passage from Genesis today, Abraham on the verge of sacrificing his son, does not help this attitude either.

In my talking with others and reading commentaries on this passage, and my own thinking, this is not a popular passage.

In fact, one writer, a Christian Educator from USA, says of this passage, with particular reference to children understanding it:

*This story may be **the scariest story in the Bible for children**. They hear it from Isaac's point of view and ask, "Would God ask my parents to kill me and if God did would they do it?" God looks really threatening. Pondering this question makes it almost impossible for children to get to a positive message about trusting or obeying God. (Carolyn Brown, *Worshipping with children*)*

Rev Professor Howard Wallace says of this passage - *Of itself today's story poses some difficult questions. Are we to see God as such a heartless being that he would test an individual's faith in such a way? Are we to see Abraham as an example of one faithful to the point of losing all sense of love and concern for his own son? Surely the story cannot be read in such ways. Who would in the end want to follow such a God or emulate such a character? (Howard Wallace)*

For me, no matter how well the scholars grapple with this passage with great integrity, it still portrays a God who deceives, and so I must look for another way forward.

I want to find a welcoming God in scripture, not a punisher, not a trickster. An American colleague Pastor Steve has helped. He wrote the following on this passage:

God didn't actually tell Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. But Abraham (that is, the community) thought so. They carried on the tradition of their ancient religion, like so many around the world, sacrificing what was most precious, even their children, in the belief that God willed it. (We still do that; that's what war is.) But the moment came, the knife poised in the air, when Abraham actually saw Isaac, saw him as a person, not as an object to be used. And Abraham realized that he'd gotten his religion all wrong. God didn't want child sacrifice.

This is a story about how religions evolve.

We get our religion wrong all the time. We're sure God wills a certain thing, and then we see more clearly that we were wrong—and we were blaming our error on God. A couple of thousand years after Abraham our religion evolved some more and we realized God doesn't want burnt offerings at all, of any kind.

The early church had to change its ways regarding the inclusion of Gentiles. For centuries we sacrificed the ordination of women and gays in the name of what we were sure God willed. And then we see them as persons, and our religion changes. Sometimes we're convinced that to "test us" God wants us to sacrifice what is dear to us, like our gifts or our well-being, or to repress certain movements of our spirit, or squelch certain experiences, or undergo certain suffering. But it might be otherwise. Are there "children" in your soul you have believed God wants you to sacrifice, to do without, to kill or cut off? Are they your Isaac, your "laughter," God's beloved, that God does not want you to sacrifice but to honour?

Lay aside the knife. Unbind the child. God will bless you, not in doing away with what is not yours to kill, but in loving that which you've been given to love.

That I think is the essence of welcome, of the braver faith. I think it is what lies also behind the Matthew passage.

Have you ever been welcomed by a young child who greets you as if you were the greatest person in the world, hardly believing their astounding good fortune that you turned up? Isn't it the best feeling ever?

Jan Stephenson, artist and minister of the United Methodist Church in the USA ponders this kind of welcome in regard to this week's Matthew passage. She writes: *I have pondered Jesus' words about welcoming in the gospel reading for this Sunday. And as I ponder, I'm wondering what it might look like to fling my arms a little wider toward the world.*

As I encounter folks in the rhythm of my days, am I leaving anyone with the impression that I think they're the greatest person on the earth and that I can hardly believe my good fortune that they have turned up?

Jesus' words remind us that he calls us to be hospitable people not because it's a nice thing to do—and Christianity depends, after all, on far more than mere niceness—but because it is a holy and whole-making act; it is a sacred art. Welcoming another is a fundamental gesture that encompasses not only the other person but also the God in whose image they were formed and fashioned and whom—though we may sometimes be at pains to perceive it—they somehow reveal in their being.

Moving to another international church, The United Church of Christ in Canada, in 2012 offered a vision of what it meant to be welcoming in regard to being an intercultural church, but their vision can be thought of more broadly. The United Church named that for a church to be a welcoming church, it:

- Is open, accepting, joyful, and life-giving;
- Trusts that God's Spirit opens all to new and different experiences, however challenging, painful, and uncomfortable at times;
- Seeks to use inclusive and expansive language in worship and community life, and honours diverse language in policy statements and official declarations;
- Maintains a commitment to mutuality, full participation, and radical welcoming as part of the church's mission and ministry.

This is the braver faith.

What might this mean for Beaumaris Uniting Church though?

I think the first thing to examine in this is to look at the ways we might be, unwelcoming?

This is a difficult thing to do, because churches do not like to consider that they might in any way be unwelcoming. But I think in order to more fully embrace the vision of us being an “inclusive community of hospitality and care”, we need to consider how we might not be this, and how then we might do those things that will make us more and more welcoming.

I think it also means looking closely at a statement like that of the United Church of Christ of Canada, and seeing how we might adopt something like it or make our own, and then how we implement such an ethos of welcome.

I know I have said this recently, but it is good to recall again, that one good way to think about it is consider when you have been somewhere and been really welcomed, and examine the things that happened that made you feel welcome.

But, here's the thing.

If I am looking to today's readings for how to unravel this notion of a braver faith through welcome, then maybe we have to ignore everything I just said. Maybe the brave faith is something more again.

In an article I have read titled “We will no longer be a welcoming church”, the author, *Rev. Dr. Robert G. Moss, Pastor of a Lutheran Church in CO, USA* writes: *We've decided to quit being a welcoming church. No kidding. We're giving it up. It won't be easy, but we're committed to it.*

We'll have to do it in stages, easing our folks into it step by step. We'll have to deal with the fear of something new, the challenge of venturing into the unknown. But we'll do it. It will take motivation, leadership, and constant reminders. But most importantly, it will take total commitment in embracing a new focus.

Like so many churches, we've sunk an amazing amount of time and energy into becoming a welcoming church. We changed worship styles, we trained greeters and ushers, we wore name tags, we percolated coffee, we went to workshops on hospitality, we put our friendliest people in the most prominent places on Sunday mornings. But we've realized we've been misplacing our emphasis. So we're no longer going to do it.

Here's what we're doing instead. We are becoming an Inviting Church. That's different. You see, "welcoming" from a missional perspective is passive. It denotes waiting for visitors and guests to drop by. When they do, we attempt to treat them very well and do everything possible to make them comfortable. We'll be willing to change who we are. We'll follow particular formats that have proven to be more welcoming to new people. We'll do whatever it takes to have them come back the next Sunday, even if they shouldn't. Welcoming is about us, not about them.

"Inviting," however, is different. That means we leave the comfort of our congregational home-court advantage. The main activity doesn't happen in our worship space when people drop in, but in the neighborhood when we go out.

It isn't so much welcoming them into our place, but going out into their place and meeting them there.

... It starts with who God has called us to be as church. It involves discovering our gifts and purpose. And it mandates joining God at work in the world. This isn't about getting the world into God's church; it's about getting the church into God's world.

... Welcoming involves hoping whoever happens to find you will join. Inviting involves sharing God's specific gifts – made real in your congregation – in the world. This is actually what the passage from Matthew is calling disciples to.

And other denominations around the world choose to do just that.

But still, where does that really leave us?

It's not that we haven't talked and thought about these things. We have, and we are. And frankly, despite what I have already said this morning, I don't think it's really as cut and dried as being welcoming or inviting. I think it is learning how to be both as we are able, or as is necessary.

Maybe the notion of a braver faith here, is about how we move from being the ones who give the welcome, to the ones who receive it. To be the kind of people that others want to say – come in and share a glass of water.

You know, Jesus had a way of cutting through all the hypocrisy and trivia and nonsense that we can sometimes get caught up in. He said that true holiness is about loving God and loving others—all others, no exceptions. He said that true spirituality is about embracing a child, caring for the weak and outcast. He said that true goodness is about feeding the hungry person, visiting the sick, and being a companion to those who are in prison.

For Jesus, a truly spiritual way of living is about being willing to give someone a cup of cold water on a hot day (Mt. 10:42). Maybe it's really no more complicated than that. No elaborate systems, no obsessions with keeping every jot and tittle. At the end of the day, it's about having a heart that is willing to give to others the same grace, and mercy, and unconditional love that we have received. May it always be so. Amen.

Sing – TIS 686

(Double click on the icon below and it will ask if you want to play the file. Click “open”. Then make your way back to the words below.)



TIS 686 because we bear your name.mp3

1

Lord Jesus, we belong to you,
you live in us, we live in you;
we live and work for you -
because we bear your name.

2 Help us receive each other, Lord,
for you receive the least of us
and come to us in them -
because we bear your name.

3 Bless those who give us any gift
because they know that we are yours;
reward them with your grace -
because we bear your name.

4 Let us acknowledge those as friends
who use your name to right a wrong,
but have not joined us yet -
because we bear your name.

5 Let nothing that we do or say
offend the weak so that they fall
and lose their faith in you -
because we bear your name.

6 Keep us from missing out on life;
give hands that help, and single sight,
and feet that walk your way -
because we bear your name.

7 You are the salt that cleanses us,
so clean us out, and make us fit

for common life with you -
because we bear your name.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE – read by Philip Stewart.

Loving God, in your mercy, hear our prayers. And all these prayers we bring in the name of the Risen Christ who taught us to pray saying:

***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.
and forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen***

Sing – TIS 468

(Double click on the icon below and it will ask if you want to play the file. Click “open”. Then make your way back to the words below.)



TIS 468_piano.mp3

1
We are your people;
Spirit of grace,
you dare to make us
to all our neighbours,
Christ's living voice, hands and face.

2
Joined in community,
treasured and fed,
may we discover
gifts in each other,
willing to lead and be led

3
Rich in diversity,
help us to live
closer than neighbours,
open to strangers,
able to clash and forgive.

4

Glad of tradition,
help us to see
in all life's changing,
where you are leading,
where our best efforts should be.

5

Give, as we venture
justice and care
(peaceful, resisting,
waiting or risking)
wisdom to know when and where.

6

Christ, as we serve you
in different ways,
may all we're doing
show that you're living,
meeting your love with our praise.

BLESSING –

Live as a testament to God's welcome and grace.
Look for life not in the promise of status or fame, but in the still,
small voice of radical love.

Go in peace and love, listening to the voice of God
amid the blur and noise of the world,
offering nourishment to neighbour and stranger,
and remembering the love of a humble but mighty God.

All: We go with renewed hope and a braver faith.

And may you be richly blessed in the days ahead by the God whose love is present
in the earth we walk, the air we breathe and the flesh we inhabit. Amen.

Recessional – TIS 236 vs.2

(Double click on the icon below and it will ask if you want to play the file. Click
"open". Then make your way back to the words below.)



TIS 236_1 vs..mp3

2

Take my hands, Lord Jesus, let them work for you,
make them strong and gentle, kind in all I do;
let me watch you, Jesus, till I'm gentle too,
till my hands are kind hands, quick to work for you.