

Video: 'The Calling'

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## **1. Welcome and introduction**

Welcome to worship this morning, especially if you are visiting Bathurst Uniting Church virtually for the first time. My name is Rev. Claire Wright, and I have the privilege of ministering in this community of faith and calling.

On this third Sunday of the Easter season, we continue to celebrate the ripples of the resurrection of Christ, and the Spirit of life loose in the world. Our theme today is Luke's famous story of two disciples' encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus. We listen in as Christ comes alongside them in their journey of grief and uncertainty, and helps them understand that their small, human stories of struggle and hope are in fact intertwined with the greatest story ever told – God's unfolding plan to mend the world...

Fittingly then, perhaps, we also reflect today on one of the defining stories of our nation's history – and what it means for our present struggles and hopes, our calling and our future... For amid these first ripples of resurrection, we pause to remember lives and hopes sacrificed to duty, as we mark Anzac Day... Friends, in observing this commemoration in worship, we do not seek to celebrate or glorify war, but:

- To acknowledge the sacrifice of those who gave – and give – their lives in service of others – **Lest we forget.**
- To pray for people and communities still devastated by war and conflict – **Lest we forget.**
- And to commit ourselves afresh to our calling as God's people, to be a fellowship of reconciliation, passionately pursuing the things that make for peace – **Lest we forget.**

As is our custom here, we pause also in remembrance of the Wiradjuri nation; acknowledging with deep gratitude their custodianship of the land on which many of us live, work and worship; and acknowledging with deep sorrow, their dispossession of home and heartland, culture and sovereignty – **Lest we forget.**

We begin where life and hope and peace begin. We light a candle, as a symbol of Christ's living presence, with us and for us, and the hope we have in him as the light of our dark world. *[The candle is lit.]*

## 2. **Call to worship**

Come, beloved friends,  
Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus,  
Let us gather to walk together a while,  
To tell our stories of grief and doubt, of faith and hope,  
To find our stories caught up in God's story  
Of a world reborn.  
Let us,  
Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus,  
Open our hands to the stranger who joins us on our way,  
Open our hearts to the Scriptures unfolded to us,  
Open our eyes to the Christ among us.  
Come, friends,  
let us worship the Lord, crucified and risen,  
who always comes to meet us  
and walks with us on our road.  
And we say together:  
**Come, let us worship the Lord!**

## 3. **Hymn:** At the dawning of salvation (*Together in Song* # 392)

We can't generally post the words to hymns for copyright reasons.  
They can easily be found on-line – or in any hymn-book you have at home.  
If you would like to borrow one of the church's copies of *Together in Song* for home use during the 'shut-down', please contact us and we'll arrange to drop off a copy.

*[Margaret Hollis reflects on what a 'hero' is to her]*

## 4. **Prayer of adoration**

The book of Lamentations (3:21-23) urges us:  
'This let us call to mind, let us remember and have hope:  
The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,  
God's mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning.  
Great is God's faithfulness.'

Therefore, let us pray.

Faithful God, whose steadfast love never ceases,  
In the glory of earth and sea and stars,  
In the patterns of celebration and remembrance,  
In your presence with us here and everywhere, now and always,  
We celebrate your generosity.

Yours is the gift of our every breath;  
The care that sustains our every moment;  
The grace that can transform our every day...

Yours is the story that makes us who we are;  
The fellowship that makes us one, though many;  
The calling that burns our hearts with meaning and purpose.

Help us to remember, and have hope. Amen.

*[Marilyn Hobbs reflects on what a 'hero' is to her]*

**5. Prayer of invitation**

Stay with us, blessed stranger, for the day is far spent,  
and we have not yet recognised your face  
in each of our sisters and brothers.

Stay with us, blessed stranger, for the day is far spent,  
and we have not yet shared your bread  
in grace with our brothers and sisters.

Stay with us, blessed stranger, for the day is far spent,  
and we have not listened to your Word  
in the words of our sisters and brothers.

Stay with us, blessed stranger,  
because our very night becomes day  
when you are there.

**6. Affirmation of forgiveness**

Friends in this season after Easter, we do not dwell on our wounds –  
**for Christ has risen to heal us!**  
We do not dwell on our fears and failings –  
**for Christ has risen to forgive us,  
to call us forth in newness of life!**

**Thanks be to God. Amen.**

**7. Hymn:** Abide with me (*Together in Song* #586, verses 1, 3 and 4)

*[John Hoyer reflects on what a 'hero' is to him]*

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?”

They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not *know* the things that have taken place there in these days?”

He asked them, “What things?”

They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people! And how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death – and crucified him. And we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel!... Yes, and besides all this, it is now the *third day* since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group *astounded* us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had seen a vision of *angels*, who said that he was *alive*! Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see *him*.”

Then Jesus said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not *necessary* that the Messiah should suffer these things, and then enter into his glory?” ... Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself, in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead – as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us: it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.”

So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him – and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, “Were not our hearts *burning* within us, while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?”

That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” Then *they* told what had happened on the *road*, and how he had been made known to *them* in the breaking of the bread.

**In this is the Gospel of Christ.**

I wonder what gives you ‘heart burn’... Too much take-away food and stockpiled pasta, at the moment, perhaps?...

‘Were not our hearts *burning* within us,’ Cleopas and his friend said to each other. ‘Were not our hearts *burning* within us, while he was talking to us on the road...?’

Perhaps it was their spirits responding to the dawning realisation that the Jesus they had known was indeed God’s Messiah; responding to some faint intuition that this stranger on the road was unfolding a world-changing truth... But perhaps it was also something more familiar – something that happens in our own day, perhaps even to us, if we are attentive to it: the heart-warming effect of hearing a story that reminds us who we are; the heart-warming effect of finding out that our own little stories – our stories of faith and following, confusion and disappointment, fear and loss – are intertwined with a far bigger story – a great and glorious story – which makes sense of it all – makes sense of *everything*; a story which gives us a hope – a purpose and a future; a story which calls us to renewed faith, call us to fresh courage and resolve, and makes *heroes* of us all...

I wonder what stories we are telling ourselves, right now, about who we are – as individuals, as a church, as a community, as a nation... Let me tell you a story.

On that day, two of them were heading home to their rural village, fleeing the city – the pandemic hotspot – and talking with each other about all that had happened. And Jesus himself came near – and they frowned at him and told him to stay 1.5 meters away – but as they walked, he said: ‘What are you discussing as you walked along?’ They stood still, looking sad. And Cleopas answered ‘Are you the *only* person who doesn’t *know* the things that have taken place here lately?’

Jesus asked ‘What things?’ And they told him about the fear and uncertainty; the social distancing and hygiene rules; the economic hardship; not being able to go out, or hug a friend, or visit a loved one in aged care; the shutting down of *church* –

‘No, no: wait a minute,’ said Jesus. ‘You’re telling the wrong story.’ And beginning with the Scriptures, he told the story of God in the world, working tirelessly for the restoration and renewal of all things. He told the story of God calling a people, promising to be their God, co-opting them to be God’s hands and feet and voice in the world, bearers of God’s love and hope and healing. He told the story of God taking unlikely people – stammering prophets, anxious warriors, fallible followers –and turning them into heroes... ‘Were not our hearts *burning* within us?’ our two friends said to each other later – as they hurried out the door, back to the city, back to the hotspot, back to where they could take their place – their own small, heroic place – in the greatest story ever told...

Friends, at times like Easter – or ANZAC Day – we tell our stories of remembrance: *not* to keep the past alive, but to bring the power of the past into the living *present*: to honour the named and unnamed heroes in our storyline so that our hearts *burn* to be like them, to do our part, to make our own small difference, to take the story *forward*... Friends, we remember *forward*... We remember not just who we are, but who we are called to be; not just where we have been, but where we are heading...

We all have our little stories of grief and uncertainty, hardship and loneliness and struggle and fragile hope at this time – as the disciples on the road to Emmaus did.

But like them, as people of faith, we are being invited once again to take our place in the bigger story of God in the world, the bigger story of Christ crucified and risen, the bigger story of our calling and sending... Like them, this ANZAC weekend, we are being invited once again to take our place in a story of suffering and sacrifice in war, for the sake of peace... And we remember *forward*, in hope, to the promised end of the story: reconciliation and shalom – peace and healing – God's restoration and renewal of all things.... We remember *forward*, in faith, to our own small part in that story... We, too, can be among those who *serve*... We, too, can be heroes.

I wonder what is giving you heart-burn, these days; what inspires you; what reminds you who you are, and who you are called to be, so that your heart *burns* with hope and courage, resilience and resolve...

I wonder what stories we are telling about COVID-19, about global recession, about the decline of the church, the fragmentation of communities, our own ageing or difficulties or smallness... And I wonder what stories need to be heard and told – what stories we need to hear and tell – so that the vast, unbroken, unending story of God's self-giving love for the world continues to flow in us and through us; continues to flow from the moment of creation; through the flawed and fallible men and women and children of the Bible; through the ultimate sacrifice and triumph of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen; through the spirit of ANZAC; through the way we respond and care and grow through COVID-19; and on into the as-yet unwritten story of our nation, our communities, our families, our lives...

As we remember Easter, as we remember ANZAC, let's remember *forward*. Remember that we, too, can be among those who *serve*. Remember that we, too, can be *heroes*, in the story that the risen Christ is unfolding in the world.

*[Aisea Langi reflects on what a 'hero' is to him]*

10. **Hymn:** I will sing the wondrous story  
(*Together in Song* #233 – verses 1, 3, 4 and chorus)

11. **ANZAC Day**

*[Ray White remembers those who served]*

Yesterday, Saturday 25 April, was Anzac Day, and since many of us will have grieved the impossibility of gathering as a community of remembrance and prayer, as we usually would, I thought we might take a moment today to do that today, if only virtually.

*[Roc Read remembers her father and Margaret Hollis, her uncle, who served]*

*[The Last Post]*

Let us pray.

**We remember with gratitude and sorrow  
all those whose lives,  
in wars and conflicts past and present,  
have been given – or taken away.**

**We pray for all  
who in bereavement, disability, pain or trauma  
continue to suffer the consequences of conflict,  
war and terror.**

**We pray for all nations, and their leaders,  
that they may understand and pursue  
the things that make for reconciliation, peace and justice.**

**And remembering who we are in Christ,  
we commit ourselves again, in faith and hope,  
to God's mission of healing  
in all the world. Amen.**

'Greater love hath no-one than this,' said Jesus,  
'that they lay down their lives for their friends.'

They shall not grow old,  
As we that are left grow old;  
Age shall not weary them,  
Nor the years condemn.

At the going down of the sun and in the morning,  
We will remember them.

**We will remember them.**

12. **Hymn:** God, as with silent hearts  
(*Together in Song #680, to tune Londonderry Air*)

*[Barbara Webb reflects on the 'ordinary' heroes in our community]*

13. **Prayers of the people and Lord's Prayer**

Let us continue in remembrance and prayer.

We think, in this season of pandemic, of those in our nation already broken – still bruised – by long drought, and devastating bush-fires, and everyday battles that have been swept into past history, too carelessly and too soon.

We will remember them. **We will remember them.**

We stand with those who, in this season, are grieving the loss of loved ones to death... or dementia... or isolation... or absence. Especially those who have not been able to visit or console; to grieve or find closure; to attend funerals or memorial services...

We will remember them. **We will remember them.**

We stand with our neighbours, known and unknown, who may be struggling with turmoil, distress or frustration; hardship or homelessness; loneliness and loss.

We will remember them. **We will remember them.**

We honour the heroes of our own day and circumstances:  
doctors and nurses, health workers and emergency service personnel;  
aged care staff;  
teachers and early childhood educators;  
delivery drivers and checkout workers;  
shelf-stackers and fruit-pickers;  
people who put out their bins in fancy dress to give a neighbour a smile;  
leaders and experts, making tough and unpopular decisions  
for the common good.

We will remember them. **We will remember them.**

As we remember all this, we affirm without shame the unquenchable hope of resurrection life and the promise of *shalom*.

**We remember forward to a world restored. Amen.**

And we share together in the Lord's Prayer, in whatever version or language is closest to our hearts.

Our Father...

*[Janet Brown remembers our doctors and nurses]*

**14. Video: 'Heroes'**

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**15. Hymn:** Now let us from this table rise  
(*Together in Song* #530, verses 1, 3, 4 – to tune Rockingham)

**16. Blessing and sending out**

Go out into the world and the week, remembering back to all that God has done – and remembering forward to all that God has promised; remembering back to how our small stories are interwoven with the great story of God in the world – and remembering forward, impassioned by the Living Word, to live in – and live out – that story, day by day, until the world is restored, *shalom* reigns, and the earth is filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea...

And the blessing of God Almighty,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you  
and remain with you always.

**Amen**