



Leigh Memorial  
Uniting Church



## LENT 4



**14 MARCH 2021**

ON LINE WORSHIP FROM LEIGH MEMORIAL, 9.30AM

Zoom: <https://uca-nswact.zoom.us/j/5199089657>

Or Dial in by phone +61 2 8015 6011 Australia

## WELCOME

A warm welcome as we gather together.

## LIGHTING OF THE LENTEN CANDLE

We light this candle  
as a symbol of God's faithful and loving support  
of people in their Lenten journey.

**The Lenten candle is lit**

**THEME** Numbers 21. 4-9; John 3: 14, 16

14 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must  
the Human One be lifted up ... 16 For God so loved the world that God  
gave the Beloved One for us ...

... a new relationship to face our darkness and contradictions!

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We acknowledge the Burrumattagal people of the Darug Nation, the  
first inhabitants of this place, as the traditional custodians of this land  
and pay our respects to their ancient culture, their elders past and  
present and their emerging leaders. We acknowledge the presence of  
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who now reside within  
this area. We honour them for their custodianship of the land, on  
which we gather today.

## CALL TO WORSHIP

As we walk on into Lenten life,  
we are gathered into the grace of God.  
Here we may touch the depths of our lives  
without the fear of being lost to love.  
Here we may find riches and promises  
which we have never unearthed before.  
The Christ will walk beside us  
as we enter each truth and face ourselves.

***Thanks be to God for the courage of Christ.***

***The Lenten way will bring us  
towards fullness of life.***

**A POEM** *The serpent dies*

No need to explain how the serpent's bite  
surfaces (stealthy as the coming of night)  
while you're reading the news; or worried and alone;  
or when suffering long; or when a doctor intones  
challenging words; or when darkness falls;  
or the voice on the end of the telephone call  
declares a once-loved relationship done;  
when hope seems lost, when joy seems gone.

No need to explain how this serpent hides  
next door to our hearts, marks left inside  
where poison drips from the tip of its fangs:  
in rage, in bitterness, in lonely pangs  
of guilt and regret; in the resentments we bear.  
And in hurts that we cause we do our own share  
of spreading its toxin and resulting grief.  
*The serpent is death – the fear of it.*

Relief  
ever seems to elude us; but we may declare  
its ultimate defeat; for above its shadow there  
rises greater light – see, lifted up,  
the one who for us drank the cup  
of suffering, whose love even in death  
conquered its evil; by whose living breath  
we also may thrive. We turn trusting eyes,  
snake-bitten, upon Christ, and the serpent dies.  
*(Source: Andrew King 2015)*

## HYMN

*O love of God, how strong and true* (139 TiS)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGkshHI-43s>

1. O love of God, how strong and true,  
eternal and yet ever new,  
uncomprehended and unbought,  
beyond all knowledge and all thought!

2. O wide-embracing, wondrous love,  
We read you in the sky above,

we read you in the earth below,  
in seas that swell and streams that flow.

3. We read you best in him who came  
to bear for us the cross of shame,  
sent by the Father from on high,  
our life to live, our death to die.

4. We read your power to bless and save  
ev'n in the darkness of the grave;  
still more in resurrection light  
we read the fullness of your might.

5. O love of God, our shield and stay  
through all the perils of our way;  
eternal love, in you we rest,  
for ever safe, for ever blest.

### ENTERING LENT

*Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,  
so must the New Human be lifted up,  
that whoever trusts may have eternal life. — John 3.14-15*

You have to look your evil in the face to be healed.  
The snakes that plagued the Hebrews in the desert  
were their betrayal come back to bite them,  
their being Eden's serpent.  
The cure was to gaze at their sin.

***So we gaze upon the Crucified One, our victim,  
and look our awfulness in the eye  
and only there grasp forgiveness,  
and only then become truly alive.***

On the cross is lifted up  
our racism, our violence, our materialism,  
our deep seated me-first-ism.  
Posted there is our last text to God,

“I’ll let you know when I need you.”

***We look at it, look at it hard,  
to get free of the lie that we’re just fine,  
the lie that keeps us from knowing  
how deeply we are forgiven,  
how vastly we are blessed,  
how infinitely we are loved.***

***Amen***

*(Source: Steve Garnaas-Holmes, Unfolding Light)*

### **WORDS OF ASSURANCE**

*A silence is kept*

*as we reflect upon the words from the Prayer of Confession.*

Infinite Love, heart of all life,  
you loved this word into being  
with such love  
as to birth yourself among us,  
Love begotten as the Beloved.

Opening ourselves to your love  
we live beyond our mortal selves  
and join your eternal Oneness.

Your presence does not separate but unites;  
love does not push away, but embraces;  
you do not condemn, but save.

Trusting this we know  
we are loved, never rejected.  
When our trust fails we are doomed:  
withdrawing into ourselves  
we aren’t open to love,  
the only source of life.

***Amen!***

*(Source: Steve Garnaas-Holmes, Unfolding Light)*

**HYMN** *Comfort, comfort all my people*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B8DXPAYWr-c>

*Chorus*

Comfort, comfort all my people  
*with the comfort of my word.*  
*Speak it tender to my people:*  
*All your sins are taken away.*

1. Though your tears be rivers running,  
though your tears be an ocean full,  
though you cry with the hurt of living,  
comfort, comfort.  
Every valley shall be lifted,  
every mountain shall be low,  
every rough place will be smoother:  
comfort, comfort.

*Chorus*

2. Though your eyes see only darkness,  
though your eyes can see no light,  
though your eyes see pain and sorrow:  
comfort, comfort.  
Every night will have its morning,  
every pain will have an end,  
every burden will be lightened:  
comfort, comfort.

*Chorus*

*Robin Mann*

## **SCRIPTURE READING**

### **Numbers 21:4-9**

4 From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but spirit of the people became short-tempered on the way.

5 The people spoke against Elohim, our God, and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and the spirit of the people, she detests this miserable food."

6 Then Yahweh sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. 7 The people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned by speaking against Yahweh and against you;

pray to Yahweh to take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people.

8 And Yahweh said to Moses, “Make a copper viper, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.”

9 So Moses made a viper of copper, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look up at viper of copper on the pole and live.

### **John 3: 14-21 (inclusive reading)**

14 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Human One be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in this one may have real life.

16 For God so loved the world that God gave the Beloved One, so that everyone who believes in this One may not be lost but may have real life.

17 Indeed, God did not send the Beloved One into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be transformed through this One.

18 Those who believe are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have refused to believe in the name of the only Child of God.

19 And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and some have shown they prefer darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.

20 For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. 21 But those who live by the truth come out into the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds belong to God.”

#### **Response**

*O God our nurturer,*

*may your word live in us.*

***And colour our living. Amen!***

#### **SERMON**

***Dare to look up on the “cursed!  
Look up and be transformed!***

#### **HYMN**

*Now the green blade rises (TiS, 382)*



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vpU01KQIUJM>

(Sung by Steve Winwood)

Now the green blade rises from the buried grain,  
Wheat that in the dark earth many years has lain;  
Love lives again, that with the dead has been:  
*Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.*

In the grave they laid him, Love whom we had slain,  
Thinking that never he would wake to life again,  
Laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen:  
*Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.*

Up he sprang at Easter, like the risen grain,  
He that for three days in the grave had lain;  
Up from the dead my risen Christ is seen:  
*Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.*

When our hearts are saddened, grieving or in pain,  
By your touch you call us back to life again;  
Fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been:  
*Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.*

**OFFERING** An offering of our lives and the gifts of creation.

### **PRAYER FOR OTHERS**

On this fourth Sunday in Lent,  
we bow our heads in prayer before you, O God.

***Make us wise in praying,  
that our love may be joined with yours  
in reaching out towards those whose choices in life  
are reduced to finding ways of surviving.***

Shine your light on their faces,  
so that we may pray with a passion for good.

*Silent reflection*

We pray for those who are close to our hearts now:

*The people pray*



May we be those who so love the world  
that, like Jesus, we become known as those  
who do not bring condemnation to others  
but walk beside them in compassion.

***Shine your light on all we do as your church, Jesus  
Christ.***

***Help us to be those  
who dare to come into that light ourselves  
and to see what is of lasting value,  
rather than passing attraction.***

Especially as we walk towards Good Friday and Easter Day,  
may we not fear what lies ahead of us,  
but trust that you have gone before and made the way straight.

***Refresh us, each day, with hope and grace  
which flows from your holy Being in a never-ending stream.  
This we pray in faith.***

***Amen.***

**HYMN**      *Christ be my leader (TiS 624)*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DlalqCCru\\_Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DlalqCCru_Q)

Christ be my leader by night as by day;  
safe through the darkness for he is the way.  
Gladly I follow, my future his care,  
darkness is daylight when Jesus is there.

Christ be my teacher in age as in youth,  
drifting or doubting, for he is the truth.  
Grant me to trust him, though shifting as sand,  
doubt cannot daunt me; in Jesus I stand.

Christ be my Savior in calm as in strife;  
death cannot hold me, for he is the life.  
Nor darkness nor doubting nor sin and its stain  
can touch my salvation: with Jesus I reign.

## BLESSING

Walk on in grace, for God is with us.

And may this time of Lent bring us closer to God,  
the company of Christ bring us nearer to each other  
and the leading of the Spirit renew each moment.

***Amen.***

*D McRae-McMahon*