

Video: 'The Calling

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To see a preview version: <http://www.skitguys.com/videos/the-calling>

1. Welcome and introduction

Salamat datang; hwanyong hamnida; malo elelei; bulla; afyo MAI; CROYso; shalom - *welcome* to worship this morning, especially if you are visiting Bathurst Uniting Church virtually for the first time – and even *more* especially if you are a mother, forgoing breakfast in bed to join us today!

I'm Rev. Claire Wright, and I have the privilege of ministering with this community of faith and calling.

Today, we continue in the Church's season of Easter – celebrating the ripples of the resurrection of Christ, committing ourselves afresh to following a Risen Lord – and counting the fifty days to Pentecost, the birthday of the Church! And so it is fitting that, today, we explore our church's *foundations*. Our Lectionary readings today speak of God as a rock of refuge and strength, and of Christ as the cornerstone on which our lives are built. But they also identify *us* as living stones, being built, together, into a 'spiritual house': a 'thin place' of God's presence in the world.

We'll be thinking of what that means for us, today.

We pause to acknowledge the Wiradjuri nation, the first people to name and know this place as a dwelling-place of Spirit in the world.

We honour their heart-felt custodianship of the land in which we, too, now find refuge and life.

And as we come to worship, we pause to remember the presence of Christ in our midst – scattered-gathered though we are. We pause to remember who we are in him: God's own people, called out of darkness into God's marvellous light. And since it is Mother's Day, we pause also to remember that in Jewish culture – as in many others – from time out of mind, it has been the *mothers* who have lit candles on family tables to symbolise the gathering of the family in God's presence.

And so we honour women's roles in holding the faith life of families and communities together, as we light the Christ candle today.

[The candle is lit.]

2. Call to worship

In these, our separate places of stone and wood and brick,
we gather, seeking shelter from the battering of the world.
But these walls are not the fortress we seek:

**We come to God,
our rock of refuge and strength.**

Into this fellowship – scattered though we are –
we are built – built *up* – built *together* –
like living stones, a spiritual house,
upon the foundation of Christ our cornerstone.

**We are called together in faith,
as God's people,
called to worship.**

3. Hymn: Christ is made the sure foundation (*Together in Song* # 423, verses 1, 3 and 5)

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.

4. Prayer of praise and thanksgiving

O Lord our God,
Our way and truth and life,
We praise and thank you for the life you speak into being.
We praise and thank you for the truth into which you lead us.
We praise and thank you for the loving way you call us to follow.

Be for us again, and always,
the solid foundation upon which we build.

**For we come to you today,
again and always,
to align our lives afresh to the way, the truth and the life
of Jesus Christ, our cornerstone.**

Amen.

5. Prayer of confession

Continuing in prayer, in a quiet moment,
we reflect on the things our lives are built on...

[Silence for reflection]

Jesus is the way –
But we confess that our own way sometimes seems better to us,
less complicated, less costly...

Jesus is the truth –
But we confess that we often prefer our own cobbled-together truths,
offering us more comfortable answers,
and questions that we already know the answers to...

Jesus is the life –
But sometimes, it's easier to settle for our own kind of life,
a life less cross-shaped,
a life at the shallow end of a deep calling...

Have mercy, Lord,
For we are on shaky ground...

6. Affirmation of forgiveness

Friends, take heart:
in this Easter season, we need not dwell on our wounds,
for Christ has risen to heal us;
we need not dwell on our brokenness,
for Christ has risen to mend all things;
we need not dwell on our own shaky foundations,
For our hope is built on the risen Christ:
Thanks be to God!
Amen.

7. Hymn: O Love, that will not let me go (*Together in Song # 602*)

8. Reflection and prayers for Mother's Day

BUC Elders

Friends, as we think about the foundations upon which our lives are built –
for good and ill – we're going to take a moment now to mark Mother's Day.

I wonder who has been a real *mother* to you in your life? Perhaps it's your
own mum – or perhaps someone else... Perhaps during your childhood – or
perhaps even now... What are you most *grateful* for, that God has given you
through your mum – and other women in your life – that has been
foundational in your life, and your faith?

[Time for silent reflection]

Let's pray...

Loving God, today we thank you for our mothers:
those who gave us birth, those who have raised us
and those who nurture and care for us still:
for aunts, grandmas, sisters, neighbours and friends;
for all of the women who touch our lives for our good and growth.
We honour and bless them.

We bless all mothers-to-be and new mums;
all adoptive mums and step-mums and single mums.
We bless their hopes, and struggles: their adventures in love.

We pray especially for mothers and children who are separated today,
by distance or circumstances, isolation or quarantine, illness or death.

For those for whom the relationship with their mother – or their child –
is a source of conflict or pain, disappointment or regret.

For mothers who have lost children.

For mothers who have had to let their children go.

For mothers who have *struggled* to let their children go.

For mothers who have struggled to be the mother they wanted to be.

For women whose longing for motherhood has not been fulfilled.

For mothers around the world, and in our own back yard,
who cannot feed their children;
who are homeless or without a homeland;
who are striving to love in the midst of conflict and violence;
who are struggling with home-schooling – on top of everything else.

Loving God, father and mother of us all,
we thank you for the painful, wonderful gift of families,
of all shapes and kinds...

Help us to know, and feel, and grasp your fatherly-motherly love for us today
– in our joy and pain, in our togetherness and loneliness.

Amen.

Friends, Mother's Day is different this year: no cafes and restaurants packed with families gathering to celebrate their mums and grandmas; no family visits to mums at home or in aged care facilities... But let's also give thanks for the new tools we've taken up for staying connected. Why not What'sApp, Facetime, Skype or Zoom – or at the very least, *text mum...*

9. Video: 'Text Mom'

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To see a preview version: skitguys.com/videos/texting-mom

10. Hymn: Our Father God in heaven
By Timothy Dudley Smith (verses 1, 2, and 4 to the tune 'Aurelia')

Our Father God in heaven, on whom our world depends,
to you let praise be given for families and friends;
for parents, sisters, brothers, a home where love belongs,
but on this day for mothers we bring our thankful songs.

How well we know the story that tells of Jesus' birth,
the Lord of heaven's glory become a child of earth;
a helpless infant sleeping, yet King of realms above,
to find in Mary's keeping the warmth of human love.

Our Father God in heaven, to you we lift our prayer,
that every child be given such tenderness and care,
where life is all for others, where love your Love displays:
for God's good gift of mothers let earth unite in praise!

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11. Bible readings

John 14: 1- 9

Andrew Alder

'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house, there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there *you* may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.' Thomas said to him, 'Lord we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' Jesus said to him: 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life.'

In this is the Good News of Christ.

1 Peter 2: 4-6, 9

Wendy Sowter

Come to him, a living stone – though rejected by mortals, yet chosen and precious in God's sight – and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture:

'See, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious;
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.'...

'You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of the One who called out of darkness into his marvellous light.'

Proclaiming the Gospel of Christ is a strange thing. Wonderful, of course: the word 'gospel' means 'good news', after all – momentous and glorious news... Into a world in turmoil and distress, we proclaim this vast, age-old story of God's power and goodness: the outworking of God's loving and faithful plan to mend and restore all things... Into a world of isolation and loneliness, we announce this heart-stirring calling to belong, to share, to enfold; to be adopted and claimed, welcomed and loved; God with us and for us... Into a world of conflict and division, we speak this wild, hopeful word of *shalom*, forgiveness and reconciliation, justice and peace.... Into a world of sickness and death, we whisper this mysterious but unshakeable promise of comfort and strength, healing and wholeness – and life, abundant life, resurrection life...

And yet... Day by day, we read the news, or watch the TV, or browse the Internet, or look in the mirror – and there it still is. All of it. The turmoil and distress. The isolation and loneliness. The conflict and division. The sickness – and death... And of course, it is precisely *because* of all these things, that the Good News is Good News. It is precisely *because* of all these things, that the Good News desperately needs to be heard – to offer peace and comfort, strength and hope and resilience; to encourage and inspire and empower... But what do we *do* when – if we're honest – we're just not seeing it? What do we *do* when there's still this nagging, painful disconnect between the Good News and – well – the *bad news* of our lived – our *felt* – reality...

In the letter from which we heard today, the Apostle Peter is writing to the Christ-following communities in Romanised Asia Minor – what is now Turkey – who are beginning to be excluded from Jewish synagogues and kicked out of pagan temples ... At best, rejected – at worst, actively persecuted – they're also suffering the painful dislocation of no longer being able to worship in the only ways – in the only places – they have ever known. 'What do we do now?' you can imagine them asking. 'We can't worship with our neighbours. We can't access our holy places. It's like we don't know how to be *faithful* any more'... I wonder if we can relate to that feeling, right now...

It's precisely in answer to this turmoil – this isolation and disorientation – that Peter proclaims the heart-stirring Good News. It's not *about* your temples and altars and idols any more, he says. Your faithfulness is no longer tethered to lifeless stone. Jesus Christ – crucified and risen – is the only 'stone' you need: the foundation, the cornerstone, which (as a stone-building culture, they knew) orients and holds firm and holds together *everything* built upon it; lives and relationships, faith and hopes... And there's more, says Peter. Because if Christ is the cornerstone, then *you* – you yourselves – are like living stones from which God's true 'spiritual house' is being built; locus of God's presence; home of worship and prayer; monument to God's grace and power; sanctuary for the neighbour in need...

'Us, God's house?', they might have said. 'Us? Peter, *look* at us: sinners, all of us; women and slaves and peasants and beggars; people with kids and debt and hearing aids and dodgy hips and –'

‘Forget all that,’ says Peter. ‘Remember who you *really* are. Remember what *God* sees in you. ‘A chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people’ – quoting text after text from the Scriptures that had long challenged God’s people to remember and *live into* – *live up to* – their identity and calling. Whatever it looks like, he’s saying, whatever it feels like right now, you are in fact part of – called into – *built* into – something bigger and more glorious and more hopeful than you have dared to dream. And this is the Good News: not because of who *you* are, but because of who *God* is. Not because of who *you* are, but because of who *God* is *in Jesus Christ*, who came to dwell among us – *not* in a house of stone, but in us and with us; in the world, for the world.

Friends, sometimes, we may struggle to see the Good News among the bad. We may not feel chosen, or royal, or holy, or owned. We may not feel built up, or joined together, or securely anchored. It may not seem like we are, in fact, part of something bigger and more glorious and more hopeful than we have dared to dream... Life is tough right now, I guess we know. We can’t hug a friend, or visit a parent in aged care. We can’t hear one another’s voices raised in worship and prayer. Communities are struggling. The future is uncertain. And maybe it doesn’t sound so great being bricked into a spiritual house, when you’re sick of your own four walls...

And if, as Christians, we believed that the Good News meant there would never be bad news – if we thought that building our lives on Christ and being God’s own people protected or exempted us from struggle or suffering in the world: our faith really would be on shaky foundations, in times like these...

But friends, that’s *not*, in fact, the Good News that we proclaim and build our lives on. Today’s Scriptures testify with brutal clarity that neither Jesus – nor those who aligned their lives with his – were immune to difficulty or trouble or pain. Jesus spoke words of comfort and reassurance to his friends, because he himself was about to die. He was the stone that the religion-builders and empire-builders rejected, as Peter reminds us. Those who followed him suffered and died despite their faith – and *for* their faith. But friends, they never believed or claimed that life would be safe. They simply testified – in the face of uncertainty and danger and death – that their lives, their futures, their ultimate destinies, were in *safe hands*... ‘Do not let your hearts be troubled,’ says Jesus. ‘Trust in God. Trust also in me.’

This, friends, is our place of refuge and strength. *This* is our assurance. *This*, ultimately, is the Good News that we proclaim. Not that we are safe – but that our lives, our futures, our ultimate destinies, are in safe hands. Not that we see the promise of restoration and renewal fulfilled in the world – but that the One who has promised is faithful. ‘Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me.’... Being safe – being saved – is not, after all, about the stones in which we shelter. It’s about the rock on which we stand.

13. Hymn: When we face an unknown future
by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette (to tune 'Beach Spring')

When we face an unknown future that we can't imagine yet,
when the closeness we have treasured turns from blessing into threat —
As we miss our friends and loved ones, as we crave community,
may we look, God, in this season, for a whole new way to be.

Jesus faced the lonely desert as a time to look within.
There he met such trial and conflict; there he knew you were with him.
In this time of separation when we miss the life we've known,
may we hear your voice proclaiming: "I am here! You're not alone."

May we cherish those around us as we never have before.
May we think much less of profit; may we learn what matters more.
May we hear our neighbours' suffering; may we see our neighbours' pain.
May we learn new ways of offering life and health and hope again.

God, when illness comes to threaten, and when so much here goes wrong,
may we know this thing for certain — that your love is sure and strong.
You're beside us in our suffering — and when times are surely tough,
we may face an unknown future, but it's filled, Lord, with your love.

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14. Prayers of the people

The BUC Coronavirus Response Team

Let us continue in prayer.

We pray for all whose foundations have been shaken
in this season of turmoil.
As living stones, may your church be a vibrant testimony
to the cornerstone on which our lives are built.

We pray for those, throughout the world,
who build up, rather than tear down;
who work for healing, justice, peace and reconciliation;
those whose lives change the world around them;
whose words inspire and encourage.

We pray for all who struggle and suffer at this time:
those for whom illness, fear, grief, loneliness, hardship, injustice or difficulty
feel like so many sharp stones, bruising body and soul.
Bless those who seek to be
gentle in compassion and care;
strong in support and up-holding;
wise in decision-making;
creative in re-building and restoration.
Be the refuge and strength of those risking everything to serve.

We affirm again, this day,
that even when our hearts are troubled,
our hope rests on Jesus Christ;
our lives and futures are held in safe hands.
We trust in you.

All in Christ, we pray.
Amen.

And we join together in the prayer Jesus taught his disciples, in whatever
language or version is closest to our hearts.

Our Father...

15. Hymn: God, when you called our church by grace
by Caroline Winfrey Gillette (slightly adapted) to the tune 'Jerusalem'

God, when you called our church by grace,
This land was such a different place.
Yet what you spoke remains the same:
"I'll be with you! Go in my name!"
Your promise is for everyone:
You love us all, you make us new.
You call us here: your word is true.
We'll be a faithful church for you!

Lord Jesus Christ, our cornerstone,
You meet us here; we're not alone!
Through times of joy, through tears long-wept,
You are God's love, God's promise kept.
Your promise is for everyone:
You call us here: your word is true.
You love us all, you make us new.
We'll be a loving church for you!

O Holy Spirit, wind and flame,
You send us out in Jesus' name.
You give us gifts that we may share
God's love and justice everywhere.
Your promise is for everyone:
You love us all, you make us new.
You give us gifts, and work to do.
We'll be a faithful church for you!

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16. Blessing and sending out

Go now to live deeply in the love of God,
In the friendship of Christ,
And the companionship of the Holy Spirit,
And to take that love, and friendship, and companionship
Into the broken world that God yearns over like a hen
Longing to gather her chicks under her wings.

And this Mother's Day,
may God who blessed the holy women of old,
who blessed the woman Mary in the birth of her Son,
who watches over us as a mother with her children,
bless and be with you as you go, now and forever.

Amen.